EQUAL OPPORTUNITY OR GENDER INEQUALITY? WOMEN’S
PERCEPTIONS ON OBTAINING LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN HUMAN
SERVICES NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master
in
Public Administration

By
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2021
THESIS: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY OR GENDER INEQUALITY? WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS ON OBTAINING LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN HUMAN SERVICES NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a culmination of my academic career and I am thankful to have had the support from the following individuals.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Collins, Dr. Emerson, and Professor Speak for their support and guidance, as I have learned many skills as a graduate student that I will continue to apply throughout my life. I would also like to thank my MPA cohort, as we motivated one another to accomplish this goal of becoming MPA graduates.

Secondly, I would like to thank my parents and siblings. Mom and Dad, you have always encouraged me to pursue higher education and helped ease my nerves every time I doubted whether I could complete an assignment or ace an exam. The phrase “You can do it, you’re smart”, means more to me than you will ever know. Nick and Bianca, you both joke about the amount of time I have been in school, but I know you are proud of your older sister and I hope to have inspired you to accomplish your dreams. Gerry, my heavenly older brother, though you are no longer physically with me, you have been with me every step of the way, and the completion of this thesis is for both of us.

G-team forever.
ABSTRACT

The nonprofit sector is often understudied and when scholars have conducted research on the glass ceiling phenomenon, findings have predominately focused on corporate America and the government sector. In this study, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, comprising of two demographic questions and five open-ended questions, was used to identify barriers women in human services nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions. Participants included six women from the Baby Boomers and Generation X generational groups who were employed in leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations, where a woman was appointed as CEO.

The results of this study found the four most common barriers limiting women’s obtainment to leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations were wages and pay negotiations, male perceptions, boards of directors, and self-doubt. The first three barriers related to current literature, and the barrier of self-doubt was a new finding. Therefore, the importance of women being able to overcome the barrier of self-doubt was explained. The researcher then recommended nonprofit organizations should create female-led mentorship programs and described how this process could begin and which persons could recruit women to join. This study confirmed the glass ceiling is still present in today’s nonprofit sector and the researcher offered suggestions for future research to continue exploring this issue.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Women comprise 75% of the U.S. nonprofit sector workforce yet, only 43% of women in the sector become nonprofit CEOs. Women are underrepresented in leadership positions and when they are appointed CEO, “earn 6 to 8 percent less than their male peers, depending on the size of the organization (McLean, 2015 as cited in Hill et al., 2016, p. 9). The pay discrepancy in the nonprofit sector combined with the U.S. gender pay gap poses risk to the sector’s sustainability, as research has found within the next five years 45% of nonprofit employees will seek new employment due to lack of pay (Strub, 2020). This is problematic as the demand for nonprofit services continues increasing, specifically in human services nonprofit organizations as they employ the largest number of women. Human services nonprofit organizations are defined as “services oriented toward the prevention, amelioration, or resolution of health, mental health, social, or environmental problems that afflict individuals, families, specific groups, or communities” (Gibelman, 1995 as cited in Gibelman, 2000, p. 255).

For this study, sustainability relates to financial sustainability and leadership succession planning. Current research has found nonprofit organizations where a woman is CEO have smaller budget sizes and generally, women obtaining leadership positions face barriers related to the glass ceiling phenomenon. However, the glass ceiling defined as, “transparent but real barriers, based on discriminatory attitudes or organizational bias, that impede or prevent qualified individuals, including (but not limited to) women, racial and ethnic minorities, and disabled persons, from advancing into management positions” (Gibelman, 2000, p. 251), has predominately focused on the glass ceiling related to women employed in corporate America and the government sector. Therefore, it is
important further research focus on women currently employed in human services nonprofit organizations, before enough women leave the sector or are no longer interested in obtaining leadership positions.

The first study on the glass ceiling in the nonprofit sector was conducted by researcher Margaret Gibelman, who focused on identifying whether a glass ceiling existed in U.S. human services nonprofit organizations as, “the female domination of the human services professions cut across agency types, fields of practices, work settings, and areas of specialization” (Gibelman, 2000, p. 254). While it was found men earned less than women at lower incomes levels up to $35,000, when comparing median salaries by gender, Gibelman (2000) found:

At almost all levels of staff, men earned higher salaries (at an average of $37,685) than did females (who averaged $31,125) among this study population. The exception is low-level management, where women earn, on average, $373 more per year than men—hardly significant. (Gibelman, 2000, p. 260)

Additionally, while agencies’ “written policies and procedures adhered to federal affirmative action guidelines and committed the agencies to equal opportunity hiring. Specific targets for the hiring and promoting of women and minorities were notably absent” (Gibelman, 2000, p. 262). The results of Gibelman’s study concluded while women overrepresented the sector, “not only are women less likely to occupy management positions but they also earn less money than men for the work they do at almost any level of the organizational hierarchy” (Gibelman, 2000, p. 260). In Figures 1, 2, and 3 below the results of Gibelman’s study are shown, further supporting how the researcher of this study can continue providing insight on barriers contributing to the nonprofit sector glass ceiling today.
Figure 1. Occupational Level by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line Worker</td>
<td>14 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-level management</td>
<td>15 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Management</td>
<td>21 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Management</td>
<td>64 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source [Gibelman, 2000, p. 260]

Figure 2. Gender-Based Salary Differentials by Income Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Salary</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td>12 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-$24,999</td>
<td>15 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$29,999</td>
<td>16 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-$34,999</td>
<td>18 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$39,999</td>
<td>18 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-$44,999</td>
<td>11 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,000-$49,999</td>
<td>8 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$59,999</td>
<td>4 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000+</td>
<td>4 Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source [Gibelman, 2000, p. 261]
The author of this study has been employed in human services nonprofit organizations in and outside the city of Los Angeles, with interest in obtaining a leadership position. Like Gibelman’s study, the author has observed women mostly employed in direct services positions and where a woman is CEO of an organization with a smaller budget size.

**Problem Statement**

While women comprise most of the nonprofit sector workforce in both unpaid and paid positions, they are underrepresented in leadership positions. Additionally, nonprofit organizations where a woman is CEO often have smaller budget sizes to cover organizational costs, and research is finding as Baby Boomers near retirement, their predecessors are unlikely to assume their roles. As the nonprofit sector is in transition from a Baby Boomers to Millennial workforce, it is important to understand how gender discrimination, societal expectations, and current nonprofit human resources practices...
perpetuate the issue of gender pay disparity. If enough women leave the sector or are no longer interested in obtaining leadership positions, nonprofit organizations with predominately female staff, specifically in human services organizations, may be in jeopardy of ceasing.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to identify barriers women in human services nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions. Current research has found the barrier of lack of pay will affect nonprofit sector employment within the next five years. The number of women considering leaving the nonprofit sector could impact the sector’s sustainability where a woman has been appointed CEO because earned revenue, government payments, and philanthropy, the three major sources of nonprofit sector income, determine organizations’ budget sizes. Research has found nonprofit organizations with the largest budget sizes typically appoint men as CEO. Therefore, this study will use qualitative data by interviewing women in leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations where a woman has been appointed CEO, to understand individual experiences and common themes towards this dilemma.

**Importance of the Study**

The nonprofit sector is often less explored by researchers and as mentioned, the glass ceiling phenomenon has predominately focused on corporate America and the government sector. Additionally, “much of the literature has been devoted to documenting the glass ceiling (often without empirical data to support the conclusions) and questioning what it will take to “crack” it (Dobrzynski, 1996; Evans, 1993; Hill, 1993; Laabs, 1993; Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995a, 1995b; Wechsler, 1996 as cited in
This study will use empirical data from qualitative research through interviews. Interview responses may improve opportunities for other women employed in the sector by identifying barriers present and making recommendations to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions. In addition, this study could increase outsider awareness of the nonprofit sector and encourage other women to become employed in the sector.

**Research Question**

The research question for this study is:

RQ: “How do women employed in leadership positions at human services nonprofit organizations perceive their roles and compensation?”

In this study, four barriers were identified as limiting women’s successes in obtaining leadership positions. Using qualitative data from participant interviews, the four barriers included wages and pay negotiations, male perceptions, boards of directors, and self-doubt. The barrier of self-doubt was a new finding, as the other three barriers had been discussed in the literature. With self-doubt being an internal barrier, the researcher recommended human services nonprofit organizations create female-led mentorship programs. By doing so, a community for current female leaders and women interested in obtaining leadership positions would be formed.

**Summary**

This study aims to identify barriers women in human services nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions so recommendations can be provided to maintain the sector’s sustainability. Caucasian and Non-White women currently employed or interested in employment in the nonprofit sector can benefit from
this study, as it will identify the sector’s advantages and disadvantages related to obtaining leadership positions. This paper will be organized in the following chapters. In Chapter 2, a review of the history of the nonprofit sector and current scholarly research on women’s representations, generational differences in the sector, and barriers women face related to the glass ceiling will be discussed. In Chapter 3, research methodology used to collect qualitative data will be described. In Chapter 4, the results and analysis from the qualitative data will be presented. In Chapter 5, the conclusion and recommendations to increase women’s leadership in the nonprofit sector will be explained.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Until the early 1960s, job listings were segregated by gender with higher level positions strictly available to men. In some instances, identical jobs would be advertised in separate male and female newspaper ads, with female wages being 36 to 41 cents less than the dollar earned by men in the same position (Brunner, 2007, as cited in Perry & Gundersen, 2011, p. 154). Historically, women have earned less than men due to assumptions “women needed less money because female economic requirements in society were shouldered by parents until marriage where economic responsibility was then shifted to husbands” (Perry & Gundersen, 2011, p. 154). Only after the Equal Pay Act of 1963 did it become illegal for women to receive lower wages for identical jobs strictly based on gender.

Gender discrimination has been present in the nonprofit sector. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was one of the first federal laws to assist in decreasing gender discrimination in the workplace. It was enacted into law as an amendment towards the Fair Labor Standards Act, which required women receive equal pay for jobs considered equal to those held by men (Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005). For women to prove discrimination under the law, women had to provide evidence that less pay was received for work considered “substantially equal” based on gender. Substantially equal was defined as, “Jobs requiring equal skill, effort, and responsibility performed under similar working conditions” (Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005, p. 140). The problem, however, was occupational sex segregation existed and it was difficult for women to prove discrimination under the law’s definition.
Research has found occupational sex segregation contributes to the U.S. gender pay gap because men are employed in the highest paying occupations, while women are in the lowest. Occupational sex segregation is defined as, “women’s and men’s concentration in different occupations” (Reskin, 1993, as cited in Damman & Mills, 2014, p. 99). This form of segregation was more common until the 1970s and found women’s pay levels, on-the-job training, benefits, and job advancement was generally less than men because overall, women entered occupations with less authority (Kraus & Yonay, 2000; Reskin, 1993, as cited in Damman & Mills, 2014, p. 99). Additionally, it has been argued “women are socialized to choose care-giving professions, while men need to provide for their families and thus need to choose higher paying jobs (Farrell, 2005, as cited in Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005, p. 139). As current research has focused on women’s home responsibilities and gravitation towards care-giving professions, further research is necessary to create recommendations for increasing the number of women in leadership positions.

**Women in the Nonprofit Sector**

Scholars agree women comprise most of the workforce today; yet, “they continue to be significantly under-represented and under-compensated in leadership positions” (Lennon, et al., 2012; Guidestar, 2014 as cited in Xie & Pang, 2018, p.34). Furthermore, when women are in leadership positions, they are more likely to become CEOs of smaller nonprofits. In one study, “92% of organizations with female CEOs had budgets of less than $10 million” (Hrywna, 2006, as cited in Xie & Pang, 2018, p. 34). A lack of equal representation is evident, which conflicts with research that identifies male and female leadership styles as more alike than different. For example, research found
“organizational roles override gender roles when it comes to management or leadership positions” (Kanter, 1977, as cited in Xie & Pang, 2018, p. 33), thereby questioning whether the organizational culture is to blame.

Women are constantly at a disadvantage because in the U.S. masculine qualities define good managers and masculine qualities are only seen to exist in men (Fine, 2009). Furthermore, “When women do beat the odds and display undeniable competence and authority in the workplace, they face another hazard: stigmatization for excelling at tasks viewed as masculine” (Heilman 2002; Ridgeway 2001, as cited in Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010, p. 374). Women-led nonprofit organizations or organizations, “who work to make feminist agendas a concrete reality in their respective societies” (Stromquist, 2000, p. 423) do so because these organizations recognize women as an oppressed group of people who are fighting for their rights. One major right woman fight for is gender equality and, while research has identified this as a global issue, some researchers use feminist theory when identifying struggles within the U.S. nonprofit sector.

Previous scholars have explained feminist theory from a perspective of three waves which included women’s struggle for suffrage and basic human rights, the 1960s-1970s era of women empowerment, and feminism of difference and inclusivity, as each demanded change towards women’s view and behaviors (English & Peters, 2012). However, these “waves” remain in progress because research has continued comparing women and men instead of seeing both genders as equal. Additionally, women’s characteristics are more often described with negative connotations. This negativity has socialized women “to develop less confidence, less independence, and lower self-esteem and therefore tend to devalue their own skills and intelligence, just as others do.”
(Herkelmann, et al., 1993, as cited in Chaffins & Forbes, 1995, p. 384). With researchers continuing to describe women’s roles in the nonprofit sector related to biological factors, a factor out of women’s control, it is important for the reader to view women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions within the nonprofit sector using a feminist perspective.

**The “Glass Ceiling” in the Nonprofit Sector**

Current research has failed to address dilemmas specific to the nonprofit sector; thus, opportunities to increase women’s leadership positions have been unidentified. However, the nonprofit sector has a significant role as government entities transferred “what used to be public services, including social services, health care, corrections, and basic municipal services” (Belfour, 2003, as cited in Linscott, 2011, p. 32) to nonprofit organizations. Approximately 74% of members in the Association of Fundraising Professionals identified their gender as female in the 2010 *Compensation and Benefits Study*, indicating women are most of the workforce (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2010, as cited in Linscott, 2011, p. 40). Despite women being well-represented, only 43% out of 75% of women in the nonprofit sector workforce become appointed as chief executive officer (CEO). Once nonprofit organizations budget sizes are considered, only 18% of women become CEO of nonprofit organizations with budget sizes of $50 million or more compared to, 55% of women becoming CEO of nonprofit organizations with smaller budget sizes (Branson, et al., 2013; Stiffman, 2015, as cited in Hill et al., 2016, p. 9). While the Association of Fundraising Professionals does not include all employees in the sector, the percentage of women in this membership
organization is consistent with research stating women comprise 75% of the U.S. nonprofit sector workforce.

Women in nonprofit organizations have fewer opportunities to obtain leadership positions due to societal and economic barriers, the organizational culture, and human resources practices. Researchers Hill et al. (2016) argued, “Women are not simply denied top leadership opportunities at the culmination of a longer career. Rather, these opportunities disappear at various points along the way” (p. 15-16). The following three subsections will identify how women’s opportunities have disappeared, resulting in overrepresentations of male leadership in the nonprofit sector.

**Societal and Economic Barriers**

Many scholars agree gender discrimination is a societal problem impacting gender pay disparity despite women’s increased education and job experiences. This is due to the education system subtly reinforcing the tendency of women to seek careers that pay less in addition to discouraging women from pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields by teachers and their families (Furger, 2001 as cited in Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005, p. 145). Former Harvard President Lawrence Summers validated this reality when discussing the sparse numbers of women in science fields, and it is known that fewer women are tenured at Ivy League universities. Therefore, as early as adolescence, women become aware they have less probability of obtaining high-status jobs than men (Rimer & Healy, 2005; National Committee on Pay Equity, n.d., as cited in Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005, p. 145).

As previously mentioned, occupational sex segregation was more common in the 1970s but is still present today and is known as pink collar jobs. Pink collars jobs are
lower-paying and lower-skill fields which wage analysis has found women gravitate towards. The National Organization for Women discovered, “women comprise 87% of workers in the childcare industry and 86% of the health aide industry” (as cited in Perry & Gunderson, 2011, p. 156). Two reasons may include 1) women prefer less dangerous jobs and 2) these jobs may have more flexible work schedules. The U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics found 92% of fatalities in the workplace in 2006 involved men. Women factored in work and family life before beginning their careers, thus decreasing job opportunities if, for example, certain jobs required travel and long work hours (Perry & Gunderson, 2011, p. 156).

Women and men can decide whether to have children, but women “are more likely than men to work irregularly and spend time out of the workforce, and they are more likely to work part time” (Rose & Hartmann, 2008; U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016, as cited in Hill, et al., 2016, p. 18). Due to women’s work schedules fluctuating and an increased likelihood they will take a leave of absence, this becomes an economic risk for employers. Women cannot be discriminated against based on gender or pregnancy, but these factors might be considered when employers are hiring for executive and hard-to-replace positions. The reality is, when women’s biological factors are considered, a negative effect on wages is created when women have children (Compton, 2007, as cited in Perry & Gunderson, 2011, p. 156). The U.S Census Bureau (2010b) found:

The more likely a woman is to have dependent children and be married the more likely she is to be a low earner and have fewer hours in the labor market. Interestingly, men with children under the age 18 earn 122% of what men without children earn. (as cited in Perry & Gunderson, 2011, p. 156)

Women and men may choose identical lifestyles but opposite effects on wages are present. For women, less opportunities for leadership positions will be offered because
“the message women get is leadership means work has to be the focus of life” (Elias, 2018, p. 179). In 1996, the Chronicle of Philanthropy found that, out of 118 of the richest nonprofits in the United States, only 16% had women as chief executive officers. Additionally, women’s “median salary was almost $30,000 less than the average male executive (Grey & Katz, 1996, as cited in Pynes, 2000, pg. 35).

Organizational Culture

The organizational culture of the nonprofit sector is comprised of persons “attracted by the ideals of selfless service and work fulfillment” (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983, p. 3). In nonprofit organizations, “it is impossible to monitor and measure whether beneficiaries have received donations” (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983, p. 3) because the nonprofit sector is a service delivery system. Despite few research studies existing on nonprofit sector board members’, research during the mid-90s and early 2000s predominately found women held fewer board member positions. In fact, one scholar argued even when “the percentage of female board members was more equitable, a disproportionately large number – 77 percent – of the board presidents were male” (Nozawa, 2010, as cited in Pynes, 2000). Board members serve an important role overseeing policymaking and administrative functions. When men hold more board member positions than women, additional challenges occur for women obtaining leadership positions in the nonprofit sector.

In a 1996 survey conducted by the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, “1,028 chief executives revealed that out of 20,000 board members, 54 percent were men and 46 percent were women” (Moyers & Enright, 1997, as cited in Pynes, 2000, p. 37). Earlier it was stated 55% of CEOs of nonprofit organizations with smaller budget sizes were
women, but women were also “more likely to serve as board members for organizations with small budgets” (Moyers & Enright, 1997, as cited in Pynes, 2000, p. 37). Board members serve different functions, one important function being fundraising. Fundraising, also known as boundary spanning, can assist nonprofit organizations in managing external environments by having board members “collaborate with government or other organizations, or by improving the organization’s outside image” (Callen, et al., 2010, p. 107).

A research study by Xie and Pang (2018) surveyed five Chinese and five American female leaders in nonprofit organizations. Researchers found American female leaders were uncomfortable fundraising, as they had been taught not to ask for money from others (p. 36). This demonstrated a conflict between societal expectations and organizational culture. Additional research has also found:

As compared with men, women report having less access to top-tier donors and prospects and occupy fewer planned giving, major gifts, or management positions. Instead, women dominate less-highly valued rules, including prospect research, grant writing, event management (a social function), or the annual fund, which is composed of modest-sized gifts from large groups of people, often via phone or mail. (Conry, 1998; Taylor, 1998, as cited in Dale, 2017, p. 6)

Unfortunately, the nonprofit sector was designed and is largely still managed by men, meaning women, “must understand how to navigate working in what is perceived as a man’s world” (Elias, 2018, p. 176). This is difficult, as fundraising is one aspect of a nonprofit organization’s success and source of revenue.

*Human Resources Practices*

Women have sought employment in the nonprofit sector for two main reasons: the labor donation theory, and increased opportunities for flexible work schedules. Labor donation theory explains that those employed in nonprofits accept lower wages for
reasons such as, “Workers and managers accept a partial redistribution of resources from labor suppliers to consumers (as often happens when paid people work together with volunteers), or they are interested in nonmonetary intrinsic or extrinsic rewards” (Anheier & Ben-Ner, 2003, p. 38). The latter, nonmonetary intrinsic or extrinsic rewards, is more common as employees “are concerned with the social relevance of the organizational output, but also in sharing the mission of the organization” (Anheier & Ben-Ner, 2003, p. 41). An intrinsic reward can be the social benefits generated by an organization, while extrinsic rewards include types of training and job flexibility offered.

As the labor donation theory relates to intrinsic rewards, the sector may have difficulty maintaining employees in the future because while Millennial workers seek increased pay, Baby Boomers, who previously accepted lower wages, are retiring. When comparing Millennials to Generation X and Baby Boomers, Millennials pursued meaningful and fulfilling work, materialistic rewards, and left the nonprofit sector when dissatisfied with aspects of work (McGinnis & Ng, 2016, p. 2). Research described the Millennial worker using a sociological theory of generations, “which states that a generation is a group of individuals sharing a common location in historical time, shaped by historical events and experiences of that time (Mannheim, 1952 as cited in McGinnis & Ng, 2016, p. 4). Based on this, some Millennial expectations include, “first promotion in 15 months and an average of 63% increase in pay over 5 years, with no relation to (academic) performance” (Lyons, et al., 2012b as cited in McGinnis & Ng, 2016, p. 4). Millennial workers’ expectations conflict with research that argued bonus and pay-related incentives could affect the “self-selection process that attracts altruistic, mission focused
employees” (Kreps, 1997 as cited in Faulk, et al., 2013, p. 4). For this reason, Millennial workers may have difficulty accepting compensation offered by nonprofit organizations.

When human resources offer new hires compensation, it is often based on one’s salary history as opposed to previous responsibilities and experiences (Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005). This creates an immediate gender pay disparity for women and Millennial women, as they make less money than men. Furthermore, “according to the National Committee on Pay Equity, stereotyping continues, since women are offered lower wages because their salaries are viewed as supplemental income (“National Committee on Pay Equity”, n.d. as cited in Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005, p. 144). When it comes to negotiation, men with higher education “were eight times more likely to negotiate starting salaries and pay than their female counterparts” (Babcock, 2002, as cited in Perry & Gunderson, 2011, p. 156). One reason is because women have more apprehension negotiating salaries, “particularly because they are counter stereotypical and commonly occur under conditions of ambiguity about the bargaining range and behavioral norms” (Bowles, et al., 2005; Kugler, et al., 2018; Mazei, et al., 2015 as cited in Bowles, et al., 2019, p. 5).

With societal expectations and human resources practices perpetuating the issue of gender pay disparity, another barrier has been created towards women obtaining leadership positions in nonprofit organizations. Research by Giapponi and McEvoy (2005) found “top management may perceive that equitable pay initiatives are too expensive and believes that perpetuating wage disparities reduces personnel costs” (p. 144). Therefore, top management support is important in reducing gender pay disparities, as that can be corrected with sequences of pay increases. Unfortunately, “the problem is
that top management refuses to acknowledge that a gender-based pay gap exists. Change would require that the ethical dimensions of equal pay become part of the corporation’s culture and values” (Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005, p. 144).

The large number of Baby Boomers retiring from the sector will create a war for talent, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics found “77 million baby boomers are expected to retire over the next ten years” (Su, 2007, as cited in Carman, et al., 2010, p. 93). Furthermore, a study by The Bridgespan Group reported “by 2016, nonprofits will need to attract and develop some 640,000 new managers, the equivalent of 2.4 times the number employed in 2006” (Tierney, 2006 as cited in Linscott, 2011, p. 32). Meanwhile, the nonprofit sector continues to grow due to “the economy’s service fields of health care, education, and social services, which account for 87% of nonprofit employment” (Salamon, et al., 2012 as cited in Hopkins, et al., 2014, p. 419). Research by the Nonprofit Finance Fund’s 2014 State of the Sector Survey found 80% of respondents reported increases in service demands, but 56% were unable to meet them in 2013. This was due to insufficient financial, human, and technical resources. These are leadership responsibilities but have become more difficult with limited nonprofit sector funding (as cited in Hopkins, et al., 2014, p. 419).

With Baby Boomers’ retirement approaching, research has stressed the importance of succession planning while also acknowledging, “few nonprofit organizations provide in-house leadership training for their staff, and while the number of nonprofit management degree and training programs has increased in the last decade, leadership development specific to nonprofit human service organizations has lagged behind” (Hopkins, et al., 2014, p. 420). Additionally, research found:
The rate of turnover among executive directors is estimated to be close to 70 percent during the next five years. Equally troubling, many of those who are next in line for this position either have no interest in assuming the job of executive director or plan to retire as well (Crocker, 2007 as cited in Carman, et al., 2010, p. 94).

As fewer people want to assume the position of nonprofit CEO, the sector’s sustainability is uncertain as women comprise 75% of the workforce. Without a particular number of women employed in the sector, client service needs could be unmet.

**Conclusion**

Scholars have recognized gender discrimination in the workplace. Despite U.S. federal laws such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963, women are still unequal to their male counterparts. This has created overrepresentations of male leadership in the nonprofit sector which are due to societal and economic barriers, the organizational culture, and human resources practices. With the nonprofit sector experiencing an economic growth, the Baby Boomers’ generation nearing retirement, and Millennial workers having greater interest in extrinsic rewards (i.e., increased pay), the sector’s sustainability may be at risk. The future of the nonprofit sector remains unclear, as current research has focused more on women’s leadership positions in corporate America and the government sector.

Current research is also challenging to analyze, as most research is secondary data, and many research studies were conducted between the late 1990s and early 2000s. This study aims to identify barriers women in human services nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions now, and what recommendations can be made to retain women in the sector. With the Baby Boomers’ generation retiring and Millennial workers considering leaving the sector, recommendations promoting employee retention are crucial. The findings of this study will continue validating the glass ceiling.
phenomenon by identifying barriers women face in today’s nonprofit sector, as little research of this is known. However, as Millennial workers are “predicted to make up more than half of the U.S. labor force for the first time, outnumbering baby boomers who are about a quarter of the workforce” (Fry, 2018 as cited in Behrans & Martin, 2020, para. 2), this study will also contribute further research as to why Millennial workers, specifically, are crucial to the sector’s sustainability.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study applied an exploratory case study approach to identify barriers most impacting women in the nonprofit sector from obtaining leadership positions. This study defined the terms women and female by sex, “a biological trait that is determined by the specific sex chromosomes inherited from one’s parents” (Conger, n.d., para. 20).

Previous scholarly research found women comprise 75% of the U.S. nonprofit sector workforce, predominately in direct services positions, while men overrepresent leadership positions. The nonprofit sector is shifting from a Baby Boomers to Millennial workforce, with Millennial workers focused more on extrinsic rewards such as increased pay. Therefore, this study aimed to identify barriers women faced in the nonprofit sector today, to provide recommendations to maintain the sector’s sustainability by employee retention. In the U.S., gender pay disparities exist and even more so in the nonprofit sector as women receive lower wages than in other sectors. This study involved two rounds of interviews from Caucasian and Non-White women (i.e., Asian) employed in human services nonprofit organizations, to understand how they viewed their roles and compensation.

Research Design

Charity Navigator, a charity assessment organization website, was used to obtain the sample population for the first round of interviews. Charity Navigator rates 501(c)(3) U.S. nonprofit organizations that have filed Form 990 with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) based on certain criteria. Nonprofit organizations on the Charity Navigator website must have at least $1 million in revenue for two consecutive years, be in operation for at least seven years, have at least $500,000 in public support accounting for 40% of an
organization’s total revenue, for at least two consecutive years, and at least 1% worth of expenses allocated to fundraising and another 1% to administrative expenses for three consecutive years. Once these criteria are met, a two-dimensional rating system calculates an overall rating from 0-4 stars by assessing nonprofit organizations financial health and, accountability and transparency (identified as A&T), using the equation as shown in Figure 4 below (“Charity Navigator's Methodology”, 2020). Based on this algorithm, Charity Navigator is recognized as “a credible source that does exactly as it states with minimal bias” (“Charity Navigator”, 2020).

Figure 4. Charity Navigator Two-Dimensional Rating System

\[
100 - \sqrt{\frac{(100 - \text{Financial})^2 + (100 - \text{A&T})^2}{2}}
\]

Source [“Charity Navigator's Methodology”, 2020]

Using the Charity Navigator website advanced search, the researcher searched for the following options: “Human Services” under “Select Category/Cause, “Los Angeles” under “State and/or City”, “All” under “Overall Star Rating”, and “All” under “Size (Total Expenses)”. The results found 43 human services nonprofit organizations in the city of Los Angeles had budget sizes of up to $3.5M (small), $3.5M to $13.5M (midsize), and $13.5M and up (large). As research focused on women in leadership positions within human services nonprofit organizations in the city of Los Angeles, the researcher removed organizations where a man was appointed as CEO. The total number of human services nonprofit organizations with a woman appointed as CEO in the city of Los Angeles equaled 20 agencies. Specifically, seven agencies had budget sizes of up to $3.5M (small), 10 agencies had budget sizes of $3.5M to $13.5M (midsize), and three agencies had budget sizes of $13.5M and up (large). However, it is important to note the
researcher used self-selection sampling to limit participants to 20 different agencies using criteria set by Charity Navigator (see Figure 4 above). In the city of Los Angeles, several hundreds of other human services nonprofit organizations exist.

The researcher contacted all 20 of the self-selected human services nonprofit organizations in the city of Los Angeles via email, using the contact information provided by the Charity Navigator website. The researcher anticipated half of the agencies would respond, to schedule a minimum of 10 online interviews. From the human services nonprofit organizations that responded, the researcher attempted to obtain additional participants for a second round of interviews, using snowball sampling. Consent forms were distributed via participants email and two participants chose to sign them. Participants were informed length per interview would be 45 minutes to 1 hour: however, average length per interview was approximately 40-45 minutes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote interviews were conducted separately at the surveyor’s and participants’ residence or place of employment. As mentioned earlier, the research question was, “How do women employed in leadership positions at human services nonprofit organizations perceive their roles and compensation?” Women of varying generational groups (i.e., Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials) employed in leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations where a woman was appointed as CEO within the specified budget sizes, were able to participate in this study. Participants were asked seven interview questions which comprised of two demographic questions, and five open-ended questions, as shown in Appendix F.
Study Participants

During the first round of interviews scheduled between the dates of February 26-March 26, 2021, a total of two participants chose to participate in recorded interviews through the Zoom video application. The two participants were the Chief Executive Officer and Director of Development, at their respective agencies. Using snowball sampling, the researcher conducted a second round of interviews from March 11-April 13, 2021. The four additional participants all held the position of Chief Executive Officer at their respective agencies. Three participant agencies were located in Los Angeles County and one participant agency was located outside of California (i.e., Georgia). The total amount of participants in this study equaled six participants. In Figures 5, 6, and 7 below, participants demographics is shown.
It is important to note, as the literature discussed, women are more likely to become CEO of nonprofit organizations with smaller budget sizes. Four participants were CEO of human services nonprofit organizations with small budget sizes. For the purpose of the study, up to $3.5M defined small budget size. The participant who was the Director
of Development at her respective agency had a small budget size as well. Only one participant was CEO of a human services nonprofit organization with a large budget size, which for the purpose of the study was defined as $13.5M and up. The participant’s budget size was $47M, specifically. In figure 8 below, participants budget size is shown.

![Figure 8. Participants Agencies Budget Size](image)

Qualitative data was gathered from participants recorded interviews, and then transcribed using open coding. The researcher utilized the process of constant comparative method, to gather the most common child codes for the parent code “barriers”. The researcher identified the four most common barriers women faced when obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations, by assessing the frequency of child codes.

**Ethical Concerns**

This study received approval from the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona Institutional Review Board (IRB), as shown in Appendix A, to conduct research involving human subjects under protocol IRB-20-183. Additionally, a consent form was
distributed via email to participants prior to conducting recorded interviews through the Zoom video application. The consent form explained interview questions would create minimal to no risk, as participants would remain anonymous. All participants were over the age of 18 and were given the opportunity to discontinue participation at any point of the study without penalty. Two out of six participants chose to sign the consent form.

**Potential Biases and Weaknesses**

Researcher bias was limited as the researcher was only affiliated with one of the human services nonprofit organizations that participated in the study. In addition, the researcher had no prior direct communication with the participant from the affiliated organization. However, weaknesses of the study were data on men in leadership positions within the nonprofit sector were not part of the study. This was because women are underrepresented in leadership positions and comprise most of the workforce therefore, women leaving could have greater impact on the sector’s sustainability. Other weaknesses included the study having a small sample size and participants were predominately Caucasian women. Future research would benefit from studying a larger and more diverse sample size by including Non-White women.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The results of qualitative research conducted from February 26-April 13, 2021 were analyzed to identify barriers women face when obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations. This is because research finds men are more often appointed CEO of nonprofit organizations, especially in agencies with larger budget sizes. Previous scholarly research on the glass ceiling phenomenon has predominately focused on corporate America and the government sector, and little research on the nonprofit sector is currently present.

The researcher of the study has been in direct service positions in human services nonprofit organizations for approximately four years. As the researcher is part of the 75% of women employed in the nonprofit sector, the researcher conducted interviews with women in leadership positions to understand experiences and barriers they believed had led to overrepresentations of male leadership in the sector.

Findings and Analysis

Participant interviews followed a semi-structured interview format with seven questions and follow-up questions in-between, based on participant responses. On average, each interview was approximately 40-45 minutes. Due to COVID-19, remote interviews were conducted separately at the surveyors and participants residence or place of employment. Interviews were conducted through the zoom video application and transcribed using Otter AI, a web-based transcription service, before the researcher coded participant responses. In Table 1 below, barriers women experienced when obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations are shown by the parent
code “barrier” and the four most common child codes. Each child code was then defined, based on themes the researcher examined from participants transcribed interviews.

Table 1. Barriers Identified with Parent and Child Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Codes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>Wages and Pay Negotiations</td>
<td>Gender pay gap, pay negotiation, budget size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male Perceptions</td>
<td>Gender stereotypes, doubt by male colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boards of Directors</td>
<td>Boards of directors, relationship with boards of directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Doubt</td>
<td>Self-doubt statements</td>
</tr>
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Below in Figure 9, the frequency of the four most common barriers is illustrated. These barriers included wages and pay negotiations, male perceptions, boards of directors, and self-doubt. Three of the four barriers except for self-doubt, had been discussed in the literature. However, each theme will be further studied to depict participants’ personal experiences.
Wages and Pay Negotiations

Throughout the U.S. women receive lower wages due to the gender pay gap. Yet, the nonprofit sector has an additional barrier of being unable to provide its employees competitive wages, compared to corporate America and the government sector. Research has found men with higher education negotiate salaries eight times more than women, because women are more apprehensive to negotiating. However, when women do negotiate salaries, they are more likely to be dismissed. This was evident when one participant stated:

I do think the pay discrepancy is an issue. I do think that, and I do think that I've been in scenarios where I, as an executive have been asking for what I think is fair, and just for the performance I'm giving. And I do feel that sometimes the fact that I'm a woman that that has not been respected. Do you know? As much as like a male counterpart would be asking for the same thing and getting different treatment. I have experienced things like that, where it's kind of like really, we're doing the same job or aren't I doing a little better than that person? (Interview with author, 02/26/21)

Though this situation did not discourage the participant from obtaining her leadership role, feelings of not being respected could decrease women’s confidence and increase women’s apprehensiveness. Another participant modeled how women can lack confidence when negotiating starting salaries before discussing her own experience when accepting her current position. According to her:

Nope. I didn't either. So, I mean, there's that right. I might now. I might now, but I think, seven years ago, I wouldn't…I didn't, you know, I was very pleased and excited just to be working in the job I really, really wanted. (Interview with author, 03/04/21)

Additionally, research has found new hire compensation is not based on prior experiences and job responsibilities but based on one’s salary history (Giapponi & McEvoy, 2005). Despite the nonprofit sector being unable to offer competitive wages,
women especially, should have opportunities to be paid fairly because men enter the nonprofit sector with a higher salary history. Lower wages increase staff turnover and recruitment, and negatively affects tenured employees, as identified by three participants who stated:

I've been at the agency about 16 and a half years, and the lowest hourly rate when I came on board was $10 an hour. You can't live on $10 an hour, you couldn’t live on $10 an hour 16 years ago, and you can't live on it now. So, I've worked these years to get those salaries up to a level that is livable for people. And that also helps them want to stay longer. So that when they do decide they're ready to leave, they have the time and the knowledge to be able to get a higher paying job than what they've got with us. (Interview with author, 03/16/21)

So, trying to find good, engaged, and thoughtful staff members is hard when you’re competing with like a Kaiser. You know, and I would say that that is a great challenge, because you want good team members to provide good service, but nonprofits really can’t compete with for profit organizations, we’re just not paid the same. (Interview with author, 04/13/21)

The boredom though, for me, I had never been number one in nonprofits. I really hadn’t planned to stay, it definitely does not pay as well as other organizations, as well as other businesses or other type of… so, I am getting close to the point of retirement, and I’ve spent the nearly past 20 years of my life in an organization that doesn't pay that much. So, it absolutely has affected my retirement. (Interview with author, 03/13/21)

The participant who worked to increase her agency’s lowest hourly rate from $10 to $20 an hour described her nonprofit organization “as more of a training site for employees” and had no expectations therapeutic staff would continue employment after becoming licensed. While the participant nearing retirement stated that younger men and women do not think of the financial repercussions that come with nonprofit sector employment, as it cannot compete with corporate retirement plans.

One major difference between the nonprofit sector versus corporate America and the private sector is, there are no pensions in the nonprofit sector. This was echoed by another participant who argued:
I mean, the nonprofit scrambling for the next dollar is, I think, a real I mean, it takes a certain amount of resilience, because it's just there's never enough money. Ever. So, you know, I do think like for, you know, for people who are working in government jobs and are thinking maybe they want to cross over, they really have to think about pension. There are no pensions in nonprofits. And the salaries are generally lower. (Interview with author, 02/26/21)

As Millennial workers are driven more by external rewards like pay, barriers related to wages and pay negotiations may influence the number of Millennials interested in nonprofit sector employment because, other sectors offer more financial benefits.

**Male Perceptions**

Implicit societal expectations of how men and women behave have always been present. Research found during the 19th and 20th centuries, middle- and upper-class Caucasian women created identities for themselves by volunteering and becoming activists for social issues such as, “women’s and children’s needs, temperance, morality, and public health”, while balancing traditional gender roles. (McCarthy, 1990, as cited in Dale, 2017, p. 2). Yet, women’s efforts went unacknowledged as men were the breadwinners. As traditional gender roles continue existing, women can be prevented from leadership opportunities when it is assumed only men have certain leadership characteristics.

One participant acknowledged this when discussing women’s capabilities and how society, including women themselves, continue perceiving men as the primary breadwinner. According to her:

And men many times, I guess we've assumed that men because they're the head of the household, need to make more money than women in that area. And so here I am probably going to contradict myself as I'm saying these things. So, working with men in the nonprofit world, there's still a hierarchy. in meetings, and all different kinds of things in pay and all of that type of thing. I think it still exists. However, there are some very powerful women that can do a lot of things. (Interview with author, 03/11/21)
In the U.S, leadership characteristics relate to male qualities which include being direct, assertive, and powerful, to name a few. Additionally, “researchers suggest that masculine modes of leadership are more valued and rewarded in organizations” (Chin, 2004, as cited in Fine, 2009, p. 182). Unfortunately, this unfair treatment leaves women unable to do anything other than recognize and ponder how scenarios would be different, if they were the opposite gender. In the following two examples, participants indicate blatant discrimination experienced, and as one experience involved illegal actions that went unchallenged; this reinforces participants’ self-doubt which will be discussed later.

Another participant discussed not having the opportunity to apply for a previous leadership position, because the agency was only interested in male applicants. While the participant later described herself as an alpha female, her awareness of male qualities being associated with leadership characteristics validates barriers women experience because of male perceptions. An additional participant provided examples of gender differences between herself and female colleagues versus board members and male colleagues. According to them:

I literally have had a headhunter say to me that the search committee does not even want to consider women. So, um, I think that, you know, that the, there is still a perception that men are somehow more authoritative and stronger and better, for lack of a better word in leadership roles then women. I mean, I've had it blatantly show up like that, where I literally was just told no, you're a woman that's not going to work. And less blatantly, in even my dealings as a leader, like with a board of directors. Like I feel that there are times that I think if I were a man, there would be certain conversations, that would be easier. (Interview with author, 02/26/21)

In particular, when relating to board members sometimes, and when I am sometimes next to male leaders who are my colleagues, I am conscious that we move differently in the world. And I'm not sure if sometimes that's because I have a gendered, somewhat gendered approach to something, or if it's just who I am, right, and, but I do see sometimes in myself and sometimes in my colleagues who
are female, we do a little bit more permission seeking, do more space making, we have a softer approach sometimes. And I think sometimes that is quite helpful. And sometimes I think it might not be the most effective approach, I've seen some of my male colleagues take a more confident approach, sometimes a more directive approach than I do, or some of my female colleagues do. And I think sometimes in leadership, confidence is equated with competence. Right? So, if female leaders are not exuding, you know, confidence, I think your competence can be questioned. (Interview with author, 03/04/21)

These discussions demonstrate how often women’s credibility is questioned, because men are viewed as more powerful, confident, and able to command a room despite women having these same qualities.

**Boards of Directors**

As discussed in the literature, the composition of board members (aka boards of directors) has correlated to agency successes. In one 1996 survey from the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, results found out of 20,000 board members, 54% were men and 46% were women (Moyers & Enright, 1997, as cited in Pynes, 2000). Despite women being “more likely to serve as board members for organizations with small budgets” (Moyers & Enright, 1997, as cited in Pynes, 2000, p. 37), less research has focused on barriers caused by board members, when women in leadership participate in decision making.

For example, one participant commented when most directors are men, the organization maintains a male dominated hierarchy, so it becomes more difficult for women to be supported. In two separate conversations regarding challenges the participant faced when leading up to her current position, she stated:

I sometimes think that there is a tendency sometimes to hire people for leadership who are then like current leadership. So, there's maybe a feeling that someone will connect with the culture, if you feel that someone is culturally similar to yourself. And if you were a white male, I think that sometimes that's how the boys’ club gets perpetuated. (Interview with author, 03/04/21)
In social services and human services, I think you'll actually see lots and lots of women in leadership, in terms of being like the directors of organizations, where I think it might be a little bit more rare to see women in leadership is on the boards. And so, I think there's definitely something about ensuring that boards become more diversified, to support more women coming into leadership. (Interview with author, 03/04/21)

From these responses, it is important human services organizations are diverse, so men and women have equal opportunities to share ideas before collaborating on policymaking and administrative functions.

The relationship between board members and chief executive officers is equally as important because research has found when board members are knowledgeable of their responsibilities and chief executive officers are engaged in managing board members, the agency is more effective overall (Herman & Tulipana 1985; Heman & Heimovics 1987, as cited in Bradshaw et al., 1992, p. 229). However, managing board members can become challenging if board members assume their positions without the required skills.

According to one participant:

I think another challenging thing in the nonprofit sector is the sort of bizarre oversight of the volunteer board of directors. I think that it can be good, and also really challenging for leaders in that leadership role, because managing the board is a whole skill set of its own. And I think that a lot of people like in nonprofits, especially like, when I was saying before, it's kind of hard to purposefully move up, in a nonprofit or at least what I've seen. At the same time, there are people who really do not have any management skills, who will end up in these leadership roles. And they're completely not prepared for the board management side, the fundraising side because, you have to kind of have all of these buckets going at the same time, and they just can't, they don't have the skills. (Interview with author, 02/26/21)

Within the nonprofit sector, boards of directors are the chief executive officer’s boss.

Therefore, board members hold the chief executive officer accountable for their responsibilities and if responsibilities are unmet, the board can fire its chief executive
officer. While one participant stated that it is not always necessary the chief executive officer and board of directors come to a consensus, two participants discussed the board of directors’ relationship with the CEO, as this relationship ultimately affects the treatment and success of staff and client services. Three participants stated:

One of the other challenges has been from a board standpoint, is the viewpoint of making decisions is always about consensus. Everybody needs to come to an agreement. Whereas I think we've worked through some of that, that we don't have to all agree and that's all okay. In fact, the diversity of our thoughts and our opinions, many times it's healthy. (Interview with author, 03/13/21)

I've had some horrible bosses. Not just the two guys that spent a lot of their time hitting on me, but women who are just awful...I don't work with the clients. Staff work with the clients. If I don't treat my staff well, they don't treat the clients well. It's that trickle-down theory. And if the board doesn't treat me well, then everybody below me isn't going to get treated well. (Interview with author, 03/16/21)

So, I have a very supportive board. It was, it has shifted. One of my first reviews was looking at the board structure, because as a CEO, you report to the board of directors. But depending on how your relationship is it impacts how well you can work with your team. (Interview with author, 04/13/21)

These responses indicate women in leadership positions experience barriers by board members when there is less collaboration, less support, and lack of trust. It also emphasizes boards of directors may not have established or are not following their policies. While the number of board members is dependent on an organization’s budget size, and smaller organizations may have fewer issues compared to larger agencies, as was reported from one participant who has a staff of three people. It is important the composition of board members continue diversifying and charters for the board are recognized, because men and women bring valuable knowledge that influences their respective agencies’ successes, and both genders deserve equal respect when presenting their ideas.
Self-Doubt

Most of the participants voiced knowing their strengths and skills, being confident in outperforming past supervisors, having the educational level to have a voice of authority, and deserving the opportunity to interview for leadership roles. Yet at different points throughout most of the participants careers, instances of self-doubt occurred. The previous three barriers (wages and pay negotiations, male perceptions, and boards of directors) could have increased the likelihood of self-doubt because within the nonprofit sector, specifically human services, taking on a leadership role is a large task. While each participant was inspired to obtain nonprofit sector employment for different reasons, most participants eventually asked themselves if they were prepared for what their position entailed. According to two participants:

And then the overall just, and the people management side of being in a position where you're having to fire people and making those kinds of decisions. That was that was a big issue for me. In terms of like, really trying to vent out (ask myself). Do I have the capacity to own the emotional toll of what it means to really, you know, make those hard decisions that you have to make on behalf of the organization? (Interview with author, 02/26/21)

The intent was to help this organization get through this, or they were going to dissolve. But I had no idea that I would become an interim for them and then their Executive Director and CEO for the next 18 years. The beast... It's definitely not a word that has a lot of tribute to it. But the beast of nonprofits, I don't know that I was totally equipped for it, because raising your own money, dealing with the laws of California, at least that are pretty intense for nonprofits. All the different accountability, not having any employees, all of those things was a high mountain. (Interview with author, 03/11/21)

In addition, another participant described the fear of failure and how she came to realize she was prepared and qualified for her position.
One participant also observed when reviewing job applications, she found women were more likely to avoid applying if they did not meet every job requirement whereas men would still apply. The participant stated:

And I think, from my understanding, like, from my conversations with colleagues, I think I am not the only woman who has felt sometimes great wondering about whether or not I'm qualified to pursue a position, you know? It's really interesting, right? I now see a lot of resumes and post a lot of positions. And it's very interesting, because I do see sometimes that I think women will only apply for something when they meet all the qualifications, like men will meet some of the qualifications, and send their resume and hope for the best. I really wish more women would do that. I myself have like, definitely fallen into that, you know too. (Interview with author, 03/04/21)

Again, women may feel discouraged to initially apply for leadership positions because of society’s expectation of men being “in power”. Another participant stated, “It is hard to be a woman leader. Because there's such a stigma with regards to men doing certain types of things, and I get that, I actually understand that”.

**Perceptions of Diversity**

In addition to these four main barriers, the barrier of racial dynamics is worth mentioning. In this study, participants were predominately Caucasian women, and scholars have found the nonprofit sector most employs persons who are white. In research conducted by Profiles in Diversity Journal it was noted:

Currently, nonprofit employees are approximately 82 percent white, ten percent African American, five percent Hispanic/Latino, three percent other, and only one percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Employees of color make up about 14 percent of leadership or upper management roles, and less than six percent of specialized positions. (Weisinger, et al., 2016 as cited in Hayes, 2012)

The results from Profiles in Diversity Journal were similar with the demographics of this study, as only one participant was Non-White, compared to five participants who were Caucasian. Additionally, from the 26 human services nonprofit organizations the
researcher contacted for the first and second rounds of interviews, only eight organizations had appointed a Non-White woman as CEO, compared to 18 organizations who had appointed a Caucasian woman as CEO.

Two participants from this study stated because of their race they had not experienced barriers Non-White women faced but recognized the importance of leadership becoming more diverse. According to both participants:

I did get to my role so, in terms of, I obviously, I am white. And so, I have not experienced discriminate, you know, I can't speak. I do think that certainly right now, I know that I have talked to headhunters and I have asked the question, is hiring black and brown a priority in this search? And if it is, I just won't even apply. Because, you know, I think that that's a fair and right priority for the right organization. (Interview with author, 02/26/21)

As I mentioned, so three of our four directors are women. Four of us are white, you know, so diversity on the directorship team, we continue to build a more diverse management team. But really, the majority of our folks of color are not on the management team, and we need to change that...I'm a white woman of a certain age, you know, like, there's a lot that we need to know, to build for the future. That I have blind spots, you know, so ensuring that we help our leadership figure out how we minimize those. (Interview with author, 03/04/21)

The participants’ awareness of being unable to relate to barriers Non-White women face, indicates Non-White women may have more difficulty obtaining leadership positions. This is because not only are they competing with men, Non-White, and Caucasian, but also Caucasian women for their positions.

Discussion

Based on participants’ transcribed interviews, the four most common barriers were wages and pay negotiations, male perceptions, boards of directors, and self-doubt. Responses from one participant whose agency was located outside of California (i.e., Georgia) was inconsistent to the results of this study, which could have been due to the participant being the founder of her agency, the only paid staff member, and having a
staff of less than three people. However, the remaining five participants more often agreed on barriers experienced when obtaining their leadership positions. For example, five participants identified the first barrier of wages and pay negotiations, by each discussing issues of gender pay gap, pay negotiation, and budget size. This was consistent with the literature as U.S gender pay gap and continuation of gender discrimination, and the glass ceiling phenomenon was discussed.

Three participants identified the second barrier of male perceptions while two disagreed. The participants who agreed stated men in leadership created a hierarchy, job opportunities for women were limited or given to a man instead, and women’s confidence could decrease. While the two participants who disagreed stated they had not experienced this barrier due to “a very close-knit group of relationships” which established trust and open communication, or they did not know which candidates they were competing against for job opportunities but had equally worked with male and female leaders. However, in the literature gender stereotypes were discussed and that was linked to occupational sex segregation, known as pink collar jobs, today. As well as the explanation of how women are at a disadvantage because in the U.S., masculine qualities are only seen to exist in men and these qualities, is what has defined good managers (Fine, 2009).

Five participants then identified the third barrier of boards of directors by this time stating, a male dominated hierarchy is created when boards of directors are men. This can be due to agency traditions when leadership consists of middle aged, Caucasian males, with long tenures at their respective organizations. Participants also discussed the difficulties of managing board members who lack the required skills, and board members
unintentional biases when it comes to acknowledging opportunities to diversify staff.

This was seen when one participant described her board of directors stating, “They weren't actively trying not to bring in ethnic or females into the leadership roles. I think it was just not being aware that that was an area that they needed to explore”. In addition, the literature explained how the nonprofit sector has been managed by men and that women “must understand how to navigate working in what is perceived as a man’s world” (Elias, 2018, p. 176).

Lastly, four participants identified the fourth barrier of self-doubt which was a new finding that had not been discussed in the literature. Despite participants describing themselves as alpha females and being confident they would do a better job than previous persons in leadership, self-doubt occurred for most participants at some point in their careers. Unlike the other three barriers which are external barriers and out of participants’ control, self-doubt is an internal barrier that is in participants’ control and can affect how they view themselves. When participants revealed they had asked themselves, “Do I have the capacity to…” or used negative self-talk by stating, “I don't know that I was totally equipped for it”, and “Like, what if I put a lot of effort into pursuing something and then find out I can't do it”, participants’ self-doubt could have prevented them from pursuing their leadership positions had they allowed their self-doubt to negatively affect them.

Self-doubt is related to confidence and as one participant mentioned, “So, if female leaders are not exuding, you know, confidence, I think your competence can be questioned”. The literature examined traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations of men and women, which found men were considered more capable to assume leadership positions within the nonprofit sector. Participants and other women’s
self-doubt would add challenges towards increasing the number of women in leadership positions, because self-doubt is a personal challenge that would need to be overcome.

The explanations of each of these barriers illustrate the glass ceiling remains present in the nonprofit sector. It was interesting to note two participants vocalized their gender was not a barrier (i.e., “For myself, my gender has not been a barrier” and “I don't feel at any point it was about me being a woman”), yet five out of six participants provided examples of barriers faced when obtaining leadership positions within human services nonprofit organizations. Additional barriers mentioned but did not have a large enough sample size, included state guidelines, leadership succession, and needing to outperform to have a voice. Future research would benefit from exploring these barriers as well.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to identify barriers women in human services nonprofit organizations faced when obtaining leadership positions. Scholars had discussed the U.S gender pay gap and continuation of gender discrimination despite, federal laws like The Equal Pay Act of 1963. In addition, scholars found the glass ceiling phenomenon predominately related to women employed in corporate America and the government sector, with the first study on the nonprofit sector being conducted by researcher Margaret Gibelman in the early 2000s. The results of Gibelman’s study found women were less likely to occupy management positions and earned less salaries than men, except in low-level management positions.

The literature explained societal and economic barriers, the organizational culture, and human resources practices as reasons women in nonprofit organizations had less opportunities to obtain leadership positions. Therefore, the researcher of this study conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain women’s perceptions on obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations today. The research question of the study was, “How do women employed in leadership positions at human services nonprofit organizations perceive their roles and compensation?” From the six participants’ interview responses, it was found the glass ceiling is still present in today’s nonprofit sector with the four main barriers of wages and pay negotiations, male perceptions, boards of directors, and self-doubt, impacting this.

The first three barriers contribute and further support existing literature because research on the nonprofit sector has always highlighted how nonprofits are unable to compete with the other sectors when it comes to pay. Scholars also discussed during the
19th and 20th centuries women’s volunteer work went unrecognized as men were the breadwinners and historically, men were found to have more leadership characteristics than women. Scholars’ previous findings of board members composition being more male than female and this study’s findings of some nonprofit organizations boards of directors still being male dominated, could encourage nonprofit organizations to strategize on ways to diversify leadership. Lastly, the fourth barrier of self-doubt offers new discoveries to existing literature as this had not been discussed prior.

The barrier of self-doubt is unique as it is an internal barrier, unlike external barriers just mentioned that have predominately been discussed throughout literature. Therefore, it is crucial for women with self-doubt to have support in overcoming these feelings, because if women doubt themselves early on, their opportunities towards obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations disappear. The disappearance of women’s opportunities is what has resulted in overrepresentations of male leadership in the nonprofit sector, so it is important women are provided support and continue pursuing opportunities to obtain leadership positions.

**Recommendations**

As the barrier of self-doubt is an internal barrier that can negatively affect women’s views of themselves, one recommendation is for the nonprofit sector to create female led-mentorship programs that provide women a sense of community. While this would be a large task, different types of nonprofit organizations (i.e., human services, education, arts, etc.) can begin this process by creating mentorship programs for women currently in or wanting to obtain leadership positions. Women in leadership understand the loneliness that comes with being in positions such as chief executive officer, so it is
important future women in leadership do not feel discouraged in taking on leadership positions for these reasons.

To recruit women to join female led-mentorship programs, nonprofit organizations human resources can advertise this as an additional benefit when posting open positions, low-level management (i.e., supervisors) can inform direct service workers of opportunities to gain insight of what leadership positions entail (if interested in later pursuing this career choice), and boards of directors can allocate 1-2 days per month for their chief executive officers to collaborate with other female leaders, which will benefit the agency as a whole as it creates network opportunities. In the nonprofit sector, every nonprofit organization has different programs that all serve to meet the mission of their respective organization but often times, staff are disconnected from one another as there are few opportunities for the different programs (all staff) to gather. By increasing each programs awareness that female led-mentorship programs are available, women, who comprise most of the workforce, will have a community that promotes confidence skills and offers guidance from other women.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future scholars should continue studying the barrier of self-doubt as newer research has developed the term “imposter syndrome”, which may be linked to self-doubt. Additionally, other barriers like state guidelines, leadership succession, and needing to outperform to have a voice, should be explored by scholars as they did not have a large enough sample size to be examined in this study. It would also be valuable if scholars studied a larger and more diverse sample size by including Non-White women and expand the time frame of the study as six weeks was not enough time to recruit
participants. A second option would be for future scholars to conduct a longitudinal study, as current research hardly follows up with original findings. The researcher had difficulty recruiting participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nonprofit leaders’ availability for interviews. Therefore, future scholars should recruit participants from nonprofit conferences or trainings, as their attendance shows availability for interviews at those gatherings.

As Millennials are predicted to be the next generational group to make up more than half of the U.S labor force, it is also important future scholars’ study how much influence external rewards like pay, will affect Millennial’s decisions to remain or leave the nonprofit sector. The participants in this study did not discuss work benefits greatly, so future scholars could focus on which work benefits would most attract Millennials to nonprofit sector employment. Lastly, it is important scholars discuss ethical challenges in the nonprofit sector, as this study demonstrated some barriers experienced by women were unethical.
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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

Memorandum
Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board – Office of Research Compliance

Date: January 20, 2021
PI Name: Amber Gutierrez, Department/College: Political Science, MPA
Co-PI(s): Brady Collins
IRB Protocol Number: IRB-20-183
Protocol Title: Test
Protocol Submission Type: Initial; Review Board Type: CPP IRB members
Review Type: Expedited
Decision: Approved

Dear Investigator(s),

The protocol as described above has been reviewed by the Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board (IRB) by the expedited review method. It was found to be in compliance with applicable federal and state regulations and Cal Poly Pomona policies regarding the protection of human subjects used in research. Thus, the Cal Poly Pomona IRB grants you approval to conduct the research. On its behalf, I thank you for your adherence to established policies meant to ensure the safety and privacy of your study participants. You may wish to keep a copy of this memo with you while conducting your research project.

You may initiate the project as of January 19, 2021.

It would be appreciated that you advise the IRB upon the completion of your project involving the interaction with human subjects. Please use the "Closure or termination of the protocol" form in the Cayuse system. Approval is conditional upon your willingness to carry out your responsibilities as the principal investigator under University policy. Your research project must be conducted according to the methods described in the final approved protocol. Should there be any changes to your research plan as described, please advise the IRB, because you may be required to submit an amendment (with re-certification). Additionally, should you as the investigator or any of your subjects experience any "problems which involve an undescribed element of risk" (adverse events in regulatory terms), please immediately inform the IRB of the circumstances. There are forms for both in the Cayuse system.

The committee wishes you success in your future research endeavors. If you need further assistance, you are encouraged to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Schiele
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Assistant Professor
College of Business Administration

This message has been automatically generated by the Cayuse system installed at Cal Poly Pomona. Please contact the IRB office (irb@calpoly.edu or 909.865.2331 or 2273) if you have questions or if you believe this message is in error. Thank you for your compliance with the regulations while conducting human subject research.
APPENDIX B

Participant Initial Recruitment Email

(DATE)

Good afternoon (ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUAL NAME),
My name is Amber Gutierrez, and I am a graduate student at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. I am pursuing a Master’s in Public Administration and will begin conducting research for my thesis entitled, “Equal opportunity or gender inequality? Women’s perceptions on obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations”. My research aims to identify barriers women in nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions. Specifically, women employed in human services nonprofit organizations where a woman has been appointed CEO. This is because, while women comprise most of the nonprofit sector workforce, women are underrepresented in leadership positions.

It is important for me to conduct this research as nonprofit organizations are crucial in providing direct services the government is not able to do and if enough women leave the nonprofit sector due to barriers faced, organizations with predominately female staff may be impacted. Personally, I am interested in this research because I have worked as a front-line worker in the nonprofit sector for the past 3.5 years and am interested in one day obtaining a leadership position.

As my research is focused on women obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations, I am interested in scheduling an interview with yourself, as you are the (INDIVIDUAL’S POSITION TITLE AND ORGANIZATION NAME). Additionally, it would be appreciated if this email could be distributed amongst staff, to schedule additional interviews with other women currently employed in leadership positions within your organization.

Attached to this email is a formal recruitment letter and consent form, as research will be conducted via interviews using the Zoom video application. Please contact me at agutierrez@cpp.edu for additional questions.

Thank you,

Amber Gutierrez
APPENDIX C

Participant Follow-Up Recruitment Email

(DATE)

Good afternoon (ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUAL NAME),

My name is Amber Gutierrez, and I am a graduate student at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. I am pursuing a Master’s in Public Administration and am sending a follow-up email regarding my thesis entitled, “Equal opportunity or gender inequality? Women’s perceptions on obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations”. My research aims to identify barriers women in nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions. Specifically, women employed in human services nonprofit organizations where a woman has been appointed CEO. This is because, while women comprise most of the nonprofit sector workforce, women are underrepresented in leadership positions.

It is important for me to conduct this research as nonprofit organizations are crucial in providing direct services the government is not able to do and if enough women leave the nonprofit sector due to barriers faced, organizations with predominately female staff may be impacted. Personally, I am interested in this research because I have worked as a front-line worker in the nonprofit sector for the past 3.5 years and am interested in one day obtaining a leadership position.

As my research is focused on women obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations, I am interested in scheduling an interview with yourself, as you are the (INDIVIDUAL’S POSITION TITLE AND ORGANIZATION NAME).

Attached to this email is a formal recruitment letter and consent form, as research will be conducted via interviews using the Zoom video application. Interviews will be scheduled from (SPECIFIC DATES), with day/times of interviews based on your availability and will be 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. Please contact me at agutierrez@cpp.edu for additional questions.

Thank you,

Amber Gutierrez
APPENDIX D

Formal Recruitment Letter

Dear (ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUAL NAME),

My name is Amber Gutierrez, and I am a graduate student from the Political Science Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about barriers women in nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership positions. Specifically, the title of the research study is, “Equal opportunity or gender inequality? Women’s perceptions on obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations”. You are eligible to be in this study because you are employed within a human services nonprofit organization within Los Angeles, CA and research finds, human services nonprofit organizations employ the greatest number of women. I obtained your agency contact information from the public database, Charity Navigator, a U.S. based charity assessment organization. (REMOVE LAST SENTENCE FOR PARTICIPANTS OBTAINED BY SNOWBALL SAMPLING)

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in an online interview using the Zoom video application and, answer approximately 6-8 questions. With your consent, I will audio/video record your interview to use the information to collect data on common themes women in today’s nonprofit sector have faced when obtaining leadership positions.

This study is completely voluntary and at any point your participation can be discontinued without penalty. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me at agutierrez@cpp.edu.

Thank you,

Amber Gutierrez

The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved for conduct this research involving human subjects under protocol IRB-20-183
APPENDIX E

Consent Form

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

You are being invited to participate in a research study, which the Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved for conduct by the investigators named here. This form is designed to provide you - as a human subject/participant - with information about this study. The investigator or his/her representative will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. You are entitled to an Experimental Research Subject’s Bill of Rights and a copy of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject or participant, complaints about the informed consent process of this research study or experience an adverse event (something goes wrong), please contact the Research Compliance Office within Cal Poly Pomona’s Office of Research at 909.869.4215. More information is available at the IRB website, http://www.cpp.edu/~research/irb/index.shtml

Project Title: Equal opportunity or gender inequality? Women’s perceptions on obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations

Protocol Number: IRB-20-183

Principal Investigator (PI): Amber Gutierrez (agutierrez@cpp.edu)
Co-Principal Investigator (PI): Brady Collins (bjcollins@cpp.edu)

The purpose of this study aims to identify barriers women in nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership roles. In the United States, women comprise 75% of the nonprofit sector workforce but, only 43% of women become appointed as chief executive officer (CEO). Furthermore, the percentage of women appointed as CEO is largely dependent on the budget size of an organization. Nonprofit organizations with budget sizes of $50 million or more appoint only 18% of women as CEO whereas, nonprofit organizations with smaller budget sizes appoint 55% of women as CEO (Hill et al., 2016, pg. 9).

Current research recognizes gender discrimination in the workplace and despite U.S. federal laws such as, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, women are still unequal to their male counterparts. This has created overrepresentations of male leadership in the nonprofit sector which are due to societal and economic barriers, the organizational culture, and human resources practices. Despite the nonprofit sector experiencing an economic growth and women comprising most of the workforce especially, in human services, generational differences pose risks towards the sectors sustainability. The Baby Boomers generation are nearing retirement and Millennial workers have greater interest in extrinsic rewards, with one being a need for increase pay.

Recent studies find within the next five years 45% of nonprofit employees will seek new employment due to the sector not paying its employees enough (Strub, 2020). Identifying the barriers women in nonprofit organizations face when obtaining leadership roles is crucial, as it may have greater impact in nonprofit sustainability where a woman has been appointed as CEO. Therefore, the research question of this study is,
How do women employed in leadership positions at human services nonprofit organizations perceive their roles and compensation?”

This study involves qualitative research in the form of online recorded interviews using the Zoom video application. Participants will respond to approximately 6-8 interview questions regarding their experiences in the nonprofit sector. The length of interviews will be dependent on participant responses. The qualitative research is described in fairly simple terms and sentences, and we do not anticipate the participant experiencing any discomfort or other negative feelings when responding to questions in this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you decide to discontinue participation, you may do so without penalty. You may also skip any question you do not wish to complete. Your participation in this study may improve opportunities for other women employed in the nonprofit sector, by identifying barriers and creating suggestions to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions. Your name will not be used during data collection, so your participation will be anonymous. None of your responses can be directly traced back to you. Interviews will be recorded with participant consent.

Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the study’s principle investigator (PI), Amber Gutierrez, MPA student in the Political Science Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Her e-mail address is agutierrez@cpp.edu.

CONSENT STATEMENT:

I, ___________________, hereby give my consent to participate in the research study entitled “Equal opportunity or gender inequality? Women obtaining leadership positions in human services nonprofit organizations in the city of Los Angeles”. I have read the above information and am aware of the potential risks and complications. I fully understand that I may withdraw from this research project at any time or choose not to answer any specific question without penalty. I also understand that I am free to ask questions about techniques or procedures that will be undertaken. I am aware that there is no compensation for my participation. Finally, I understand information obtained about me during the course of the study will be kept anonymous and cannot be traced back to me.

_________________________________________  ________________
Participant’s signature (18+ years of age)          Date

I hereby certify that I have given an explanation to the above individual of the contemplated study and its risks and potential complications.

_________________________________________  ________________
Principal Investigator/Date          Witness/Date
APPENDIX F

Interview Questions

1. What generational group do you most identify with?
   A. Baby Boomers (1946-1964)
   B. Generation X (1965-1980)
   C. Millennials (1981-1996)

2. How long have you been employed in the nonprofit sector?
   A. 0-5 years
   B. 5-10 years
   C. 10-15 years
   D. 15+ years

3. What factor(s) first inspired you to obtain nonprofit sector employment?

4. There is a phenomenon of the glass ceiling effect, which refers to “discriminatory attitudes or bias, that impede or prevent qualified individuals, including (but not limited to) women, racial and ethnic minorities, and disabled persons, from advancing into management positions” (Gibelman, 2000, p. 251). In your opinion, how has the glass ceiling effect continued to exist in the nonprofit sector?

5. What challenges have you personally faced leading up to your current position?

6. What are some of the challenges of your respective organization? (i.e., mention budget size and then other examples like staff turnover)

7. What factors have promoted and discouraged you from taking on a leadership position?