

Second-generation gender bias: An exploratory study of women's leadership gap in a UK construction organisation

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The eradication of gender discrimination at work has been a prominent feature of the UK political and business agenda for decades, however the persistent business gender leadership gap remains. The concept of second-generation gender bias has recently been proposed as the primary cause. This paper evaluates how women experience second-generation gender bias in construction organisations. It examines key manifestations of second-generation gender bias and how it impacts women's career progression into leadership positions in the UK construction industry.

Methodology: This study adopts a broad feminist interpretative lens aligned with the general aims of feminist critical inquiry through semi-structured interviews, with 12 women experiencing career journeys of at least five years in the construction industry.

Findings: The study reveals that second-generation gender bias hinders the career development and leadership identity of some women and the persistent business gender leadership gap is unlikely to change without addressing it.

Originality/Value: There is little or no research that speaks exclusively to the experience of second-generation gender bias and female managers working within UK construction. This paper provides further insight into the barriers women face when attempting to progress into senior management roles, particularly in construction.

Keywords: Second-generation gender bias, Leadership, Women, Construction industry, United Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

Despite outperforming men at every level of education, women's career success is not being matched with their academic achievements. The persistent and prevalent issue of women's underrepresentation in senior management has generated a considerable body of research (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Weyer, 2007; French & Strachan, 2015). However, few attempts have been made to address the impact of covert barriers, namely the phenomenon of second-generation gender bias on women's career progression (Ely *et al.*, 2011; Trefalt *et al.*, 2011). Over the last few decades the UK has made substantial progress in increasing the participation of women in the workplace (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006). Accounting for almost 49% of the workforce, women have gained near equal representation in general labour force participation, with a record 14.6 million women in work (ONS, 2017). Women have also excelled in education and qualification. In 2016, 73% of women achieved a 2:1 or above compared to 69% of men, and for the past two decades female students have outnumbered male students at UK universities (Higher Education Policy Institute-HEPI, 2016). On the premise of these gains, it would appear that women in the UK currently have more opportunities than ever to succeed in the workplace. However, recent studies exposed some discouraging realities. According to research conducted by (Grant Thornton, 2016; Llewellyn Consulting, 2006; MGI, 2015; PWC, 2016) the UK has one of the worst records for gender equality at work in Europe. It is projected that the under-utilisation of women's skills costs the UK economy 1.3 to 2% of annual GDP (Women and Work Commission, 2006).

In this paper; the business gender leadership gap refers to the significant underrepresentation of women in senior management positions in business (Trefalt *et al.*, 2011). Senior managers typically report to the CEO or a group of directors. They are individuals responsible for establishing departmental or large team priorities, day-to-day operations, as well as, effective and efficient allocation of resources, to facilitate the achievement of the organisation's long-term strategic goals (Kotter, 1986; Goffee & Scase, 1992). Grant Thornton (2017) revealed that the proportion of women in senior management positions in the UK is only 19%. This represents an increase of just 1% since the annual research began in 2004. The proportion of UK businesses with no women in senior management at all is 41%. Research consistently concludes that businesses with a large proportion of women in senior management roles have a much greater return on investment, in comparison to those that do not (Chengadu & Scheepers, 2017; European Commission, 2016). The Peterson Institute for International Economics found that profitable businesses that increased their proportional representation of female senior managers from 0% to 30%, benefitted from a 15% increase in financial performance (Noland *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, research from MGI (2010) illustrated that gender-balanced upper management teams have a 56% higher operating profit than companies with male-only teams. Homogeneity can be damaging to growth, whereas diversity improves adaptability, innovation and resource efficiency (Thayaparan *et al.*, 2014). Today's global market is unstable; to stay competitive and enjoy chances of improved economic success, closing the gender leadership gap is an economic imperative for UK businesses. Given the chance to access a larger pool of talent, as well as the strong economic case for change, the question remains; why does the business gender leadership gap persist and prevail?

Following a survey of over 1000 women in Fortune 1000 companies, Weyer (2007) determined that barriers to women's career progression were often unintentional. Yet, there appears to be disproportionate empirical research addressing the impact of implicit gender bias (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; Hoobler *et al.*, 2011; Nadler & Stockdale, 2012). Some researchers (Kolb & McGinn, 2008; Sturm, 2001; Trefalt *et al.*, 2011; Ely *et al.*, 2011; Ibarra *et al.*, 2013;) have proposed second-generation gender bias to be one of the primary causes of persistent gender leadership disparity at work. Second-generation gender bias is *implicit gender bias*. It refers to the creation of subtle and 'invisible' barriers for women. These barriers arise from existing cultural and structural workplace practices, as well as normative gender-based patterns of interaction that appear neutral. The most notable study exploring the relationship between second-generation gender bias and the gender leadership gap in organisations was undertaken for the Centre for Gender Organisation (CGO) (Trefalt *et al.*, 2011). There is limited known empirical data that explicitly addresses the impact of second-generation gender bias on women's career advancement to leadership. The term is relatively recent, but the subject of bias is not (Trefalt *et al.*, 2011). Many researchers (Dainty *et al.*, 1999; Evetts, 2000; Clerc and Kels, 2013) agree that in the context of the organisation, it can be viewed that career development is determined by three dimensions of explanations; *structure*, *culture* and *action*. This study therefore embraces Evetts (2000) suggestion to approach research concerned with the analysis of women's career development through the dimensions framework that provides a holistic assessment of what happens to women's and progression in the workplace, thus forming the structural lens of this study.

Women and the UK Construction Industry

It is well-established that male-dominated industries such as construction are amongst the worst in the UK for continuous underrepresentation of women in senior management roles (Gale & Cartwright, 1995; Worrall *et al.*, 2010). The significant size of the UK construction workforce and economic contribution justify construction as worthwhile context for research (Dainty *et al.*, 2000). The construction industry is one of the greatest sector contributors to the UK economy, as well as a key driver of growth for other sectors. It provides an economic output of £92.4 billion and accounts for approximately 10% of UK employment (Rhodes, 2014). Although the number of women employed in the industry has increased in recent years (Duong & Skitmore, 2003), the industry has the lowest level of female participation in comparison to others. The lack of women in senior management in the construction industry is well documented in the UK (Sommerville *et al.*, 1993; Duong & Skitmore, 2003; EOC, 2006; Watts, 2009). Despite studies illustrating that female leaders are just as equally effective as males (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2003), it remains a sector where women are confronted with critical barriers to progress (DeGraft-Johnson *et al.*, 2009; EHRC, 2011). According to a report by Randstad (2016) the proportion of women in senior roles within UK construction companies is only 16%, an increase of just 10% since 1997. Worrall *et al.* (2010) claim that barriers to women in the UK construction industry appear to be experienced universally, irrespective of job function.

The persistent UK sector response to the situation has been the introduction of equality and diversity interventions and policies catalysed by socio-political reforms to attract and push women into management roles in construction (Munn 2014). Although enthusiasm for change is often expressed by industry leaders, continued underrepresentation, evidenced by data, imply that these initiatives are not generating significant or sustained improvement. Lu and Sexton (2010) advocate that industry leaders need to recognise that women's career journeys are not just being

impacted by legislation and policy. A third of UK construction industry workers believe that more could be done to advance women into senior management positions (Randstad, 2016). The rhetoric is not in sync with reality, thus the leadership gap remains and the reasoning behind such warrants further exploration (Rhodes, 2014).

APPROACHES TO GENDER PARITY: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A review of literature on women in leadership reveals a collection of tautological theories explaining the existence and persistence of barriers to leadership in male-dominated industries. Traditionally, researchers espouse gender-centred and organisational structure theories. Table I succinctly consolidates the prevailing traditional theories into three explanatory frames.

	Reasons for Barriers to leadership	Theoretical view of Gender Parity	Approach To Change	Advantages	Disadvantages
Frame 1 <i>(Heims, 1993; Powell, 1987; Kay & Shipman, 2014)</i>	Women lack skills, there are socialised gender differences. Women don't know-how to 'play the game'	No differences between men and women; women are just like men	Develop women's skills through training, mentoring, etc.	Assists individual women to succeed; produces role models when successful	Leaves system and male standards intact; blames women for problem <i>(Cox, 1994)</i>
Frame 2 <i>(Rosener, 1997; Vanderbroeck, 2010)</i>	Women have different skills due to socialisation. There are separate domains of activity, 'feminine' skills not valued.	Differences acknowledged, 'feminine' skills appreciated and preserved	Training in diversity acceptance; reward and celebrate dissimilarities, 'women's ways'	Legitimises differences - 'feminine' approach valued; aligned to broad equality initiatives	Reinforces stereotypes; leaves processes that produce differences intact <i>(Ridgeway, 2001)</i>
Frame 3 <i>(Acker, 1990 Fielden et al., 2001; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004)</i>	Gender differences in treatment, access and opportunity present. Differing structures of power and opportunity cause lack of access to resources for women	Create level playing field by decreasing structural obstacles. Create equal opportunities	Policies to compensate for structural barriers, e.g. affirmative action, work family benefits	Assists with hiring, retaining, progressing women; less work- family stress	Has nominal impact on organisational culture. Sometimes there is a backlash and work-family remains 'woman's problem' <i>(Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Glass, 2004)</i>

Table I: Approaches to Gender Parity and Reform (Adapted from Ely & Meyerson, 2000)

Classical approaches of the issue contentiously imply that women are the problem due to socialised gender differences, resulting in the necessity to be 'fixed'. Thus, Gherardi and Poggio (2001) and O'Neil and Hopkins (2015) agree in criticising attempts expressed in frame one and two as cursory. Frame one theorists explain that as a result of socialisation, women lack skills and understanding. In order for women to progress to management they must assimilate according to existing male standards (Powell, 1987; Heims, 1993; Kay & Shipman 2014). Organisational structures and procedures remain unimpaired; however, Cox (1994) contends that unless existing male power structures are challenged, under-represented groups will continue to be marginalised. The status-quo is maintained, especially in male-dominated industries. Frame two theorists explain that the 'feminised' ways in which women are different to men are not valued by organisations, people within should be made aware of the differences. The typically 'feminine' skills such as 'nurturing' and 'listening' are to be recognised (Rosener, 1997). Ridgeway (2001) believes this to be counterproductive as it contributes to gender stereotyping, thus prompting gendered division of labour. Furthermore, Vanderbroeck (2010) acknowledges that recognition does not equate to value. In industries typified as adversarial like construction, where typically 'masculine' leadership qualities are favoured (Worrall *et al.*, 2010), this could elicit bias towards men when selecting managers.

Many researchers (Acker, 1990; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Ogden *et al.*, 2006) subscribe to the explanatory approaches described in frame three which highlight visible structural barriers to the recruitment and advancement of women. In determining that women have less structural opportunities to progress, policy-based interventions such as affirmative action hiring, promotion practices and flexible working hours are implemented in an effort to create equal opportunities

for women (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). Although this approach is progressive, it fails to address the impact of the existing organisational culture and its interaction with policies, of which, Liff and Ward (2001) ascribe as essential to meaningful change. It also exhibits little consideration to the potential backlash from the feeling of exclusion from men, subsequently inciting alternative barriers (Glass, 2004). Furthermore, equal opportunity does not guarantee equal treatment or outcomes. French & Strachan's study (2009) supports indication for heterodox thinking by identifying the weak correlation between exclusive implementation of equal employment policies, and the significant increase of women in senior management and non-traditional occupations. With the acknowledgment that frame three has driven some improvement (Stamarski & Hing, 2015), generally the approaches have sought to accommodate extant systems as opposed to directly challenging them. Subsequently, it stands to reason that contemporary academics have pursued revisionist or alternative lines of inquiry.

CONCEPTUALISING SECOND-GENERATION GENDER BIAS

Shifting the focus of research from overt to covert bias, the theory of second-generation gender bias somewhat challenges existing dominant theories. A study undertaken by the CGO (Trefalt *et al.*, 2011) suggests that advances of gender equity in leadership are limited due to organisational change efforts often being designed to address conspicuous discrimination. Consequently, organisations neglect to address the subtle imbalanced gender-dynamics cultivated by second-generation gender bias. Similar to Cox (1994), Ely *et al.*'s (2011) theory-based study deduced that as the structures and practices go unchallenged, masculine-feminine dichotomies become so embedded in an organisation's culture and structure, that they are perceived to be the norm. Second-generation gender bias differs from first-generation gender bias in the way that it is not deliberate and can be unconscious. O'Neil and Hopkins, (2015) suggest that it has largely

replaced obvious discrimination with less discernible forms of prejudice in organisations. In agreement, Kolb & McGinn (2008) perceive it to be more prevalent and unwittingly interwoven into societal fabric, without men and women cognizant of its occurrence.

Career Development Determinants

By definition, the theoretical underpinnings of second-generation gender bias are rooted in structural, cultural and action dimensions (Ely et al., 2011), therefore, it is fitting to present the conceptualisation through this lens. The framework has previously been used to accentuate obstacles and determinants of women's career paths, as well as to succinctly emphasise how gender patterns are reproduced and preserved in the workplace (Dainty et al., 2000). Subsequently, it is useful to review manifestations of second-generation gender bias according to aligned career development dimensions; structure, culture and action, for a more holistic determination of implications to women's career paths to senior management.

Structure Dimension - The structural aspects of an organisation establish the framework within which careers develop; these include processes that characterise working patterns, division of labour, salary and promotion ladders (Evetts, 2000). Having traditionally been constructed mainly by and for men, Acker (1990), depicts organisations as inherently biased structures, supportive of men's experiences and life circumstances. It's argued that through formal and informal processes, women are subject to inadvertent systematic discrimination.

Performance and Gendered Career Paths - Women face unintended bias in performance evaluation which often leads to gendered working and vertical segregation (Stamarski and Hing, 2015). Established by male leaders, organisations have tacit criteria for good performance of which,

employees are expected to abide (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Employees that work long hours, prioritise work above all, can travel and relocate readily are favoured for paths to leadership for demonstrating what is perceived to be commitment. Failure to comply is likely to negatively affect development and promotion prospects (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006). Such normative practices may disadvantage women as they are not suited to typical female life-circumstances; like family commitments, which may influence or limit working hours and geographic flexibility (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Glass (2004) advises that even when flexible working arrangements are implemented, career penalties on women are imposed and interestingly, it is perceived that men do not feel as comfortable as women using the arrangements. Traditional organisational culture still favours 'presenteeism'; employees who are in the office more tend to be regarded better performers than those less present (Gurjao, 2006). Culture appears to influence the organisations structural processes. In this way, culture and structure could be seen to be working in tandem, subtly undermining women's efforts.

Again, Bagilhole (2002) noted that the construction industry in particular ceases to comprehend the complexities of balancing work-family demands due to prevalence of inflexible working hours. Women are often overlooked for promotion as they are perceived to be less committed and therefore assigned less responsibility and decision-making authority. As a result, they become associated with certain types of work, typically work that ascribes to skills deemed 'feminine' or specialist. This prompts divergent opportunities, catalysing assumed gendered career-paths and vertical segregation. According to Lindgren and Packendorff (2006), in instances whereby women comply with tacit and formalised performance criteria, partiality is further evident in the disparate standards to which men and women are assessed. Lyness and Heilman (2006) maintain that men are promoted on potential and women on performance. It is implied that women are

assessed on prior achievements and perception, whereas men are only required to demonstrate capacity to accomplish and succeed. From this it can be deduced that despite compliance, women are still unlikely to progress at the same pace as men as they are subject to a more stringent code of conduct by managers.

Networks and Sponsors - Normative practices enabling employees to exploit informal networks for career progression are imbalanced; subsequently, producing disparate effects on women's career journeys (Woodley, 2012). Strong affiliation with informal networks can greatly enhance prospects of increased salary, workplace mobility and attainment of leadership (Singh et al., 2009). The interrelationships formed serve as important resources offering guidance, development opportunities, nepotism and access to influential sponsors that assist in promotion (Timberlake, 2005). Maki (2015) remarks that informal networks afford individuals chances to circumvent formalities to facilitate achievement of desired objectives. However, research determines that whilst men are already positioned to leverage their informal networks to progress, most women must rely on formal networks to rise (Stamarski & Hing, 2015).

Powerful informal networks are often referred to as the 'old boys network'. Although some women attempt to penetrate, studies show that men do not readily grant access (Oakley, 2000). Ibarra's (1992) research found that when presented with men and women of equivalent education and experience, men were still afforded greater sponsorship, increased access to their mentor's networks, and were more likely to be invited into influential groups than women. Linehan (2001) confirms that women have fewer and weaker connections to senior managers than men at the same level. This results in disproportionate distribution of power exerted by men through homophilous relationships (Woodley, 2012). Men forge links with other men and direct advancement opportunities to junior men who mirror them (Ridgeway, 1997). However McGuire

(2002) conjects that this barrier is not necessarily gender-exclusive, as not all men are privy to access powerful informal networks. On the basis of homosocial reproduction, there are also negative implications for ethnic minority males. Nonetheless, Singh et al (2009) suggest that by function of being male in a male-dominated organisation, all men are likely to have significantly better chances of access to such resources in comparison to women. Influenced by culture dimensions, patriarchal structures appear to propagate gendered career paths, which seemingly hinder women's power and potential.

Culture Dimension - Organisations form a cultural system which encompasses the values, beliefs and assumptions under which the employees cooperate to undertake assignments and compete for limited opportunities to progress. These conditions strongly influence collective employee behaviours, perceptions and job performance expectations (Dainty *et al.*, 2000). Ibarra et al (2013) claim that in the majority of cultures, 'masculinity' is associated with leadership. Weyer (2007) conveys that traditional organisations have a prevailing gender-based dynamic which tends to ascribe to 'masculine' culture, as organisations are pre-dominantly led by men. This suggests propensity for insidious bias, implying a culture that renders unfair repercussions for women unable to assimilate.

Gender Stereotyping & Double Binds - Congruity theory supports indications of second-generation gender bias through the effects of implicit gender stereotyping (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Ginige et al (2007) describe gender-stereotypes as the antecedents of workplace bias. The theory surmises that bias toward women in leadership occurs due to conflicts between the characteristics of social gender role stereotypes and qualities associated with archetypal leadership. Reinforced by Vinnicombe & Singh (2002), it is conveyed that management roles in

construction are perceived to be typically 'masculine'; therefore there is a cultural belief that good managers require corresponding traits, e.g. assertive, competitive and autonomous. As these qualities do not adhere to the perceived traditional female gender role stereotypes; when exhibited by women they may be perceived negatively when being evaluated. Evidence compatible with this theory is presented by Eagly et al. (1995) meta-analysis, which concluded that women are considered less effective leaders than men in environments that are perceived as masculine. This suggests that due to pre-existing cultural perceptions men have an advantage when trying to progress, due to assumed consistency with the established dominant-masculine culture and the social gender role stereotype. Some researchers challenge the conclusions of Eagly and Karau (2002). For example, Vecchio (2002) claims that since the meta-analysis study was undertaken, there have been significant improvements in societal attitudes. Quantitative research by Violanti and Jurczak (2011) reflected that current organisational demands represent a shift in desired leadership qualities; with typically feminine qualities favoured over masculine; thus creating the 'female leadership advantage'.

Nonetheless, when women displayed typically 'masculine' valued leadership qualities, such as assertiveness, they were often perceived as competent but bossy and unlikeable. However, women that exhibited stereotypically nurturing, passive, 'feminine' behaviours were liked, but not viewed as competent enough for leadership. Dainty et al (2000) supports this in identifying that on average, women progress one hierarchical level behind their male counterparts of comparable experience and age in construction, demonstrating that career paths are longer and slower. Maki (2015) explains that although unintended, gender-stereotypes can exclude women from valuable broader career development experiences. Even though management demographics have changed to women's favour, stereotypes that thwart parity in treatment may still prevail and

limit opportunities for advancement (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). Moreover, Gherardi & Poggio (2001) argue gender-stereotyping to be an unconscious dogmatic replication of the dichotomous symbolic gender-hierarchy, to control structural access to leadership and to maintain social order.

Reproduction of Masculine Culture - Organisations preserve patterns of male dominance at work through implicit homosocial reproduction; people make positive assessments of people similar to them, therefore feel uncertainty is minimised (Linehan, 2001). Ellison (2001) arguably substantiates this in attributing the variance of men's promotion rates to biased decision-making by male leaders. Ellison's (2001) findings illustrated that, men of equal profile gain promotion at a faster rate than women, mainly within the first ten years of their career. Through homosocial reproduction, organisational culture can be viewed to sustain cultural practices and unbalanced organisational structures that benefit men's career progression (Appelbaum et al., 2003). Ridgeway (2001) shares similar perspectives with Linehan (2001) in suggesting that women are marginalised to preserve the status-quo.

It is argued that the paucity of role models only serve to reinforce cultural beliefs that women are not meant to be in leadership positions. To employees within the organisation the norm reflects men in senior management positions (Ely *et al.*, 2011). Zimmer's (1998) work on 'tokenism' implies that women in leadership are sometimes perceived as the imposed minority as they rebel against the sociocultural gender hierarchy. Consequently, they may struggle to garner compliance or progress. In support of this view, Henderson and Stackman's (2010) study concluded that female middle-managers in construction are twice as likely as men to be assigned less favourable, lower-budget, 'token' projects to manage. Managing large, complex projects are generally viewed as prerequisite for senior management roles. Without access to exposure and experience;

it becomes difficult for women to gain the necessary competence to advance (Azhar & Griffin, 2014).

Action Dimension - When exploring structural and cultural dimensions, the focus is mainly on the career determinants or constraints, action refers to the response. Careers are not determined by just cultural and structural forces, they are experiences individuals respond to (Clerc & Kels, 2013). There is not much literature pertaining to action but it is implied that women challenge, adapt or ignore existing structure and culture that then informs their response and choice. Ely *et al* (2011) and Ibarra *et al* (2011) agree in claiming that cultural and structural conditions obstruct the creation of leadership identity in women, diminishing their desire to pursue positions. However, the CGO study (Trefalt *et al.* 2011) revealed that 59% of women indicated that they did not opt out of leadership opportunities due to feeling that they did not fit into their organisation's leadership model. This calls into question whether second-generation gender bias really does obstruct the creation of leadership identity and hold women back from pursuing leadership positions.

Lu & Sexton (2010) and Hakim (2006) contend notions of the importance of second-generation bias in claiming that the most disregarded and important factor enhancing the progress of women into senior management is women and their individual choice and life circumstances. Hakim (2006) argues that women prefer not to be in leadership positions and that is why they are not represented adequately in senior management. However Maki (2015) infers that individual choices alone were not responsible for the gender leadership gap in business, people are products of their environment and influenced by the culture that surrounds them. Ely *et al* (2011) argue that career choices are not made in isolation; people in organisations are influenced by existing systemic structures and culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to the ontology of the problem, a constructivist, as opposed to positivist epistemological approach was deemed most appropriate for collating knowledge and analysing the data. The constructivist approach seeks to cultivate deeper insights into the experience of the individual who lives it and therefore gives richer meaning to data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Morse (1994) stated that the personal lived-experience has value because it is often invisible in research by default. Participants feel more comfortable to talk more honestly about experiences if familiar with the researcher (Asselin, 2003). It was identified that the research problem is best suited to qualitative study with the use of semi-structured interviews to facilitate deeper exploration of career experiences and perspectives of women working in construction (Murray, 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow formality yet enable flexibility to explore areas where useful data which might not otherwise be captured. It also encourages a comfortable free flow of dialogue and presents opportunities for additional discoveries (Schmidt, 2004). Interviews lasting approximately 35-45 minutes each were conducted in the workplace face-to face. The sample was purposefully selected (Guarte & Barrios, 2006) from an anonymous construction subsidiary public sector organisation. Figure I details how the organisation structures itself in terms of role hierarchy. The sample was selected to represent women across the career journey from support manager to senior management. Second-generation gender bias could still impact women's progression early in their career journeys potentially affecting leadership.

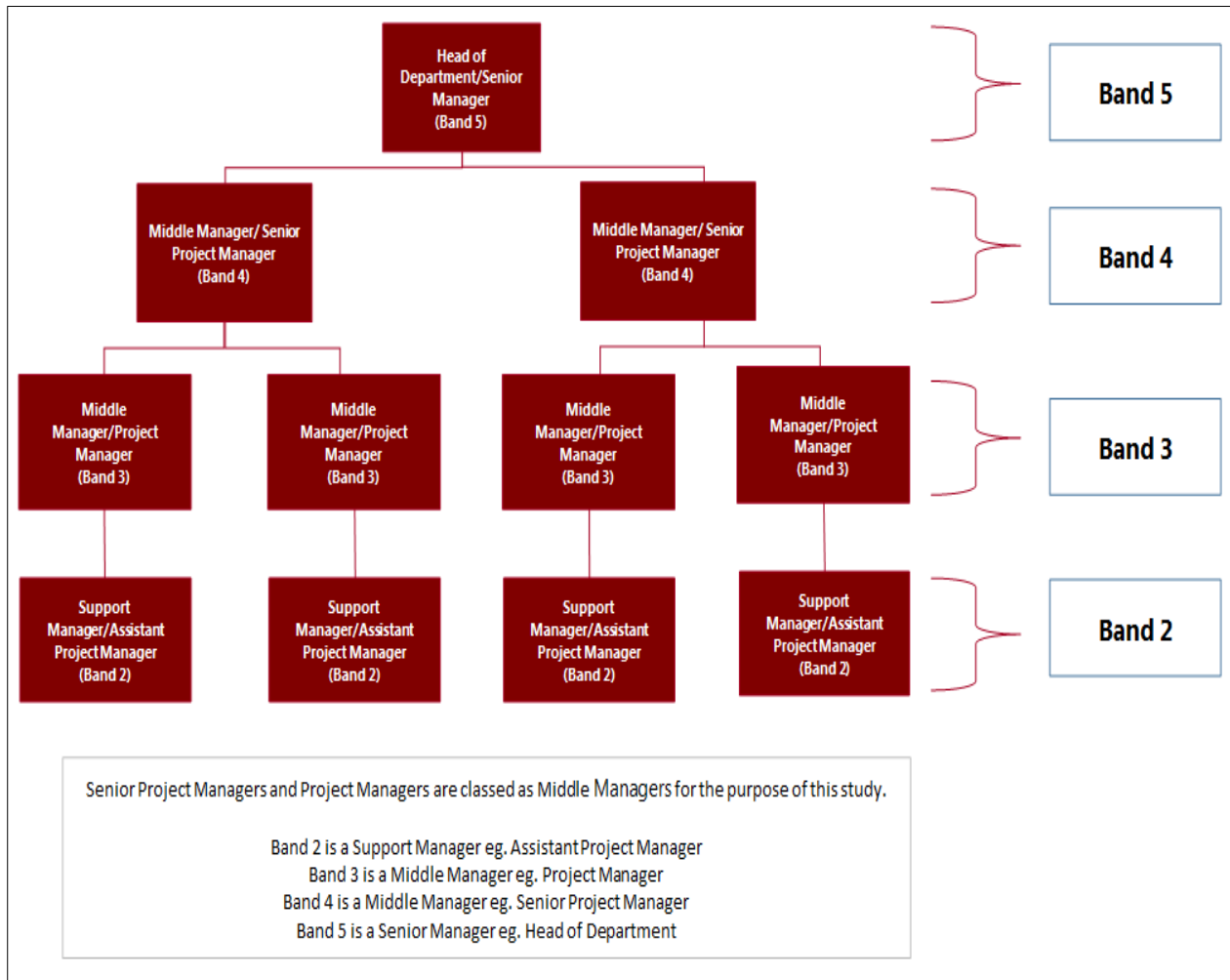


Figure I: Hierarchy of Research organization

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Excluding the pilot study involving 3 participants, interviews were conducted with 12 full-time employees. The sample size of 12 was chosen because Morse (1994) recommends at least six participants can be involved in a qualitative study whilst Guest *et al* (2006) stated that 12

participants are sufficient in qualitative study as saturation is reached beyond this point. A profile of participants interviewed for the study is shown in Table II.

Participant	Position	Age bracket	Length of time in the industry
P1	Band 2 - Support Manager	30s	5-10 years
P2	Band 5+ - Senior Manager	50s	Over 20 years
P3	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	40s	15-20 years
P4	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	40s	15-20 years
P5	Band 5+ - Senior Manager	40s	Over 20 years
P6	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	30s	5-10 years
P7	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	30s	10-15 years
P8	Band 5+ - Senior Manager	50s	Over 20 years
P9	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	50s	Over 20 years
P10	Band 2 - Support Manager	30s	5-10 years
P11	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	40s	10-15 years
P12	Band3/4 - Middle Manager	40s	15-20 years

Table II: Profile of interview participants

Consistent with the definition of senior manager, in this research, Band 3/4 employees are categorised as middle managers, e.g. Project Manager and Senior Project Managers, and Band 5 and above employees will be categorised as Senior Managers, e.g. Head of Department or Programme delivery manager reporting to a Director. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns that suggest commonality in experiences of second-generation gender bias and its impact on career progression, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method as shown in Table III. Identifying themes in qualitative data analysis further assists understanding of phenomena, as main characteristics are drawn out (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Interviews were then recorded and transcribed manually to improve the ability of the researcher to identify themes for coding.

Theme	Themes	Descriptions
Structure Dimensions	<i>Performance Evaluation</i>	<i>The evaluation of women's performance in comparison to men</i>
	<i>Access to Informal Networks</i>	<i>Women's access and use of informal networks, sponsors and mentors for progression</i>
	<i>Working Hours/flexible working</i>	<i>Length and or suitability of working hours and flexible working hours arrangements</i>
Culture Dimensions	<i>Masculine culture</i>	<i>Organisational Culture</i>
	<i>Homophily</i>	<i>People tend to form relationships with people like them</i>
	<i>Gender stereotyping</i>	<i>Simplistic generalizations about gender qualities/difference/roles. Stereotypes can be positive or negative, but not necessarily accurate</i>
	<i>Double-bind</i>	<i>If individuals exhibit behaviours that are inconsistent with their gender stereotype, they are perceived negatively.</i>
Action Dimensions	<i>Tokenism</i>	<i>Perception that women are employed as symbolic effort of inclusivity, to give the appearance of gender equality.</i>
	<i>Paucity of role models</i>	<i>Lack of female role models and how it affects choices</i>
	<i>Leadership identity</i>	<i>Creation and belief that one can or can't be an effective leader/senior manager in a male-dominated environment</i>
	<i>Coping strategies</i>	<i>How women deal with dimensions affecting career paths – Adapt/Ignore/challenge</i>
	<i>Awareness</i>	<i>Awareness of concept and experience of second-generation gender bias</i>

Table III: Main Research Themes

Structure Dimension - Findings convey that structural practices have significant implications for women wishing to progress into senior management.

Performance Evaluation - Many participants felt that formal evaluation processes were disparate. They perceived that women were challenged to prove their credibility more than their male counterparts. Three quarters of the participants indicated that women's performance is evaluated unfairly in comparison to their male equivalents in construction. Interviewee P12 and

P9 remarked that they lack constructive feedback when assessed and were not perceived as positively as their male counterparts with respect to performance evaluation. For example P9 noted that; *“I surpassed all of my agreed objectives on my P&D, yet I was told I was still performing at average whilst my male equivalent who just about met his objectives was recommended for promotion.”*

Interviewee P9’s response echoes Nadler and Stockdale (2012), in alluding to the notion of women needing to repeatedly *prove* credibility when being assessed. It supports Lindgren and Packendorff’s (2006) assertions that men are promoted on potential as opposed to performance. Interviewee P12 however commented that; *“I’ve rarely received constructive feedback on my performance; it’s quite vague and negative. I’m still told I can do better but not how.”*

Without constructive feedback it can be difficult to progress and some women may remain stagnant, this could unconsciously contribute to horizontal segregation and inadequate representative in leadership. Stanford University’s Clayman Institute for Gender Research study shows that women received double the amount of negative feedback men did with regard to their personalities as opposed to technical ability (Silverman, 2015). Interviewee P12’s experiences hint at cultural influences, in terms of the cultural inference that women are more negatively appraised in performance feedback due to socio-cultural stereotypes. This is again illustrative of how structure is influenced by culture. The culture dimensions inform the structure dimensions, of which is maintained by the organisational culture.

Access to Informal Networks - In correlation with the literature, all participants note the significant power and influence of having unreserved access to informal networks and sponsors.

The majority reference the 'old boys' network. Interviewee P1 argued that; *“In construction the men definitely help each other out, they have their networks that they use for information and to surpass formal procedures for job opportunities. It can be hard to get in with them.”*

Interviewee P4 added that, *“Men lead the band 5 and above roles. They have the 'old boys' network mentality, they have most of the power and influence and they look after their own friend, leaving us women on the outside looking in.”*

However, interviewee P2 commented that, *“The organisation is a big 'old boys' network. The only way to get into senior management is to be part of it and if you're a woman, that's very unlikely. It's a shame that HR allows such archaic types of recruitment to continue. People should be promoted on merit.”*

Most of the participants cited exclusion from such networks and illustrate the impact of the exclusion through their narrative. P4, P1, P2 note that this network is responsible for enhanced promotion prospects and many use the network to progress into senior management positions, thus limiting opportunities for women, regardless of merit. Interviewee P6 implied such in performance evaluation by saying:

“I am experienced and qualified, in fact I had the highest level of qualification in my old team of men, yet each time senior position came up I was told I was not successful due to lack of qualification”.

Although it is not intended, some women appear to be excluded from such networks within this construction organisation, indirectly giving men an unfair advantage. Furthermore if Human Resources (HR) allow recruitment through such informal processes, HR is unwittingly

contributing to unintentional bias towards women. Experiences of exclusion can make it challenging for women to obtain necessary support and mentorship to excel in their roles. As a by-product, they could be deprived of pivotal development opportunities that are afforded to men to help them succeed. Nevertheless, it must be noted that some of the findings challenged the dominant perspective in literature with regard to the power and influence of women's networks. For example interviewee P8 commented that:

“I was mentored by a female senior manager, which I met whilst smoking outside the office building. I no longer smoke so it couldn't happen today. I was lucky, she got me my promotion, I had been trying for a while before I met her.”

Some researchers insinuated that women have weaker networks with limited power and influence, however, P8's experiences not only suggest that men and women are at liberty to exploit them, it also calls into question whether powerful women exclude men from their networks.

Working Hours/flexible working - Ten out of twelve participants cited long working hours in construction as a principal feature of the industry; however, not all perceived this to be a barrier. Interviewee P5 perceived the flexible working arrangement to be very accommodating of men and women's life situations. P5 expressed that both men and women utilise the arrangement without reprisal in her team and argued that; *“We have good working locations with adequate transport links and facilities. Sometimes long hours but with built in flexibility to make space for work/life balance. It's very accommodating for my personal situation and it's the same for men, plenty in my team use flexitime – men and women.”*(Interviewee P5).

Interviewee P10 expressed that although hours were long, the working hours suited her own and many women's life-circumstances, due to flexible working arrangements. All participants remarked on the benefits of flexible working arrangements in principle. However, some did express concerns as to the impact of using such arrangements. For example interviewee P3 stated that:

"I don't believe the organisation genuinely provides the right support or flexibility needed for women to have senior management roles on construction. They constantly say they do in literature and that seems to be the public message but they need to brief this down to managers so they can understand this."

Others supported this view in alluding to repercussions when implemented. Interviewee P11 reported that: *"We have great working hours. They are flexible around my childcare, but, have come across resistance when I have applied for promotion. Non flexible working was cited as a core reason."*

This reinforces Glass's (2004) statement that career penalties may be imposed on those that make use of flexible working arrangements. Several participants noted that it was dependent on the manager as to whether these arrangements could be in place; therefore if the manager was not comfortable with such arrangements it was not a viable option if they wanted to remain in favour. Most of the participants reported that male managers preferred them to be in the office than work flexible hours. It appears that senior managers still hold 'presenteeism' as a measurement of performance (Gurjao, 2006), which has negative implications for primary care-givers. This infers that although policies to assist women are in place, their career development can be hindered due to the perceived performance criteria suited to the men in a male-dominated environment. It is evident that the pre-existing culture of the organisation significantly influences practiced working structures and performance evaluation. A third of the interview participants also noted being

overlooked for career development opportunities due to an assumed work-family balance. Interviewee P1 for example noted that: *“I do remember volunteering myself for a project I thought would be really good to work on, but I was told later that it didn’t get assigned to me because it involved a lot of night-time working and travel to various locations. Thinking on it, it seems to be men in charge of all the high-profile projects.”*

This suggests that some women are potentially being denied structural development opportunities to progress due to gender stereotypes that they may be less committed. Due to likelihood of lesser external constraints, Azhar & Griffin (2014) argued that men are perceived to be more autonomous by business leaders and preferential for senior management positions. Such practices can fuel gendered career-paths and vertical segregation. The perceived findings support the views in the literature, that there are implicit structural constraints negatively influencing women’s career progression.

Culture Dimensions

Masculine Culture and Gender Stereotyping - All interview participants agreed that the construction industry was a male-dominated environment that exhibited and protected ‘masculine’ cultures. The result is reflective of the literature (Dainty *et al.*, 2000; Tharapayan *et al.*, 2014) in stating that women were significantly underrepresented. According to interviewee P3, *“Women are significantly underrepresented; there are a lot more men than women in construction than in other industries. This affects the culture, its male dominated and male led. Masculine culture is what rules here with a few token concessions for women.”*

However some participants expressed feelings of intimidation and isolation due to being underrepresented. Ely et al (2011) suggests that this could obstruct the creation of leadership identity in women. However, one participant did not attribute masculine culture to preservation of male dominance, but instead due to societal changes and time. This was supported by interviewee P5 adding; *“Yes there is a masculine culture but I think it’s just because women entered the workforce later, few will have the experience needed to progress so it’ll take time to catch up, I think it can also depend on the team/area/project you’re in.”*

Interviewee P5 emphasized the uniqueness of individual experiences, what one might experience in one team might not be in another. Some participants inferred that masculine culture meant the production of stereotypes. The experiences of some participants provide evidence of Eagly and Karu’s role incongruity theory (2002). In particular interviewee P7 pointed out that; *“Yes my management style does differ; my male equivalents are more firm/blunt and they are perceived to be assertive. My management style is centred on trying to befriend and or convince my wider team of my point of view. When trying to be more assertive I’m viewed as being over sensitive and or aggressive.”*

Moreover, interviewee P1 noted that; *“Most of the male managers in our department are [assertive]. I get a mixed reception. By some I feel they respect how direct I am and others not so much. When I’m assertive it’s been called catty or aggressive, but when men do it, it’s not questioned.”*

Most interview participants reported experience of double-bind scenarios. For the women in construction, it appears very difficult because the majority of participants report that an assertive

leadership style is favoured. The double-bind bias inhibits women from progressing due to traditional gender role stereotypes. Ginige *et al* (2007) maintains that due to intransigent occupation stereotypes in the construction industry, regardless of competence or experience, women are likely to be evaluated unfairly compared to 'masculine ideals' in recruitment. Consequently, they experience more difficulty in achieving and maintaining senior management positions when competing with their male counterparts in construction.

Homophily - In supporting the theory of homophily, many participants indicated that they believed that masculine culture was reproduced due to homophily. Interviewee P10 for example noted that; *"People seem to gravitate to people like them. You can see it with the senior managers and their mentees, the people they seem to promote. I think it's reflective in the organisation. The senior managers are recruiting men who seem like them so it's not really surprising that every time we get a senior manager he's an older white-male, similar to the last"*

Such factors can produce very complex difficulties, it's difficult to recognise when initiating the homophilous relationship (Linehan, 2001). Ellison (2001) argues that surreptitious barriers like homophily will be difficult to combat as the majority of people will most likely reinforce it without realising. The perceived reproductive culture is likely to generate fewer role models. This study has also provided evidence that exploitation of homophilous relationships work both ways, with regard to informal networks.

Tokenism - Not all of the participants experienced tokenism, however, interviewee P7 said that; *"I've worked on some great high profile projects and I only ever managed smaller ones at the start of my career, but that's to be expected."*

On the other hand, interviewee P6 commented that; *“I don’t feel that the tasks I get differ to my male equivalents. It’s about the same, sometimes you get great projects, and sometimes you get complex ones. I’m currently managing quite a large one”*

It was noted that a large number of the interview participants shared instances whereby they perceived that either they personally experienced or they witnessed other women experiencing tokenism. According to interviewee P8, *“The males seem to get all the high profile projects. However, there are a few women in high profile project roles, none are ethnic minorities.”*

Action Dimensions

Paucity of Role Models - Arguably, the lack of role models is resultant from cultural dimensions, yet it may have action implications. Participants felt that the lack of role models made it difficult to view women as leaders. Interviewee P12 noted that, *“There are hardly any women in senior management; this makes it harder to find role models to identify with.”*

However some participants did not appear to be as affected; in particular interviewee P2 commented that; *“I tend to look up to mixture of male and female business leaders; I know there aren’t many female leaders but it doesn’t bother me. I know I’m good and I know I’ll get there.”*

Coping Strategies - All of the participants expressed strategies similar to findings from literature (Dainty *et al.*, 2000). These were one of the three strategies; challenge, adapt or ignore. Only one participant expressed that they challenge such behaviours. For example interviewee P6 argues

that; *“when I experience any type of stereotyping or conditions that I think are unfair because I have child care etc., I will always respectfully challenge it. How can anything change if you don’t?”*

The majority were perceived to have adapted and interviewee P12 mentioned they preferred to try and fit in. In doing so, they may be accommodating the existing power structure and inadvertently maintaining subtle bias. The findings show that some women appeared to be unwittingly complicit in creating conditions that theoretically suit men. This raises questions on the nature of implicit bias; is it inherent or is it a social construct and can it be overcome if it’s at the unconscious level?

Awareness - The study findings also illustrated a lack of awareness of the definitive concept of second-generation gender bias. Only one interviewee P8 was vaguely aware of the concept of second-generation gender bias and commented that; *“Not too sure on the details but I understand second-generation gender bias to be backdoor discrimination possibly affecting promotion? Anyway, if I’m right then I definitely have experienced it quite regularly throughout my career!”*

This supports the argument that many women are unaware of its existence and therefore may be unaware of its impact on their career progression. Nevertheless, it is clear from the study that the women in the construction organisation are aware that the work culture and structural conditions they experience are not entirely unbiased. There is indication that women are aware that their attempts to progress are being subverted, however it’s not an explicit awareness and is was not conveyed by any of the participants as a major concern that affects them.

Leadership Identity - Some participants were resolute in the fact that the aforementioned cultural and structural practices would not obstruct their desire to progress into senior management. This is aligned with the results of the CGO study (Trefalt *et al.*, 2011) in which most women said that it did not dissuade them from pursuing leadership opportunities. Interviewee P5 mentioned that; *“I don’t feel that anything has hindered or impact my desire to become a senior manager. I’ve found the company accommodating. I’ve been treated like males in my profession, if anything I stand out more.*

The experience of some research participants support Ibarra et al (2013) and Ely et al (2011) in their summations that second-generation gender bias hinders the creation of leadership identity or limits the desire of women to become leaders. On the basis of identifying that most participants have experienced manifestations of second-generation gender bias; one third referenced a desire to no longer want to progress to senior management due to persistent and systemic second-generation gender bias. These participants have been in the industry for at least 15 years. For example interviewee P2 said that; *“It has a wider impact on confidence and questioning my abilities and how I come across to the business and my peers, I do often doubt how and if they would take me seriously.*

Interviewee P8 added that; *“I have resigned myself to my current role without the thought of promotion. I’m staying in this role until retirement now. I no longer think that it’s viable to try and progress my career.”*

According to Ely et al (2011) there are less role models to reinforce cultural beliefs for men and women that women are not meant to be in leadership positions. To employees within the research organisation, the norm reflects men in senior management positions. Although it may not be all

women, the findings imply that second-generation gender bias can have a significant impact on women's career progression, as not only does it present structural and cultural obstacles to overcome but in time it may reduce their ability or desire to be in senior management.

DISCUSSIONS

The impact of the manifestations of second-generation gender bias on women's career advancement is apparent, as implicit bias accumulates to damage women's careers, stifling further advancement. The study findings appeared to resonate with much of the literature in detailing women's perceived experience of their organisation's masculine-feminine dichotomies, generated by the perceived 'masculine' culture in construction. According to the definition of second-generation gender bias outlined in this paper; the findings of the study have been consistent in indicating that women perceive that they experience manifestations of second-generation gender bias in their construction organisation, through normative practices that tend to be tacitly accepted by men and women in the organisation. The implicit bias is in the form of treatment and decisions of women resulting from imposed gender stereotypes, disparate performance evaluation, exclusion from influential informal networks and incompatible working arrangements and expectations. The findings of the study suggest that second-generation gender bias pervasively affects development opportunities, recruitment and promotion decisions, also possibly affecting women's inadequate representation in senior management.

In general, the study shows that women are disadvantaged in their career journeys as 'masculine' cultures and patriarchal structures that present a non-sexist fallacy prevail and perpetuate inequitable conditions for men and women, to compete for senior management positions. On this

basis it appears that women, who are affected by second-generation gender bias in the construction industry are unintentionally limited in influence, power and opportunity to progress. However, an important conclusion of the study revealed that not all women perceive experiences to be the same, and not all experiences have the same impact on the individual. There was varied response to perceived experience, indicating that it does not necessarily contribute to the detriment of leadership identity for all women, it may act as a motivator or de-motivator dependent on the individual. Perceptions also may have differed with age and race, as indicated by participants. There was an implication that younger entrants may have differing experiences or challenges due to changes in societal thinking and attitudes. There was also a suggestion that ethnic minorities may experience a difference degree of implicit bias layered with other complex challenges. The study provides an improved understanding of the significance of the phenomenon of second-generation gender bias and how it interacts with the underrepresentation of women in business leadership, using context-specific analysis as a vehicle. The research also highlights how the cultural and structural dimensions of an organisation affect women's career journeys and hopes findings from this study could contribute to identifying more effective ways of closing the gender leadership gap in organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

There is ample empirical data demonstrating that companies perform better with diverse leadership, yet continued under-representation of women in upper management roles persist. The study demonstrated that cultural patterns of behaviour and structural practices are closely interlinked in the way that they influence one another and then inform the action choice of the individual. Although it cannot be determined that second-generation gender bias unequivocally

contributes to the gender leadership gap, the study findings infer that it presents subtle barriers that undermine women's pursuit of leadership positions, possibly stifling the progression of many. The research has provided key insights into how cultural and structural dimensions of an organisation affect women. The practical implications of these findings can be utilised to inspire recommendations for practice in business, more so, within construction organisations. It may inspire alternative thinking in the way businesses can support their ascension of their female talent through changes to culture and structure. By placing the issue in the context-specific frame, issues are magnified and constructive, pragmatic solutions can be employed to diminish the gender business leadership gap in construction organisations. More information assists in developing effective and sustainable gender policies to facilitate the optimum co-existence of working of men and women. This would not only assist in the betterment of working conditions for women and increase the equality and diversity of the UK workforce, but also offer a credible solution to the alleviation of the shortage of UK construction industry skills. Unlike first-generation bias, tools such as legislation cannot be used to overcome second-generation gender bias and it is evident that policy implementation only spurs marginal improvement. Although structural reforms are positive; they will have limited effect in addressing the other dimensions of culture and action. The study revealed that men and women inadvertently reinforce the cultures and structures that perpetuate theoretical implicit bias. In order to reduce the negative impact of second-generation gender bias, organisations can attempt to initially reduce the occurrences. Business leaders and employees should increase their awareness to understand and confront second-generation gender bias.

Research Limitations

Due to the research approaches adopted for the study it is not intended that the research findings are used to conjecture inappropriate generalisations, nor should it be presumed that the subject-area has received exhaustive analysis since the researcher drew sample from just one organisation. Although implications can still be drawn; it may not be applicable industry-wide or to other sectors. The relatively small sample size used for the study in relation to its large size may mean that experiences are only representative of a small cohort within the organisation. Also the nature of qualitative research recognises subjectivity. Again one of the researchers is a woman working within the studied organisation employing a broad feminist interpretive lens; therefore, there is the potential for unconscious bias. However, every effort was made to follow all ethical procedures to ensure the researcher remains neutral in asking questions so as not to impose the lens or views of the researcher. The researcher sought to ask questions and engage with participants in a way that did not guide responses (Watts, 2009).

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