



Theses and Dissertations

2019-11-16

Bridging the Gender Gap: A Journey of Women and Men in Communications Leadership

Steven Bruce Pelham
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Pelham, Steven Bruce, "Bridging the Gender Gap: A Journey of Women and Men in Communications Leadership" (2019). *Theses and Dissertations*. 9114.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/9114>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Bridging the Gender Gap: A Journey of Women and Men
in Communications Leadership

Steven Bruce Pelham

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Pamela Jo Brubaker, Chair
Mark Alden Callister
Christopher E. Wilson

School of Communications

Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2019 Steven Bruce Pelham

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Bridging the Gender Gap: A Journey of Women and Men in Communications Leadership

Steven Bruce Pelham
School of Communications, BYU
Master of Arts

“Throughout history, there have been various gaps: racial, gender, income, education, skills gaps...society today is not any different” (Andrews, 2017). Despite advances to close these gaps, a large gap still remains in communications leadership: the gender gap. Approximately 75 percent of practitioners are female and female practitioners only make up 20 percent of senior-level positions (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). Existing research suggests there are several reasons why a gap exists: an unconscious bias that favors male leaders (Devillard, Hunt, & Yee, 2018), only 60 percent of women have the confidence they can advance into leadership positions (KPMG, 2018), lack of mentorship (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018), lack of exposure to female leaders (Arvate, Galilea, & Todescat, In Press), and the balance of personal and work responsibilities (Krivkovich, et al., 2017).

This study employed 32 qualitative in-depth interviews with senior level communications leaders to understand the journey that women and men go through to become communications leaders, perceptions of communications leaders, factors contributing to the gender gap, and ultimately what can be done to close the gender gap. Participants of this study are among some of today’s most senior-level communications leaders, with the average participant having 29 years of work experience in the field of communications.

Multiple themes were identified for when and why individuals begin aspiring for communications leadership but it usually begins sometime during high school, college, or in the first few jobs after college once they have be experienced some form of leadership for the first time. There are certain factors such as unequal expectations for women and men and organization culture that can make a woman’s path more difficult than a man’s path. The majority of participants agreed that women and men are viewed differently in the workplace and that there are key differences such as sensitivity to and involvement of others that differentiate women from a men. There were seven primary themes identified as factors that contributing to the gender gap: relationships, unique challenges to women, issues in the communications field, a long history of male dominance, the pay gap is fueling the gender gap, lack of awareness of the gender gap, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Additionally, this study introduces multiple ways to help mitigate factors that are contributing to the gender gap. There were three primary thematic areas identified on ways to mitigate the gender gap: organizational mitigating factors, cultural mitigating factors, and personal mitigating factors. In summary, there are a number of reasons why a woman’s journey into communications leadership is more difficult than a man’s journey; however, there are many actionable things that communications leaders believe can be done to make it easier for future leaders.

Keywords: gender gap, communications, leadership, career path, qualitative interviews, biases

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express appreciation to several women whose help was invaluable to this study. First, Pamela Brubaker, Ph.D., and Tina McCorkindale, Ph.D., APR, for their mentoring and guidance throughout this entire study; second, Marlene Pelham, for demonstrating how to be an amazing mother while also being a leader in her career, and finally Whitney Pelham, for her never-ending support and love. The author would also like to express appreciation to the Institute for Public Relations for assisting with and funding this study.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| TITLE PAGE | i |
| ABSTRACT | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| List of Tables | ix |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Literature Review..... | 3 |
| Leadership and Communications | 3 |
| Women and men in communications leadership..... | 3 |
| Benefits of mixed-gender leadership..... | 6 |
| Leading to Communications Leadership..... | 7 |
| Developing leadership | 7 |
| Advancing through leadership..... | 9 |
| The Leadership Gender Gap in Communications..... | 10 |
| Communications: A feminized field..... | 12 |
| Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap | 13 |
| Mentorship..... | 13 |
| Work-life fit..... | 14 |
| Confidence..... | 15 |
| Unconscious biases..... | 16 |
| Exposure to female leaders..... | 17 |
| Leadership styles and preferences | 17 |
| Females don't perceive themselves as leaders | 17 |
| Male reaction tendencies | 18 |
| Closing the Gender Gap | 18 |
| Research on the Gender Gap in Communications | 19 |
| Methodology..... | 20 |
| Description of Research | 20 |
| Participants | 20 |
| Selection | 20 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Recruitment | 22 |
| Compensation | 23 |
| Data Collection..... | 23 |
| Data Analysis | 24 |
| Reflexivity..... | 26 |
| Timeline and Funding | 26 |
| Findings..... | 27 |
| RQ 1: Similarities and Differences in Career Path | 27 |
| When and why aspirations for leadership begin..... | 27 |
| When aspirations begin..... | 27 |
| Never remember aspiring for leadership..... | 28 |
| At a young age with encouragement | 28 |
| During high school or college | 28 |
| Within the first few years of their career..... | 29 |
| Why aspirations begin..... | 29 |
| To have more control of their career outcome | 29 |
| To be a better leader | 30 |
| To escape gender bias | 30 |
| The leader's career path..... | 31 |
| Historically a more difficult path for women | 31 |
| A mixed belief on the current path for women and men | 32 |
| Women simply encounter things that men do not | 32 |
| An organization's culture has a great impact on women and men..... | 34 |
| RQ2: Perceptions of Women and Men Communications Leaders | 35 |
| Women and men leaders viewed differently in the workplace | 36 |
| Felt there was no difference in how women and men are viewed..... | 36 |
| Felt there was a difference in how women and men are viewed | 37 |
| Viewed differently when being assertive..... | 37 |
| Childbearing..... | 38 |
| Socializing Complexities..... | 38 |
| Men are Naturally Perceived with More Credibility..... | 39 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Communications is a reflection of society | 39 |
| Differences between a woman and man leader | 40 |
| Felt there was no difference | 40 |
| Felt there was a difference | 41 |
| RQ3: Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap..... | 41 |
| Factors | 42 |
| Relationships..... | 42 |
| Building relationships with leaders and touting themselves | 42 |
| The CEO and the CCO relationship..... | 43 |
| Sources of influence and recruiting for leaders..... | 43 |
| People like people who are like them..... | 44 |
| The funding club | 45 |
| Unique challenges to women | 45 |
| Lack of assurance that it can be done..... | 46 |
| Lack of business acumen..... | 46 |
| Childbearing and rearing..... | 46 |
| Women are not as confident as men..... | 49 |
| Lack of quality examples and mentors..... | 51 |
| Issues in the communications field | 52 |
| Attrition of talented women from the field | 52 |
| Communications not viewed as strategic | 53 |
| Clients are part of the problem..... | 54 |
| Gender saturation in certain functions and industries | 56 |
| A long history of male dominance..... | 56 |
| The pay gap is fueling the gender gap | 58 |
| Lack of awareness of the gender gap..... | 59 |
| Sexual harassment and sexual assault..... | 60 |
| Biases..... | 60 |
| How to tell if something is biased..... | 60 |
| What contributes to bias in the workplace..... | 61 |
| People feeling there is a gender bias in their workplace..... | 61 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Biases in hiring | 61 |
| Biases in compensation..... | 62 |
| Biases in promotions..... | 62 |
| Biases in treatment..... | 62 |
| Biases in recognition..... | 63 |
| Biases against men..... | 63 |
| RQ4: Closing the Gender Gap | 64 |
| Mitigating factors that add to the gender gap..... | 64 |
| Organizational mitigating factors | 64 |
| Cultivating a flexible work environment | 65 |
| Making men part of the solution | 66 |
| Hiring and promoting women | 66 |
| Demand and negotiate for pay equality..... | 68 |
| Set goals and hold people accountable..... | 68 |
| Organizational policies..... | 68 |
| A pipeline thing that'll change with time..... | 70 |
| Cultural mitigating factors | 71 |
| Informal practices or cultural norms | 71 |
| Not just rewarding those who are the loudest | 72 |
| Strong examples of female leaders..... | 73 |
| A grassroots-effort change to drive leadership change | 73 |
| Parents, educators, and professional societies influencing the industry | 74 |
| Making communications a serious function..... | 75 |
| Personal mitigating factors | 76 |
| Identifying and eliminating personal biases..... | 76 |
| Women need to fill holes in their skillset..... | 77 |
| Spend time getting to know people | 78 |
| Just do not let it happen..... | 78 |
| Advice from communications leaders to women and men..... | 79 |
| Advice to women and men | 79 |
| Advice to women | 80 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Advice to men | 80 |
| Discussion | 80 |
| The Value of this Study in Gender Gap Research | 80 |
| Theoretical Implications..... | 81 |
| Practical Implications..... | 83 |
| The Gender Gap Conceptual Model..... | 84 |
| Similarities and difference in the career path | 84 |
| Perceptions of women and men communications leaders | 85 |
| Factors contributing to the gender gap | 85 |
| Closing the gender gap | 86 |
| Conclusion | 90 |
| Limitations & Additional Research..... | 92 |
| References..... | 94 |
| Appendix 1: Interview Guide..... | 104 |
| Appendix 2: Recruitment Emails..... | 108 |
| Appendix 3: Implied Consent Document | 111 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Table 1 | 22 |
| Table 2 | 86 |

Introduction

“Throughout history, there have been various gaps: racial, gender, income, education, skills gaps...society today is not any different” (Andrews, 2017, para. 1). Despite advances in recent years to close many of these gaps, a large gap still remains in leadership. The leadership gap spans all industries and is a gap that is at the forefront of many studies and discussions. This is particularly true in the field of public relations in which approximately 75 percent of practitioners are female; however, female practitioners only make up 20 percent of senior-level public relations positions (FitzPatrick, 2013; Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). This conundrum is the basis of this study and other scholarly work taking place in this area. This study is being conducted with the Institute for Public Relations, which will provide strategic direction, access to participants, and assistance in data transcription.

There are several reasons why it is important to study the gender gap. First, there are the moral implications of giving every human being, regardless of race, gender, or other classification, the opportunity to excel in a way of their choosing. In a field such as public relations, where the majority of the field is women, yet the majority of the leadership is male, it is clear that there is some force at work which is preventing every human the equal chance to excel. Secondly, this is an important topic to study because of the clear evidence of the benefits of mixed-gender leadership. Benefits of gender-diverse leadership include better financial returns, cultures, reputations, and higher job satisfaction levels (Berakova, 2017; Devillard, Hunt, & Yee, 2018; Morgan Stanley, 2017; Noland, Moran, & Kotschwar, 2016). Despite the benefits of gender-diverse leadership, the leadership gap remains wide.

Rigorous academic research is needed to better understand this gap and what can be done to mitigate it. Although there is sound academic scholarship that exists that can be connected to

this topic, additional scholarship is needed to explore this area and to shed light on causes and implications. Leading scholars in this area, Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) stated:

Scholarship addressing the causes of and the discursive, cultural, social, and structural forms of gender disparities must continue. Such continued inquiry is critical for the empowerment of emerging public relations professionals and for creating a more ethical, equal, and just profession for generations to come (p. 171).

In an effort to understand the leadership gap in communications leadership, this study seeks to understand the career process, including career advancement and development of both women and men in communications leadership roles. By understanding the pivotal moments in the careers of both women and men in communications leadership roles in an effort to understand why such a gender gap exists.

This study adds a unique value to the existing scholarship because it will study both women and men. Specifically, this study will seek to understand differences in the life and career pivotal moments of women and men to understand additional factors contributing to the gender gap and to gain insight into how to close the gender gap. Previous studies have focused on studying either women or men but few have studied both. By studying women and men in a comparative study, this study will show differences in pivotal moments that may be giving men an edge over women when it comes to being in a senior-level public relations position. In an analysis of existing literature on the gender gap in communications leadership, Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) suggested a roadmap for future research on the gender gap—“a wealth of additional factors should be researched to understand the interaction of gender, leadership, and public relations”(p. 170)—something that this study seeks to add to. In addition to providing a current look at this topic, this study will also provide insights that will inspire future research in

this area. Many things have happened since previous studies on this topic such as the Me Too Movement which could have impact on how women and men are viewed and interact in the workplace. Having this study is important now because gender equality is still a large issue and is often debated. This study also adds value is studying the highest level of communications leadership which provides a unique looks into those who have experienced multiple levels of leadership in the field of communications. Francis Ingham, chief executive of the International Communications Consultancy Organisation said:

It's imperative that we address the gender gap, so we can retain talented women in the public relations industry. A more balanced boardroom makes sound business sense. We need to work together to make this happen and to shape our industry for the future (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017, para. 13).

Literature Review

Leadership and Communications

Women and men in communications leadership. Leadership, defined as “a dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produce ethical and effective communication practice” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 143), has remained an important topic amongst academics and professionals alike and remains an intriguing topic to study. People are fascinated with studying leadership because it is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). Leaders are the ones that make decisions that impact the way things are at work, at home, and throughout life. Because of their influence, and the fact that many people aspire to be leaders, understanding the process that forms a leader has remained intriguing to many. Over 90 percent of CEOs recognize that leadership is “the single most

important human-capital issue that their organizations face” and they plan to increase their investment in developing leadership (Feser, Mayol, & Srinivasan, 2015, para. 1). Leading management consultancies such as McKinsey & Company have consistently reported that good leadership is critical to organizational health and, ultimately, financial returns (Feser, Mayol, & Srinivasan, 2015; De Smet, Schaninger, & Smith, 2014).

Although the study of leadership remains an important topic throughout many industries, components of leadership in public relations remain largely under-studied—especially regarding gender differences between women and men in public relations. Although some communications research has concluded that there are no significant differences between women and men in terms of their leadership qualities, leadership effectiveness, or leadership preferences (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Jin, 2010; Meng, Berger, Gower, & Heyman, 2012), there remains a massive gender gap in public relations leadership. Saying that the public relations industry is a gendered field creates power struggles, and, because of connections with transformational leadership and female traits, “women may be more suited to be public relations leaders” (Tsetsura, 2014; Aldoory & Toth, 2004, p. 179).

Berger and Reber (2006) reported that public relations is striving for levels of legitimacy across the world. Erzikova and Berger (2006) suggest the subordinate nature of the industry may exacerbate the position of women in public relations. They found that communications is still largely viewed as an insubordinate to marketing (Tsetsura, 2014, 2012, 2011, 2010).

Bowen (2009) found that both women and men believe that leadership is key to becoming part of the dominant coalition, the group of people with the most influence over the organization’s goals and strategies (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Through a series of in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners, Erzikova and Berger (2006) discovered that overall women believe that their weak desire to lead in the field is due to men's discriminatory behaviors and that men believe that having women in technical or subordinate roles is normal. They further explained that men's bias toward women is quite deliberate and not unintentional.

Gino, Wilmuth, and Brooks (2015) found that women generally have more life goals than men and that women believe they are significantly less than likely to achieve those goals in comparison to men. This study also found that women view high-level positions and promotions as less desirable than men and that they would be less likely to go after high-power positions, even if it requires no additional effort—this is due in part because women perceived more negative outcomes from being in a position like this due to conflict with other life goals (Gino, Wilmuth, & Brooks, 2015).

Berger (2012) found that although many women and men are after the same goal, they go through a different process to get there—women and men view leadership, including the process of becoming a leader, differently. Men perceive themselves as more likely to want to be a leader, more likely to become a leader, and more likely to be a stronger leader when compared to women. Women are more likely to address major issues in the public relations field, be more aligned to the seven dimensions of public relations leadership, and more likely to put a greater emphasis on developing future communications leaders when compared to men. In addition to having different processes for leading, Berger, Meng, and Heyman (2017) found that when compared to men, women are significantly less engaged and less satisfied with their jobs, less confident in their work culture, less trusting of their organization, and more critical of top leaders. Despite these perceptual differences, the study found that both women and men are

equally capable leaders. Berger (2012) suggests an in-depth qualitative analysis is needed to understand why such a perception difference exists. Therefore, this study seeks to add in-depth qualitative analysis to understand perceptual differences and the key moments that cause those perceptual differences.

Benefits of mixed-gender leadership. In an examination of the power of women on the market, Boston Consulting Group found that women control 73 percent of the dollar (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009), meaning that women are controlling financial decisions and are the people spending money. Seventy-seven percent of healthcare decisions, new car purchases, and consumer purchases are made by women, with 75 percent of women saying that they are the primary household shopper (Kransy, 2012).

With such a high percentage of women making major purchasing decisions, FitzPatrick (2013) noted that we simply cannot afford to keep women out of senior communications roles, not only because women control purchasing power, but because they generally offer a different perspective than men. A varying perspective is important because women's leadership styles tend to be more transformational while men's behaviors tend to be more transactional (Bass et al., 1996).

This diverse perspective leads to many benefits for organizations. It has been concluded that companies with gender-diverse boards and executive teams are likely to have a higher profitability and value creation (Devillard, Hunt, & Yee, 2018). Morgan Stanley (2017) created a gender-diversity framework and ranked over 1,600 stocks globally and determined that companies with greater gender diversity in top leadership have increased productivity, greater innovation, better decision-making, and higher employee retention and satisfaction. Through a survey of more than 22,000 public organizations, the Peterson Institute (2016) found a strong

correlation between the number of women on boards and an executive team and profit performance. Bereakova (2017) noted that a gender-diverse team improves the quality of group decision making and promotes productivity and innovation, which leads to a direct impact on products and services.

Leading to Communications Leadership

Developing leadership. In seeking to understand the leadership gender gap, it's important to understand the process that both women and men go through to develop leadership. Leadership is something that can be developed and learned (Resnick, 2003). The leadership development process can be understood by examining the behaviors and attributes of leaders (Northouse, 2013). When studying public relations leaders, Martinellia and Erzikova (2017) found leadership dimensions—self-dynamics, ethical orientation, team collaboration, and relationship-building—formed at a young age through family necessity, sports teams, or the classroom and that these skills are honed over time.

Leadership development is often classified in one of two ways: technical skills, which are teachable skills that are typically learned in a classroom, or soft skills, which are interpersonal skills that are often difficult to quantify (The Balance Careers, n.d). Strong technical skills are viewed as the main prerequisite to developing into a public relations leader and are often learned from a role model and/or mentor in the field (Berger & Meng, 2014; Martinellia & Erzikova, 2017). Both public relations students and leaders desire to develop their leadership through on-the-job experiences and individual initiatives (Meng, 2013). Public relations practitioners of varying ages and experiences understand the need for continuing to grow in public relations leadership and have a desire for doing so (Martinellia & Erzikova, 2017).

Although technical skills are viewed as the main prerequisite to becoming a public relations leader, soft skills should not be discounted. Berger (2012) said that soft skills—better listening, cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution capabilities, and change management skills—are essential to helping public relations leaders. Unlike some technical skills, soft skills can be more difficult to develop. Developing soft skills is something that takes active self-reflection and thinking about strengths and limitations in order to lead to greater self-awareness, something that will help to develop skills and to connect better with others (Berger, 2012).

Leadership development is not a passive practice and is something that is best learned through doing work (Day, 2000; Martinellia & Erzikova, 2017). Mentors play an invaluable role in helping practitioners to learn in work settings in order to advance in their careers. This is especially true of women who need support and mentorship from other successful women in order to be successful in developing their own leadership (Martinellia & Erzikova, 2017). Another possibility is that leadership can also be developed by vicariously observing other leaders (Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat, 2018).

The foundations of leadership are formed at a young age and are developed as people continue to grow. Although formal education and training are important and necessary, on-the-job training from a trusted mentor is necessary for career advancement.

In a study with public relations leaders, Meng (2013) found that the most desired leadership qualities for public relations leaders are strategic decision-making capabilities, the ability to solve problems and produce desired results, and communication knowledge and expertise. When examining communications-specific qualities, public relations leaders said that having a compelling vision of communication for the organization, possessing comprehensive

knowledge and skills about media and technology, are the most important qualities (Meng, 2013). Berger and Meng (2014) reported that strategic decision making is the “the most significant leadership condition in various situations and geographic locations” (Berger & Meng, p. 108, as quoted by Martinellia & Erzikova, 2017).

Advancing through leadership. In addition to understanding how leadership is developed, it’s important to understand the process that women and men must go through to advance in leadership and in their careers. Having a mentor in the workplace to help learn technical skills and to navigate the organizational complexities is key, and there are several other factors that are important in learning to advance through leadership. The workforce is shifting, with digital natives quickly becoming the majority of the workforce. Shifts in the workforce mean that, for many people, starting at the bottom of an organization and climbing to the top isn’t the norm anymore. Millennials, for example, are estimated to change their jobs between 8–12 times and will go through multiple complete career changes—meaning for leadership advancement a focus has been placed on transferable leadership skills and continuous leadership development (Khare, 2007; Burns, 2002). Personal attributes, social skills, the ability to listen, and being able to be a team player are leadership skills that are important to public relations and advancing in public relations leadership (Keaveney, 2004; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006; James, 2006). Additionally, work experience is no longer something that is measured in time, rather it is measured by performance (Wolf, 2010; Ishida et al., 2002; Morgan, 2002).

Wolf (2010) evaluated the perceived factors that are most important to public relations career advancement and found that strong personality and enthusiasm, relationship with top management, and networking are the most important factors, while involvement in industry events, changing companies frequently, and gender were found to be the least important factors.

Rather than just hard work, career advancement in public relations is most often achieved when an individual shows enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and the desire to get results (Wolf, 2010).

Six out of 10 working women aspire to become a senior leader at their organization; however, 6 out of 10 women don't see themselves becoming a leader—this disconnect, of women wanting to lead but not having the confidence, results from not having opportunities to build confidence in the woman's personal or professional life (KPMG Women's Leadership Study). During the 2018 KPMG Women's Leadership Study, over 3,000 female professionals and college students were surveyed about what could help more women to advance through their career; results showed that leadership training, confidence building, decision-making, networking, and critical thinking were reported as the most important training and development skills. However, women can be prevented from advancing in their career because senior-level positions often require emotional toughness, assertiveness, competitiveness, and risk-taking—attributes that are not generally associated with females (Hoyt, 2005; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007; Ellemers, Heuvel, Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004). Generally, women are expected to be more understanding, nurturing, and forgiving; however, these attributes can prevent them from advancing in their career because these are not the perceived attributes of a manager (O'Leary & Ryan, 1994; Mavin, 2006; Bradley et al., 2018). This leads to this first research question of:

RQ1: For male and female communication leaders, how similar or different are their experiences of becoming a communication leader?

The Leadership Gender Gap in Communications

Approximately 75 percent of the jobs in the communications industry are occupied by women (FitzPatrick, 2013; Shah, 2015); however, women only occupy 20 percent of senior-level positions (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). The Holmes Report (2017) found that men occupy 22 of

the 30 CEO spots at the top 30 communications agencies worldwide. Additionally, women comprise less than half of the executive committee positions in large communications firms, and only four women lead communications agencies with global revenue of more than \$100 million (Lee, 2011).

The number of female senior-level positions is not the only place where the gender gap is prevalent. The average communications salary for men is \$61,284 while the average salary for women is \$55,212—a staggering gender pay gap of \$6,072 (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). This compensation trend stretches from entry-level positions to the highest paying communications jobs. Men occupy 62 percent of communications boardroom seats in which 28 percent of men make more than \$150,000 annually while there is only 12 percent of women that have the same compensation (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). In the United States, 70 percent of women work below the glass ceiling (PRSA/IABC Salary Survey, 2000). Additionally, the gender gap in leadership appears to be exacerbated by age. Oakes & Hardwick found that 36 percent of women and 25 percent of men believe that the public relations industry is ageist.

This gender gap extends far beyond the communications field. Krivkovich, Robinson, Starikova, Valentino, and Yee (2017) conducted a survey with 222 organizations across the United States and found that on average only 22 percent of senior vice president roles were held by women. In this same study, it was discovered that white women only have an 18 percent chance of reaching the executive team, while women of color have only a meager 3 percent chance. Devillard, Hunt, & Yee (2018) reported that 79 percent of women in a mid- or senior-level position have an interest in reaching the executive level—a similar proportion to men; however, women are substantially less likely to receive a promotion than their male

counterparts—even if they ask for one. FitzPatrick (2013) best summarized this problem when she said:

While women hold roughly three in every four public relations jobs, men control 80 percent of the senior leadership positions. That's not just a glass ceiling: that's a thick-cut, double-reinforced, opaque glass barricade. And it's coming at a cost, not only to our industry but also to the organizations we represent (para. 4).

In their survey of U.S. public relations leaders and practitioners, Berger, Meng, and Heyman (2017) found that the gender gap has deepened, and the women said they want more involvement in strategic decision making, their opinions to count for more, and they want a communication system that places greater emphasis on two-way communication. Because the gap remains wide, women's opinions of organization trust and engagement are low.

Progress in diversity in many senses in public relations remains painfully slow. For women in the survey, it appears that being successful in the field is still challenging; the pay gap is real; the opportunity gap is real; and the being-heard-and-respected-gap is real. These gaps won't magically disappear. They require action, and the power to act resides in the minds, hearts, and hands of current leaders at all levels in organizations (Berger, Meng & Heyman, 2017).

Women have historically been unwelcome in male-dominated groups; however, when women become leaders, they show that they are capable of matching and even outperforming men (Hoyt, 2005; Hoyt, Blascovich, 2007). This leads to the second research question:

RQ2: How are women and men communications leaders perceived?

Communications: A feminized field. Pompper and Jung (2013) found that the majority (65.1%) of men working in public relations believe that the public relations industry is feminized, confirming the Public Relations Society of America's assessment that approximately

70 percent of practitioners are female. Interestingly, only about half (52.1%) of male practitioners believe that men hold the highest senior-level positions in the industry (Pompper & Jung, 2013). Pompper and Jung (2013) also concluded that some male practitioners felt there were negative effects of being in a feminized field, including the belief that public relations is “an old girls club,” that men often have to think of topics that would interest females during small talk, and that men have to soften their language tone and criticism in order to not hurt the females’ feelings (p. 502).

Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap

There are many factors that contribute to the leadership gender gap in the communications industry. Although research in this area is limited, both academics and professionals are beginning to add research to the knowledge base in this area—this study hopes to contribute to that body. Existing research has concluded that both women (Jin, 2010) and men (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009) associate themselves as being a transformative leader, a leader who helps themselves and others to rise to a higher level of morale and motivation (Burns, 1978)—an attribute often associated with the best leaders. Wu (2006) studied themes that define leadership such as style, competency, and workability and concluded that both women and men could be successful in leadership roles. These researchers, along with Meng et al. (2012) and Waters (2013), have concluded that there is little difference between women's and men's leadership styles. Yet, Algren and Eichorn (2007) found that gender differences still prevent women from progressing in public relations careers. Previous literature suggests that there are several factors that hold the leadership gap open.

Mentorship. One factor that prevents women's growth within an organization is mentoring which stems from “structural, political, and familial relationships that may hinder (or

enable) their success” (Place & Vardeman-Winter 2018, p. 167). Berger & Heyman (2005) suggested that interpersonal relationships, such as those within the organization and with subordinates, were key to succeeding in the business. Devillard, Hunt, and Yee (2018) found that these factors are not only a problem at the top of an organization but at all levels throughout the organization. Organizational structures and practices can hinder mentoring opportunities for women (Everbach, 2014; Janus, 2008; as presented by Place & Vardeman-Winter 2018). Oftentimes women are not able to have access to individuals in power (Berger & Heyman, 2005; Place & Vardeman-Winter 2018).

Work-life fit. Krivkovich et. al, (2017) found that women face a double burden in that women primarily lead out on and execute on the majority household responsibilities in addition to carrying out a full-time job. There is a long-term precedent for women leading out in household responsibilities that has yet to be broken. Women with a partner and children are 5.5 times more likely to lead out on the housework in comparison to men in their same position (Krivkovich et. al, 2017).

Oakes and Hardwick (2017) found that 83 percent of survey respondents, of the annual GWPR (Global Women in PR) survey of over 700 practitioners in 19 countries, reported that they were parents, and all found reported facing challenges balancing parenting and work responsibilities. Of those women that reported being parents, two-thirds of women reported that they took on the main responsibility for organizing childcare (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017).

Approximately 56 percent of practitioners wished for a more flexible work schedule. Angela Oakes noted that having a more flexible work schedule will “help women better manage the demands of work and family commitments so they are given the chance to reach the top of the career ladder” (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017, para. 11). With many women leading out in family

responsibilities, it can become particularly challenging to balance multiple responsibilities. It appears that managing multiple identities remains the biggest challenge for women-leaders (Chirikova, 2003), including those employed in communications. Daymon and Surma (2012) said, “All women working in public relations face the challenge of juggling roles as worker, mother, partner, parent or grandparent” (p. 191). In a survey of male practitioners, Pompper and Jung (2013) found that there was a higher than average belief that men hold the majority of leadership positions because “females take off time for parental responsibilities (e.g., birth, sick, child) and this puts them behind on the management track” (p. 503).

Confidence. Another factor that prevents women from advancing in their communications career is confidence. Sixty-seven percent of women report that they need more support building confidence to be leaders (KPMG Women’s Leadership Study). The lack of confidence impacts other factors that ultimately help to become a leader. Women struggle with confidence in many aspects of their job: 92 percent of women struggle to ask for a mentor, 76 percent of women struggle for access to senior leadership, 73 percent of women struggle to pursue an an opportunity beyond their experience, 69 percent of women struggle to ask for help developing a career path plan, 65 percent of women struggle to requesting a promotion, 61 percent of women struggle to ask for a raise and 56 percent of women struggle requesting a new role or position (KPMG Women’s Leadership Study).

About 26 percent of women were uncomfortable asking for a pay increase or promotion in comparison to the 13 percent of men (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). This finding also bears true when practitioners were asked if they believed they would reach the top of the career ladder—28 percent of men strongly believed they would reach the top, while only 18 percent of women believe they would (Oakes & Hardwick, 2017).

The importance of confidence and connections is evident throughout the study, highlighting key opportunities to influence a woman's perceptions of leadership (KPMG Women's Leadership Study). Confidence, the encouragement of positive role models, and the presence of a strong professional network shape a woman's view of leadership in the workplace (KPMG Women's Leadership Study). Extending the leadership training and positive messaging some received beginning in childhood throughout a woman's career could help continue the self-perception of one's ability to lead (KPMG Women's Leadership Study).

Unconscious biases. Devillard, Hunt, and Yee (2018) found that there is still a strong unconscious bias against women in leadership positions. Biases used to be a common excuse for why women were not promoted to leadership positions; however, this "excuse no longer washes" (Devillard, Hunt, & Yee, 2018, para. 17). Yet, unconscious biases are still present. In their seminal piece, Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) indicated that gender assumptions regarding divisions of labor and perceptions of roles is a major challenge for women in public relations careers and indicated that only minimal research has been conducted in this area (Aldoory, 2007; Fitch & Third, 2014; Jiang, 2009; Place, 2011).

Some of the biases that have been examined include the performance-evaluation bias (men are evaluated more on their potential and women are evaluated more on what they have done), and that women tend to receive less praise than men do and more criticism than men (Devillard, Hunt, & Yee, 2018). Through a series of in-depth interviews with male practitioners, Pompper and Jung (2013) found it is perceived that there are powerful men in leadership positions that believe that "only men can drive business," or "only men can close the deal," or that "men are more strategic thinkers than women" (p. 503). Previous scholars have suggested

that it's likely that both male and female leaders tend to favor those of the same sex, thus further reinforcing groups of men at the top (Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat, 2018; Bradley et al., 2018).

Exposure to female leaders. Lack of seeing women in high-profile positions is also exacerbating the gender gap. When exposed to female leaders, stereotypes are broken and the perception of women and their ability to lead in both the private and public sectors improved (Beaman et al., 2008; Arvate, Galilea, & Todescat, 2018).

Leadership styles and preferences. O'Leary and Ryan (1994) noted that women can be expected to be more understanding, nurturing, giving, and forgiving than men; however, this can set women up for failure because perceived characteristics of a management role are generally more masculine (Mavin, 2006). Previous scholarship has suggested that "women may be more suited to be public relations leaders" because female personality traits are more aligned with transformational leadership (Tsetsura, 2014; Aldoory & Toth; 2004, p. 179). However, a mix of both masculine and feminine traits may be most necessary to succeed. A study by Stanford Business School concluded that women who can "turn on" and "turn off" masculine traits when they need to are more likely to get promotions than either men or women (Rigoglioso, 2011, para. 1).

Females don't perceive themselves as leaders. Berger (2012) found that although many men and women are after the same destination, they go on a different journey to get there—men and women view leadership, including the process of becoming a leader, differently. Men perceive themselves as more likely to want to be a leader, more likely to become a leader, and more likely to be a stronger leader. In general, women simply view themselves as likely to become a leader and less likely to want to become a leader.

Male reaction tendencies. Some have suggested that in a social setting, men are generally more likely to act and then think while women are more likely to think and then act (Rogers, 2011; Sanow, 2015). Because of this men are generally more likely to volunteer first and to step up for leadership opportunities. This in no way is to speak negatively of females but to explore the natural tendencies of males. This leads to the third research question:

RQ3: What factors do communications leaders identify as contributing to the gender gap in communications leadership?

Closing the Gender Gap

Despite recent efforts in the professional world to implement policies and a greater focus in an academic study on this topic, the leadership gender gap in public relations is still wide. Bruce K. Berger, Ph.D., research director of the Plank Center at the University of Alabama, said that “if we identify the gaps and work to close them, we strengthen our profession’s leadership—a crucial strategic asset.” As time goes by, it’s becoming apparent that there is a need to act with urgency to close this gap. The closing of this gap is something that will take time and a lot of additional understanding.

Lessons learned as a child and exposure to leadership have an impact on one individual's perceptions of leadership and their ability to lead (KPMG Women’s Leadership Study). Mintz (2017) noted that everyone has an unconscious bias—including women—and that a more diverse workforce is part of the solution to close the gap. Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat (2018) found that women who are in senior-level positions are more likely to help each other to excel and to grow in their own leadership.

Mintz (2017) suggested three things that will close the gender gap: first, raise awareness by becoming more aware of natural unconscious behaviors; second, invest in training in order to

improve communication, mentoring, and to identify non-inclusive behaviors; third, designing processes to encourage inclusion. Besides organizational-wide practices, Racioppi (2018) suggests that obstacles can often be overcome by women themselves in ways that are frequently overlooked.

Increased exposure to female leaders will also help to eliminate the gender gap because it will encourage more women to pursue leadership opportunities and will help break down existing stereotypes about women in leadership (Beaman et al., 2008; Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat (2018); Bradley et al., 2018; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). Bradley et al. (2018) suggested that according to Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1986, 1992, 1999, 2005), the existence of female leaders will increase women's self-esteem and encourage them to enter male-dominated environments. This leads to the final research question:

RQ4: What do communications leaders believe can be done to mitigate factors that are adding to the gender gap?

Research on the Gender Gap in Communications

Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) conducted a secondary analysis of all research on the status of women in communications published or disseminated between 2005 to 2016. In this study, they found that during these 11 years, only four articles were published that specifically addressed gender when researching communications (Aldoory, 2007; Algren & Eichorn, 2007; Geyer-Semple, 2011; Wu, 2006). They also found that only 30 academic and trade articles had findings regarding workforce gender composition, salary data of women versus men, the extent to which women supervise others, the number of years of experience in the field women have, women's managerial/leadership roles in public relations, and the dynamics of diversity in the field. In this seminal piece, Place and Vardeman defined the strategy for future research in this

area. One area that they defined is the need for feminine versus masculine leadership and roles research. Additionally, Place and Vardeman suggested the need for research in public relations education.

This study builds on existing research with women in leadership positions by conducting research with men in order to compare and contrast the differences in experiences which lead to factors that may be contributing to keeping the gender gap open wide. This study briefly touches on how leaders reached their current position. The findings from existing research ultimately inspire these four research questions.

Methodology

Description of Research

In an effort to understand the leadership gap in communications leadership, this study explored four specific areas that are critical to understand in mitigating the gender gap: experiences in becoming a leader, perceptions of leaders, factors contributing to the gender gap, and mitigating factors. By exploring the gender gap through these four different lenses, greater clarity was provided on the gender gap and how to close it. In-depth qualitative interviews were used to understand and study these areas with both female and male senior-level communications leaders. This study builds on existing research by analyzing the path of both women and men as it pertains to the gender gap in communications leadership.

Participants

Selection. Participants of this study were senior-level communications leaders with at least 10 years of experience working in the communications field and an average of 29 years of work experience for all participants. Although the focus of this study was primarily on public relations leaders, there is often overlap between public relations, communications, and

marketing, and all of these roles often report to a marketing leader, thus the phrase “communications leader” will be used to represent all participants. Participants were recruited from across the United States and were not limited by what industry they work in. There were 17 female and 15 male participants who met the criteria of this study and were interviewed. One participant currently resides outside of the United States; however, this particular participant is from the United States and is familiar with the issues facing communications leaders in the United States.

When looking at previous communications studies that utilize in-depth interviews, there are typically between 15 to 30 participants. For example, Molleda, Kochhar, and Wilson (2015) interviewed 25 public relations agency professionals in their study on localization practices of global PR firms; however, they found a saturation point where they kept finding a similar result after only 20 interviews. Plowman (1998) interviewed 30 participants, including top public relations officers and top organizational managers, in his study of conflict resolution. Mack Kelly and Wilson (2016) interviewed 15 public relations fundraising scholars. Wilson, Callister, and Seipel (2018) conducted 23 interviews with senior-level public relations practitioners in order to understand the priorities of fundraising at public and private universities. These similar studies provide a framework for this study and show that conducting at least 20 interviews with senior-level practitioners is the needed quantity of interviews to gain insights. After completing 32 interviews, no new insights were derived and interviews were discontinued at that point. See Table 1 for a breakdown of participant characteristics.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------|
| Participants | 32 | |
| Gender | 17 females, 15 males | |
| Race | 29 White, 2 African American, 1 Asian American | |
| U.S. Region | Northeast | 10 participants |
| | Midwest | 2 participants |
| | South | 7 participants |
| | West | 12 participants |
| International | 1 participant | |
| Work Experience | Average | 29 years |
| | Minimum | 11 years |
| | Maximum | 48 years |
| Common Job Titles | CCO, CEO, CMO, SVP, President, Founder, Principal | |
| Industries of Participants | Technology, Healthcare, Insurance, Travel, Consulting, Non-Profit | |

Recruitment. The contact information for prospective participants was obtained through professional societies that prospective participants may be a part of (the Institute for Public Relations and the Arthur W. Page Society) and/or from mutual connections of prospective participants. Once contact information was collected, an email was sent to prospective participants explaining the purpose of the study and the length of the interviews, see Appendix 1 for recruitment emails. Those participants who expressed interest in participating were emailed to set up an interview appointment and received an electronic copy of an implied consent form, see Appendix 3 for the implied consent form. Participants were recruited via email

approximately three weeks prior to the anticipated interview. Similarly to Berger and Meng (2014), participants received interview topics of discussion prior to the start of the interview so that they would have time to prepare responses.

Compensation. Participants were not compensated as part of this research, but they will receive aggregated findings of the study. There was no benefit to participants for participating in this study.

Data Collection

This study employed qualitative semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This was a process that has been previously used to allow participants the opportunity to talk about their opinions, perceptions, and to share their experiences (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Wilson, Callister, and Seipel, 2018). Each participant participated in one 30- to 60-minute Zoom or telephone interview with the researcher. Interviews originated from the researcher's home office located in Lehi, UT. The interviews were recorded via Zoom. Multiple microphones were utilized to ensure that there were redundancies in place. Audio files were files stored on the author's computer, external hard drive, and a cloud-based storage base. Recordings were password-protected to ensure that data was protected. Once interviews were completed, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were used to draw conclusions and to derive the discussion section of this study.

Throughout each interview, the interviewer referenced an interview guide that is rigid enough to ensure that all the necessary data was collected while giving the interviewer the flexibility to listen and to respond to participants, see Appendix 2 for the interview guide. The interview guide consists “of a list of topics and questions that can be asked in different ways for

different participants” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 200). This interview guide was evolving and as things were discovered they were added to the interview guide.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study will consist of a six-part thematic analysis originally introduced by Braun and Clark (2006)—data familiarization, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting of themes. Other scholars have followed a similar approach to analyzing their data from in-depth qualitative interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Storie, 2017; Fountaine, 2017). This process was expedited by use of NVIVO, in which themes were grouped together.

Data familiarization. During this phase of analysis, interviews were transcribed and reviewed. During this initial phase, transcripts were reviewed several times to get a better understanding of what was being said and then to begin to look for deeper meanings.

Generation of initial codes. Generation of initial codes were generated as each statement in the transcripts was reviewed. Patterns were noted on the transcripts and prepared to be sorted into initial codes. Every possible theme and pattern was coded for. During this phase, notes from interview guides and codes were compared across all 32 interview transcripts and initial codes were created. During this phase transcripts were loaded into NVIVO and nodes were created. Nodes in NVIVO are groupings of codes are a the formation of themes.

Searching for themes. In this phase, deeper relevant codes and related codes were collated and the meaning and relation of codes began to be analyzed. Themes were identified and were as comprehensive and as mutually exclusive as possible. Miscellaneous themes were accounted for and were reviewed in the next phase. This phase concluded by having subthemes. Themes were identified not only by looking at women and men individually but by contrasting

themes amongst both genders of participants. When certain themes fit well together they were grouped together in corresponding nodes and sub nodes were created in NVIVO.

Reviewing themes. Subthemes were reviewed to determine if they were strong enough to be a standalone theme or if they needed to be rolled up under another theme in NVIVO. All themes were reviewed for internal and external homogeneity to determine what data should cohere together and what data has clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. Additionally, themes were mapped out to determine what connects with what and codes were refined based on how they fit into a theme and faced validity to see if it really reflected the overall sense of the data. This process of reviewing themes is illustrated in Molleda, Kochhar, and Wilson (2015).

Defining and naming themes. During this phase, themes were named and defined on the essence of the theme. Names were chosen based on what the essence of the theme was saying. During this phase, themes were defined in a single sentence and a clear mapping between themes and subthemes was developed.

Reporting of themes. Definitions were reported for each theme and justification was provided for why this theme is meaningful and representative. The findings section of this study was crafted from grouped themes from NVIVO. In writing the findings section, themes were reported at a high level and then were described further. Direct quotes from participants were used to illustrate and support each theme. In order to facilitate drawing conclusions, data was reported by the research question in the form of short blocks of text (Martinellia & Erzikova, 2017).

Reflexivity

An important aspect of qualitative research is understanding the research instrument, which in this case was the primary author. Understanding the research measurement is important because it provides insight into certain biases or points of view that the measurement may have had at the time of collecting and analyzing the data. The primary author is a white male in his late twenties who grew up and presently resides in Utah. He is also an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The primary author grew up with a mother who worked full time and a father who stayed home with the children because of health issues. Prior to the beginning of the study the primary author felt strongly about equality for all regardless of gender. The author also felt strong that in the effort to close gender gaps that men should not be neglected but that women should be brought up as equals. Despite personally observing challenges that the primary author's mother faced, the primary author came away from this study even more attuned to the challenges that some women frequently face in the workplace and what can be done to help to mitigate those factors.

Timeline and Funding

Data collection for this study took place from January through June 2019. Due to the schedule restraints from these participants' job roles, it often took several weeks or even a month to schedule and complete an interview. This research was funded by the Institute for Public Relations. Funding for this project means helping, with participants recruiting funding transcription services. The Institute for Public Relations was invaluable to the development and execution of this study.

Findings

RQ 1: Similarities and Differences in Career Path

RQ1 analyzed how similar or different the experiences of male and female communication leaders were as they became communications leaders. This research question was inspired by Berger (2012), who explained that women and men view leadership, including the process of becoming a leader, differently. This research question also explores when leaders first begin aspiring for leadership. In summary, while every communication leader did not explicitly state that they believe the path is different, in one way or another they indicated that there is still something different about the process that women and men go through in their rise to the top-level communications role.

When and why aspirations for leadership begin. Several themes emerged for when participants began aspiring for leadership and why they began aspiring for leadership; see sections on When Aspirations Begin and Why Aspirations Begin for a breakdown of themes. At a macro level, the process of beginning to aspire for leadership looks the same for women and men, both begin aspiring young, have leadership opportunities in high school that help them to discover they like to lead, and then they have certain experiences early in their careers where they are able to observe good and bad leaders and to determine the type of leader that they want to be. For women and men, it is clear that all leaders are driven people who want to achieve and who don't want to just wait around. While motivations for leadership vary from person to person, many aspire for leadership to have greater autonomy and impact. But for multiple women interviewed, rising to leadership was the only foreseeable way to escape gender biases.

When aspirations begin. There were four subthemes that emerged for this question: first, some participants never remember aspiring for leadership; second, some began aspiring for

leadership at a young age after encouragement from a parent or parent figure; some began aspiring for leadership in high school or college after having experience in some form of leadership; and others began aspiring later, such as within the first few years of their career. For each of these themes, there were both women and also men participants who described themselves as being in each of these themes. Participants explained that aspiring to become a leader was a process rather than one pivotal moment.

Never remember aspiring for leadership. These participants described that they never remember aspiring for leadership because leadership was always a part of them or even part of their DNA. They only ever remember wanting to push themselves to be the best they could be and to be a leader. One male participant described this as: “I’ve always wanted to be the president of everything I do.” Other participants described that they never aspired for leadership and that they just fell into it. One female participant explained that she was “an accidental executive.”

At a young age with encouragement. These participants explained that they began thinking about leadership at a young age because it was something that a parent or parent figure talked with them about. While this encouragement started young, it was something that was reaffirmed as the child grew up. Several participants described that this process started as early as they could remember, with their parents encouraging them to push themselves to be their best.

During high school or college. For most participants, the process of aspiring to become a leader really became apparent in high school or college as they were given opportunities to lead. Some communications leaders felt that they sought out leadership while others felt that leadership sought them out. One female participant explained that her aspirations for leadership began in high school as she had opportunities to lead:

In my experience, leadership skills are developed and refined as you grow up. In high school, I took on leadership opportunities that others wouldn't, and it just felt natural for me. Whether it was a club or an athletic team, I always wanted to do more. I didn't just want to be part of the team. This was early on before I decided what I was going to do professionally.

Within the first few years of their career. For a few participants, leadership aspirations came within their first few years working post-graduation when they experienced leadership themselves or after observing others in leadership. One male participant explained how he had a realization that he could lead as he was approached about an opportunity to transition roles early on in his career:

I was working at a well-established organization at a manager level and was approached by a startup to move into a director-level role where I would be running all communications for the startup. During this time, I remember having the thought, 'I know enough about this to run the show and it's my time.' Although this was my first communications full-on leadership role, it ties back to experiences I had in high school, which was where I took my first step in leadership.

Why aspirations begin. Regardless of when aspirations began, there were three primary themes for why participants aspired for leadership: to have more control of their career outcome, they felt they could be a better leader, and to escape gender biases they were facing. For the most part, both women and also men were within each of these themes. The one exception was the theme about escaping gender bias, only women described themselves as being within this theme.

To have more control of their career outcome. There were several subthemes within this area where things such as work-life balance, greater autonomy and influence, and the ability to

dig into a project were factors that were brought up. Both women and men identified with this theme. In being able to have more autonomy and influence, one male participant explained:

What drew me to leadership opportunities is a passion for getting stuff done and wanting to have control and influence over what gets done and how it gets done. I learned early on that initiative and follow-through are key for success. This helped me to move from the guy with a folder full of ideas to be the boss where I could bring forth those ideas I had.

To be a better leader. Several participants, both women and men, described that after watching others lead, they felt they could do a better job as a leader and that pushed them to want to become a leader. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme. One male participant explained:

In seeing a blend of other leaders, some of whom, in my opinion, were good at what they were doing, and some whom, in my opinion, were bad at what they were doing. And I would say to myself, 'If I ever get the chance to lead other people, I'm going to learn from both and wean that into a leadership style that works for me. I will do this so that I will be a better leader of people.'

To escape gender bias. For a few participants, their motivation for leadership was not an idealistic motivation, rather it was to get out of a bad situation that they were in. For these women, their goal to become a leader was so they could escape gender biases or a glass ceiling that they were facing. Only female participants shared sentiment around this theme. One female participant explained:

I remember very vividly being treated poorly, and I'm convinced that it's because I was female. Not 'poorly' in the sense of any harassment issues, I mean in terms of being treated equally. I was not given the credit for some of the things I did. I was treated much

like a secretary. I already had a Ph.D. at this point, and I thought to myself, ‘This doesn’t feel good.’ So I realized I didn’t want to feel that way, so I needed to be in a position of leadership so I wouldn’t have that feeling. I wanted to have more freedom to be recognized for what I did.

The leader’s career path. A primary goal of this study is to understand what is different about the path that a woman goes through to become a communications leader in comparison to the path that a man goes through to become a communications leader. In talking with participants about differences in the career path for women and men, there were several themes that emerged: historically, all agree that that path has been more difficult for women, presently some believe the path is the same while most believe the path is different, there are things that women encounter that men simply do not, and an organization’s culture has a great impact on women and men. There were both female and also male participants who shared sentiment within each of these theme areas. In summary, both female and male participants feel that largely the path is different and more difficult for women; however, improvements are being made to make it easier for women as a result of societal and organizational pressures. Historically, women have had to jump through other organizational hoops and pressures that men are not expected to. There are certain nuances that complicate the process of becoming a communications leader, and these nuances will be described further in RQ3.

Historically a more difficult path for women. Everyone agreed that historically the path has been more challenging for females; however, there was a mixed sentiment when it came to the progress of improving the path for women—most people felt that things have improved; however, some are still frustrated with the lack of progress that has been made. Some women, especially older women, felt that good progress had been made while others, especially younger

women, felt frustrated with the lack of progress. For the most part, men realize that there is still a long way to go but were not frustrated with the lack of progress that has been made. Despite the progress that participants feel has been made, it is clear from both female and male participants feel that there are certain factors that make it more difficult for a woman's path than a man's path.

A mixed belief on the current path for women and men. When asked if women and men have a different career path, most female and male participants agreed that the path is different. However, there were several female and male participants who believe that the path for women and men is the same. One male participant explained that that he has not observed anything different about the path that women and men experience. One female participant also believes that the path is the same and she explained that there are certain nuances that complicate whether or not a certain career goal is obtained. She explained:

I think the path for women and men can look essentially the same. If you look at the organizational structures of any in-house, agency, or non-profit, the roles are the roles for the most part. And I think everyone has the opportunity to achieve those roles. There is a camp for everyone, men and women, to occupy these roles, but there are a lot of nuances along the way that impact whether or not you'll get there.

Women simply encounter things that men do not. For those who believe that women and men have a different career path, it is largely because of things that they have observed that show that women simply encounter things that men do not. One female participant explained that she was required to start at a lower job tier than her male counterparts. This woman communications leader said:

Women and men have a different career path to become a leader in communications. As I developed my career, there were roles that I had, especially out of the gate, that were traditionally female-oriented roles. When I started my first role at an agency, I started answering phones. None of my male colleagues started this way. They started right into a coordinator or specialist role while I had to be promoted into these roles.

Another female leader explained that her path was also quite different than her male counterparts:

My path was different in that I had to be better than the men that were my peers. Being equal or on par wasn't good enough. If my male peers were being promoted for being an eight or nine out of ten then I had to be a ten out of ten to get promoted. I had to run circles around them. It wasn't just that I felt that I had to, I had to. I had to toot my own horn, I had to make sure people knew, I had to make things happen. Whereas this wasn't the case for my male peers. My work had to be better than my male peers because I couldn't rely on personal connections to get the best assignments or promotions. My male colleagues were able to foster stronger personal relationships with the male leadership because of the out-of-office activities they had together. I didn't get this.

One male communications leader explained that he observed a different expectation for women and men as they aspired to lead:

There are different expectations for women than for men. I worked closely with a female executive who talked about this frequently. This executive felt that she had to be unnaturally assertive or she would be ignored. She would speak up sooner and would be more definitive to show that she could be taken seriously. This is an unfortunate reality that I think many women face

An organization's culture has a great impact on women and men. In addition to these complexities, several participants noted that oftentimes there are additional things both inside and outside an organization, such as the company culture and social norms, that can add additional pressure and make it difficult for women to advance through their careers. One male communications leader explained challenges that he's observed:

Historically, women and men have had different career paths but hopefully it's getting better. Some companies have made it very hard for women. I think that in particular, software companies where you've got a big sales team, there's almost this testosterone-driven sort of athletic or military culture. It's hard-charging, hard-drinking, and lots of strip clubs. I've seen female colleagues come into these environments and act very different than they wanted to, to try to fit into a culture. It's shifting in a lot of places but that was the culture.

Another male participant said:

Every company has a culture and you have to understand what the culture is. In some cultures, it demands that you be more of a self-promoter. In other cultures, self-promoting is frowned on. Regardless of whether you're a woman or man, you need to understand organizational politics, which are a byproduct of human behavior. If you want to get ahead you have to understand the game and how decisions are made.

Another male participant summarized the pressures that he has observed both inside and outside the organizations he has worked in:

The path is very different; the higher up you get in an organization the more male and the more white male it becomes. Men have mentors, role models, and coaches in the leadership arena long before women do. Men tend to look to their fathers and other males

around them who are pursuing careers, and those influential males reach out to their sons to reach out to do and to become and to be. It just happens with more regularity and specificity than it does with women. It's the way society has been since the beginning of time where men have always been the leaders, the protectors, the providers, and that has really not shifted significantly over time.

Although there are different things that women have to go through the men do not and societal pressures that make it difficult for women to advance, there are generational and societal shifts that are taking place that are shifting the path of becoming a communications leader. This generational shift is coming because the older CCO, who grew up in an age when there were not many women in the workplace is retiring and younger CCOs with different beliefs views are coming into leadership. As a result, a new type of CCO (Chief Communications Officer) is coming to be. One male communications leader said:

The path to the top communication spot is crisscrossed. The older generation of CCOs tend to be older white guys who were former news people or perhaps worked in some of the more classic agencies, and the newer middle-aged and younger CCOs tend to be female. This newer CCO is a result of a generational shift in the marketplace. The way into the field of corporate communications isn't through the newsroom anymore. So the way you get into the profession, and the sheer realities of a generational shift, have impacted the path.

RQ2: Perceptions of Women and Men Communications Leaders

RQ2 explored how women and men communication leaders are perceived. Participants were asked to explain how women and men as communications leaders are perceived in the workplace and to explain any differences between a female and a male communications leader.

The goal of this research question is to identify how women and men are perceived in order to understand what may be contributing to the gender gap. Two overarching themes were identified for this topic: women and men are viewed differently in the workplace, and differences between women and men communications leaders. Both female and also male participants shared similar sentiment within each listed theme.

Women and men leaders viewed differently in the workplace. There was a broad-spectrum response when it came to how women and men are perceived in the workplace and several themes were identified. At a high level, two themes emerged: those who felt there was no difference and those who felt there was a difference in how women and men are viewed in the workplace.

Felt there was no difference in how women and men are viewed. There were several participants who felt there was no difference in how women and men leaders are perceived. One theme emerged for this topic, and it is that these participants feel that while historically perceptions have been different, that they have improved and that women and men are now viewed the same. One female participant said:

I don't think women and men are viewed as differently as they used to be. For a long time, things have been shifting. There's still a long way to go but there is now a lot more of a focus on diversity and inclusion.

One male participant said:

I don't believe that women and men are viewed differently. I would say I think it's much more merit-based than it used to be. Advancement, responsibility additions, promotions, and the work you're getting is much more merit-based than it used to be.

Felt there was a difference in how women and men are viewed. Conversely, most participants felt that there is still a difference in how women and men are viewed in the workplace. Several themes were identified: childbearing, lack of socializing with senior men, men are naturally perceived with more credibility, communications is a reflection of society, and that women and men are viewed differently when they are assertive.

Viewed differently when being assertive. The main difference that came up across most participants is that it is okay for a man to be assertive but not for a woman. The reverse also came up that it is okay for a woman to be emotional but not for a man. One male communications leader described this as:

If a man were to be tough, assertive or bold, that was viewed as okay. That was normal. If a woman were to act this way they would be viewed as difficult to work with. There was like a strange invisible barrier like it's okay for a man, but not for a woman.

A female communications leader explained that she was unsure why this was but explained that it's likely a result of societal norms:

If a woman is assertive, she's called a bitch. If a man were to have that same communication style, he's not labeled that way. He's almost congratulated for being assertive. I don't know what that is, but it continues to be. It's like society has these boxes and you can only operate within those boxes. It's okay to have compassion and empathy if you're a male. It's okay to be assertive and a go-getter if you're a female. It doesn't make you any less male or any less female, it just means you're human.

One male communication leader explained that when a woman acts or communicates very directly and in a straightforward manner that he's observed that men tend to respond one of two ways:

I've seen the men in the room say, 'Okay, I wasn't expecting that. And you're right, yes, we're going to do that.' Or, 'That makes sense.' I've also seen it play out where the men in the room may not have said anything, but I've watched the non-verbals. You know, I watch men look at women. And again, my interpretation is they're asking themselves, 'Why does she think she can say that that way? What gives her the right to do that?' I mean, simply my interpretation, but I think I've seen it both ways.

Childbearing. Childbearing can impact how women are viewed because there is unknown around if or when she may become pregnant. One female participant shared her observations of how women can be perceived:

I've observed that certain management teams seem to look at women with somewhat of a question mark around their future because they don't know what the woman is thinking about, whether she will stay in the workplace when she has children or want to take a break from the workplace.

Socializing Complexities. Additionally, varying types of unconscious bias and lack of socializing can also lead to why women and men are viewed differently. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme; however mostly women identified with this theme. One female participant said:

A female versus male leader is viewed differently in the workplace for a lot of reasons. One reason is unconscious bias. I also see women not being included all the time because senior men are uncomfortable socializing with women like they would with men. I've observed that when a senior man joins an organization, he would be asked to play golf with the other senior guys, whereas women are also excluded from social activities.

Another female participant explained that she has observed men who only talk about doing work and who do not follow through, thus contributing to how some men are perceived. She described:

I've seen men in positions where they would talk about doing work but they wouldn't actually do it. We're moving to a place where you can't just be a good talker, you have to get the work done.

Men are Naturally Perceived with More Credibility. Several participants explained that, put simply, men are just viewed as more credible than women and that women must work harder to earn their seat at the table. One male participant said:

When a female comes into the room, it's just a very different dynamic. It can be someone that they think the world of and have a lot of respect for. And I think when she starts to talk, she's got to prove herself, to prove her worth, and to show that she knows what she's talking about and that she's coming from a position of strategy, as well as the ability to implement on tactics. And, yes, I have observed that. I've observed that. White men, in particular, are viewed as being more credible, more worthy of being at that table. Women have to show their work and show that they should be at the leadership table, at the front of the table.

Communications is a reflection of society. Several participants explained that issues relating to the gender gap in communications leadership is simply a result of a larger gender gap in society. One male participant shared that through a network of other communications leaders, they've discussed perceptions of women at length. He explained how historically women have been perceived much differently but how things are beginning to change:

We are at a juncture where perceptions of women in senior leadership are changing. It's becoming more about the leader and the person and less about the person as a woman.

The communications profession has certainly pushed this, the idea to make sure that these hidden prejudices with the system are ironed out. But I think this is what's going on in society. These shifts are really a reflection of the larger societal trends.

Differences between a woman and man leader. This entire paper could be written about the differences between women and men, and, more particularly, about the differences between women and men communications leaders. That said, several key themes were identified specifically about differences. Participants noted that while they had observed some of these behaviors, some of the statements about the differences between women and men are generalizations and that there are many exceptions to these statements. Participants were generally in one of two themes when it came to differences between women and men: the first theme is those who felt that there was no difference between women and men leaders and the second theme is those who felt that there was a difference.

Felt there was no difference. Several participants felt there was no difference between women and men communications leaders. One reason that was given was that they had observed good women and men leaders and that they had observed bad women and men leaders, but that gender was not the overriding factor. One participant noted that it was more about the leader's ability to do the work and that gender was not a factor in that. Another reason why some participants felt that there was no difference is that they had observed that differences between women and men at the top are "very acute" (female participant) and that the best leaders are those that have characteristics that are traditionally male and that are traditionally female.

Felt there was a difference. Several participants also felt that there were differences between women and men communication leaders. One reason is that women tend to be more graceful and sensitive to other's feelings, especially being more attuned to how other women are feeling, while men tend to be more straightforward and brash. Participants explained that men tend to be more straightforward and definitive in their communication 'I think this...' while women tend to add preferencing phrases such as 'How are you?' 'Do you agree?' 'Good to see you.' 'I hope you had a good weekend.' to their communication. Additionally, participants felt that while men tend to be more programmed to rally around one person making a decision and then go forward to execute, women tend to be more collaborative and inclusive. Because of tendencies in communication and decision-making styles, participants said that men tend to be weaker communicators and team leaders and those men who are the most successful communications leaders are those who adopt both traditional male and traditional female leadership styles. Some participants expressed that they've observed certain women that have an "out to prove the world" mentality that can earn them a "ball-buster" or "man-hater" reputation. Both female and also male participants independently brought up the phrase "ball-buster" to describe this type of behavior.

RQ3: Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap

RQ3 sought to understand what factors communication leaders had observed that are contributing to the gender gap. Participants were asked open-ended questions and then specific questions about different types of factors and biases that have been identified based on previous studies. This section will be divided into two themes: factors contributing to the gender gap and different types of gender biases. In summary, there are many different factors and biases that can and are contributing to the gender gap. Factors and biases that were identified in previous studies

were confirmed and additional factors and biases were identified. Participants identified biases as a major factor that contributes to the gender gap. As such, biases will be broken out from factors into its own subsection. Unless specified, both female and also male participants shared similar sentiment within each listed theme.

Factors. There were seven themes that were identified as factors contributing to the gender gap. All of these themes were independently brought up by participants. These seven themes are: relationships, unique challenges to women, issues in the communications field, a long history of male dominance, the pay gap is fueling the gender gap, lack of awareness of the gender gap, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Relationships. There were five subthemes identified under the theme of relationships. These subthemes are all interconnected in that in one way or another and they tie back to a type of relationship and these relationships are part of a larger factor that is contributing to the gender gap. These five themes are: building relationship with leaders and touting themselves, the CEO and the CCO relationship, sources of influence and recruiting for leaders, people like people who are like them, and the funding club.

Building relationships with leaders and touting themselves. There Women are at a disadvantage when it comes to building relationships with leaders and they are likely to “tout themselves.” Several participants explained that there are some social events that exclude women and that when men leaders want to do these types of activities that women are often left out. The activities that come up the most often that exclude women are golf, hunting, and strip clubs. During these activities, men leaders are able to bond with other men who are lower in the organization, which ultimately helps to strengthen these relationships, which makes these lower men the most logical choice the next time there is a job opening.

Both female and male participants noted that women are simply less likely to “tout themselves,” which can lead to “a slower career progression for a woman” because they are “perceived as weaker leaders than they are.” When asked why women are less likely to promote themselves, several participants explained that it is because they “recognize that it takes a village,” meaning that for a success to take place, it often involves a lot of people and not just the woman. One female participant explained that “there’s a natural inclination for women to be more inclusive.”

The CEO and the CCO relationship. Another factor that came up with several participants is that the relationship with the CEO and the head of communications contributes to the gender gap. Across many industries, CEO roles are still largely dominated by men. Unlike many other relationships, a CEO's relationship with their head of communications can be very intimate. One female participant described this relationship as, “the CEO needs to be able to let their hair down with their head of communications.” They further explained that the CEO needs to be relaxed and fully honest in front of their head of communications in order for the communications leader to do their best work. Since the majority of CEOs are still men and this study found that people tend to hire and “hang out” with people like them, oftentimes male CEOs tend to hire men to be their head of communications. One of the female participants in this study described that she has made it possible to have a good relationship with her CEO; however, not every woman is able to do this. Participants believe that having more female CEOs will go a long way in helping to close the gender gap in communications.

Sources of influence and recruiting for leaders. Because most funding sources tend to be influenced by males, many boards tend to be male-dominated. Only male participants identified this themes, female participants did not. One male participant said, “Most board rooms are still

male-dominated, period.” He further explained that having a male-dominated board leads to having a male-dominated executive team; as he broke down the recruiting and hiring process for most executives, he said:

When you recruit for a Chief Communications Officer, you have roughly half a dozen people at play at any given time. The most influential people to that decision are the boards, the banks/finance backing, and politics—which are all still largely dominated by men. These are the sources of influence at top companies.

Besides having the majority of decision-makers being male when hiring a Chief Communications Officer, participants explained that those candidates who are being considered are often other lower-tier leaders in the company, who also tend to be men.

People like people who are like them. Several participants described that communications agencies and corporate functions were founded primarily by men coming from a new background. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme; however, mostly women, brought up this theme. As these men founded these functions, they “brought in their friends who were guys, and so on.” This shows how historically leadership in communications has been so dominated by men. Many women and men participants in this study described that people tend to hire people like them: men tend to hire men and women tend to hire women. One female participant said, “We all like hanging out with people that look just like us” and one male participant said, “We tend to hire those that we’re most comfortable around.” In addition to hiring those that they are most comfortable around, one male participant suggested that men can be uncomfortable hiring women because they are intimidated by them. One male participant suggested that this can be a very subtle process, “when left to our own devices, we tend to hire those who are like us.” Participants were asked why this is the case, and one female participant

explained, “It’s because this is the purest expression of your ego. When a leader leaves, he naturally wants to set up all of his buddies or lieutenants in order to preserve his legacy.”

Another part of that, as one participant suggested, is that men just may not be “evolved enough,” meaning they certain men simply may have not had an experience in their life that has “helped to show them a different perspective.” Despite the challenges of people still hiring people like themselves, many participants noted that this is changing.

The funding club. Another factor that contributes to the gender gap is that women are generally not part of the “the funding club.” Only female participants identified this themes, male participants did not. One participant explained that the very nature of a business, every organization, starts with some kind of funding. Regardless of leadership styles or cultures of organization founders, funding comes from somewhere and it impacts the organization. Participants explained that most funding comes from a venture capital firm or a private equity firm, which are still predominantly male organizations. When funding comes from these groups, these groups, which are largely dominated by men, tend to influence the selection of leadership for the startup. One female participant explained this in short, “Funding mechanisms for companies tend to be extremely male-dominated. That leads into the boardroom, which leads into the rest of the organization, and so on.” This participant further explained that “private equity and venture capital, it’s a club” and that for women communications leaders to be successful that they need to understand this club and how to work with this club.

Unique challenges to women. There were five sub themes identified under the theme of unique challenges to women. These subthemes are all interconnected in that in one way or another and they tie back to a type of challenge that is directed at or specific to a woman. These challenges are part of a larger factor that is contributing to the gender gap. These five themes are:

lack of assurance that it can be done, lack of business acumen, childbearing and rearing, women are not as confident as men, lack of quality examples and mentors.

Lack of assurance that it can be done. One large and subtle factor that was brought up by both women and male participants is that women simply lack an assurance that they can become a communications leader. Participants explained that they had observed many women who self “select themselves out” of a leadership role because they think that maintaining family responsibilities with the added stress of a leadership role is too much. One female participant explained that women become frustrated with the process and the fight so they’ll either give up or quit and create their own business so that they can have more control over things. Another female participant explained that “It’s natural to have these doubts but women just need some reassurance that they can do it.”

Lack of business acumen. Several participants explained that women may be passed up for promotions simply because men have “a greater depth of business knowledge” and because they “know how to speak the language.” One female participant explained that she has seen plenty of women promoted within the “comms rung” but not from “more strategic roles outside of comms.” Another female participant explained the men simply have a better financial understanding than women do and that women should seek to fill holes where they have them.

She said:

Women should do whatever they have to do to be as competent in understanding how business works, how the stock market works, all those things that men have historically been in charge of.

Childbearing and rearing. Previous studies have shown that this is a large factor that is contributing to the gender gap and this study reaffirms previous findings. One unique value that

this study adds is the insight that women can be successful mothers while having a successful career at the same time. The biggest challenge that female and male participants identified on this topic is the lack of flexibility on behalf of the employer and individual team members and clients. The frustrating thing to many participants is that there is technology available today that makes it easy for women to work whenever and wherever. However, it is people's belief of a 9:00 am to 5:00 pm in-the-office mentality that prevents women from taking advantage of the technology that they desperately need to balance their children and career. One female participant said, "If you're out the door at 5 pm every day, it's perceived as a lack of commitment, but some women need this to try to get to their children." This participant went on to explain that having rigid hours in a rigid location attracts a different type of talent that often is not working mothers.

There is no doubt that childbearing and rearing can put women at a disadvantage. Several participants explained, "pragmatically it's harder for a woman to have an uninterrupted focus on her career if she wants to be having children as well" and "women have children at some of the most critical points in their career." Several female participants explained that it was "extraordinarily demanding" for them to have children while trying to be pregnant, going through childbirth, and then taking care of a new infant while trying to work, often with travel demands and long commutes into the office. On top of the already demanding experience, one female explained how her female boss did not want her in client meetings because her boss did not feel like she looked as good while she was pregnant. This participant explained that this is shifting though; she described a recent meeting that she was in that had two pregnant women in it and these women were much more comfortable and welcomed in the meeting. Another female

participant explained that she felt that some men did not want a woman leader because of the possibility that she could “become burdened with pregnancy.”

But it is clear that challenges for women go much beyond the pregnancy and birthing portion of being a mother. One female participant explained that the challenge for women goes far beyond the pregnancy, and she said:

Women are much more involved in helping children through their journey than men are. Around the office, most female conversations revolve around children while male conversations generally have another focus. That puts the women at a disadvantage. Other females described the time needed to take children to school, appointments, and other activities, including needing time to just be with their children when they needed them. While one might assume that time away from work could prevent the woman from getting done what she needed, several participants described that this is quite the opposite. One participant described that she observed women working late nights and weekends to ensure that their clients were satisfied and had everything they needed.

While it is clear from conversations with participants that women desperately need more flexibility at work, from a business perspective, some are unable or unwilling to search for a solution for their female employees. One male participant described that he has observed some men who are unwilling to hire women because of the “formulaic” process that he has observed of talented women coming into the workplace, getting married, having children, and then leaving their job after their maternity leave. One male participant noted how this can be challenging from the perspective of the business:

One of the biggest challenges the leader faced in regard to this is figuring out the flexibility to allow women to work part-time or remote or whatever worked best for

them. The thing with working remotely is that there has to be a relationship there. There can't just be a disconnected voice. The person has to be flesh and blood.

Several participants explained that from the woman's perspective and from the business's perspective, determining that flexibility can be challenging but that it is very possible. In fact, not every female participant identified whether or not they were a mother; however, many participants did, and they explained that with a flexible team at work and a flexible team at home that it was very possible. Several female participants described that they do what they can to make sacrifices in other parts of their life and that their husbands often had to make sacrifices as well, but it was definitely doable. One male participant described how he had worked with a particular woman earlier on her career and has continued to work with her, as she has been promoted to be one of his best vice presidents. He said that because she was so amazing to work with, that he went to great lengths to keep her on his team. He said that at times it was challenging but they both stayed open and made it work. Both female and male participants wished that more women and men knew how possible this could be.

Women are not as confident as men. Participants were asked which gender, women or men, they had observed to be more confident in the workplace. Resoundingly, participants said that men are more confident than women. Several participants explained that they have observed that men will apply for a job when they are still missing many of the qualifications, but women will not apply for a job because they think they are underqualified, even when they have nearly every qualification. One female participant explained that men feel more confident to fail than women do but she did not know why. One male participant explained that men grow up being told that they need to be tough or "they're not a man" and that this permeates into their career where they are bold and confident. The gender breakdown of the executive team also impacts

how confident women and men are. One male participant explained that it is difficult for women to feel overly confident when they do not have someone in their organization who is exuding this confidence. Another female participant suggested that since men are generally less vocal about their feelings, that they are able to hide their feelings and act more confident than women. One male participant explained that he has seen equally confident women and men and he felt that confidence is something that comes with experience. While every participant agreed that men are more confident than women, many participants feel that this is changing and that women are becoming more and more confident.

More specifically, on women not applying for jobs, several participants went deep on what they describe as the 60/90 mentality—men will apply for a job if they have 60 percent of the requirements, while women who have 90 percent of qualifications will wait. One female participant recounted a conversation she had with a political leader who said, “Women don’t go into politics because they can’t fill 110% of the job.” This female participant knew and understood this feeling and described this phenomenon:

I think there is something from a gender perspective where women work for or toward perfection. I also think from a gender perspective, women have a tiny voice in the back of our heads that can occasionally cast doubts. And that if you’re not the absolute perfect person for the role, maybe you should wait. I’ve brought this theory up in multiple different settings with women and they agree. So I think there’s something there. The only way to get women comfortable to cast themselves out there for these roles is to tamp down that little voice. And the only way I can think of to do it is to call it out. We need to acknowledge it and take away its power.

This female participant was not the only participant to explain this 60/90 mentality, but she described it more completely and eloquently than any other participant.

Lack of quality examples and mentors. Similar to raising and rearing children, this factor is one that has been identified in previous research. This study reaffirms those previous findings and provides additional insight into this factor. Both women and men leaders agree that lack of exposure to female leaders contributes to the gender gap. One male participant explained:

It's harder for women to move up from a mentorship perspective because there are fewer female executives to look to. It's got to feel weird as a minority in the room, which is often the case.

Another male participant explained that perceptions of future communications leaders are being shaped now and that there simply are not enough examples of women now who are leading in the field of communications. One female participant explained how painful this feeling can be:

Women haven't felt the doors open. If the glass ceiling remains, it's discouraging to think that that door is not open to you. As a young girl, or a young adult growing up, you tend to try to move to a pathway where you think that you'll find success. But if there are no mentors and women in those positions for you to see, it's very hard to think you could be in one of these positions someday. And it becomes a self-perpetuating cycle, women get into the field of communications or any other field, frankly, and they look around the landscape and they say, 'What's my path? Where could I go? What are the possibilities?' And they see more male leadership than female leadership. This informs the thinking of young women and young girls.

While there is still a long way to go in getting women into more visible roles, there are two examples that participants shared that are inspiring to help to eliminate this factor. First is from a

male participant, who explained that early on in his career he had a female leader who was a great mentor to him. This woman helped to shape this participant's career and this participant has gone on to be a large advocate for women. He explained that he feels that every man should have a female mentor in order to help shape perceptions about female communications leaders. The second example is from a female participant, who at any given time is mentoring five to 10 women. She explained that in addition to women seeking her out as a mentor, she will seek out women on her own and will help to mentor and champion them. She described her process of mentoring as one that varies depending on the mentee, but overall this process includes one where they will get together on a semi-frequent basis to discuss the challenges that the mentee is facing, and then the participant will offer advice to help the mentee. The participant explained that this is something that she really enjoys doing and something that she has seen a lot of success with.

Issues in the communications field. There were four subthemes identified under the theme of issues in the communications field. These subthemes are all interconnected in that in one way or another and they tie back to a type of challenge or issue in the communications . These challenges are part of a larger factor that is contributing to the gender gap. These four themes are: attrition of talented women from the field, communications not being viewed as strategic, clients are part of the problem, gender saturation in certain functions and industries.

Attrition of talented women from the field. Several participants explained that they have observed an attrition of talented women out of the field of communications. While there are many talented women who are still in the field, many are leaving. Participants listed several of the other factors in the section including that "most of the burden" is on women for family and children responsibilities. Another reason that participants explained that is causing women to

leave the field is what they called “the burnout factor.” One male participant explained, “This industry is very intense and can lead to burnout. We see it more commonly in women because there are more women in the field.” Other participants explained that factors such as being always on call to respond to a client can lead to burnout. Once someone is burned out then they tend to leave the field and do not necessarily come back.

Communications not viewed as strategic. One challenge that has come up multiple times in communications literature is that the communications function is not always viewed as a strategic business function and that practitioners have to work hard to have their seat at the table. Multiple female and male participants echoed this sentiment and explained that having communications not viewed as a strategic business function contributes to the gender gap. One male participant described that he had observed that, “Much of the Fortune 500 leadership has come up from sales, finance, or some other business unit. There’s a bias that marketing communications is a necessary evil.” This problem is exacerbated when a female is in a communications leadership role. Another male participant described that when “we’re not viewed as a business strategist, men tend to naturally have more credibility at the table.” This participant further explained that people from engineering and sales look at marketing communications as a weaker and less-technical function and that looking at a woman in a communications role makes her appear especially less technical. A female participant explained that the weaker perception of communications and being a female is like “having two strikes” against her. In addition to being from a “softer function,” and being female, this participant explained that being younger than most of the men at the table can make it especially challenging for her. She explained:

There are plenty of opportunities for women in the communications field; however, where it gets challenging is at the senior level when you're one of the few women at the c-suite table. I've witnessed women at the c-suite table being completely ignored. The biggest challenge I see in the organization that I'm in is at the board meetings where it's not just men, but older men. Being a younger female in that setting provides both a gender and an age gap. This is amplified because the communications function is often viewed as a softer function.

Clients are part of the problem. Many of the participants from this study either currently work for or have worked for some type of communications agency. One factor that independently came up many times throughout data collection was the fact that clients are part of the reason the gender gap exists. Several participants explained that part of the reason for this is that communications are a very "service-oriented function" that takes on the characteristics and cultures of its clients, be that clients inside the same organization or clients outside the organization. That means that for those communications practitioners who serve industries which tend to be more male-dominated, such as technology, manufacturing or engineering, gender gaps can be further perpetuated in communications. One male participant explained the clients are "especially bad" at introducing various types of biases in the workplace.

Participants explained that they had observed multiple types of subtle and not-so-subtle biases and other prejudices introduced by male clients into the communications teams. One of the most common problems is that when a client is in the room with a woman and man communications professional, that the client will mostly only address the male communications person, even if the woman communications person is more senior. This is especially true in older white male clients. One male participant explained that this is especially true when working with

international clients because international clients tend to be less progressive because of “cultural, long-standing vestiges.” Participants have also observed clients will use insensitive language such as referring to women communications people as “girls.” Some participants explained that they had even observed male clients harassing their female employees or requesting to work with a man instead of a woman. Another problem is the social aspect; several participants explained that they have been put in uncomfortable situations because they want to socialize with their client to help build a relationship but the client has asked them to do things they are uncomfortable with such as going home with them, going hot tubbing, or going to strip clubs with the client. In some cases, participants noted that they were reprimanded by their leadership for not giving in to their client’s requests. Other participants explained that they had to work through situations where employees had sexual relations with a client.

When these challenges were brought up, participants were asked to describe what they did to work through these issues and how they balance responsibilities to their employees and clients. One male participant explained that balancing this can be challenging because “firms exist to satisfy their clients” and that “some large multinational firms put a lot of pressure on firms to put financial returns above everything else, including gender diversity.” Participants explained that first and foremost, that employees need to come first, “always put your employees first,” and “you stick up for your employees, employees come first.” Participants explained that at times they had to have some uncomfortable conversations, but things always worked out best when they put employees first. Participants explained that the key is being upfront with clients and employees and setting appropriate expectations.

Gender saturation in certain functions and industries. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme. Another challenge that contributes to the gender gap is that certain communications functionality areas and industries tend to be male-dominated, while others tend to be female-dominated. It can be especially difficult to break into an area or industry that is dominated by a certain gender. Participants explained that corporate communications, investor relations, public affairs, and crisis management tend to be male dominated, whereas, entertainment, food and wellness, and consumer-oriented functions tend to be female-dominated. Participants explained that industries such as aerospace, mining, engineering, technology, and finance are industries that tend to be male-dominated, making it more difficult for women to break into. When asked why these functional areas are usually dominated by one gender over another, participants shared that it is because it aligns with stereotypes and often it is a thing of women or men “self-selecting themselves” into these areas or industries, making the gender gap especially wide in these areas.

A long history of male dominance. This theme of a long history of male dominance has no subthemes. There has been a long history of men being in leadership roles and of men being communications leaders. A male participant explained that the majority of communications leaders today are Baby Boomers who grew up with their fathers working while their mothers stayed home to take care of the home and children. For these types of leaders, it was not that they were anti-women, they just grew up in a much different way. A female participant explained that “it all goes back to how you were raised” and for many generations, this is how people were raised and it was normal.

Additionally, perceptions of leaders today were shaped many years ago. One male participant describes that “It just takes time to become a leader and the people who are in

leadership positions, their attitudes were shaped 40 years ago, 30 years ago, maybe in another industry.” Many of the most senior communications leaders today came from a news background. Historically, communications leaders “cut their teeth” in the newsroom as “hard-charging, hard-drinking, hard-smoking newsmen” (male participant) before switching over into a communications role. Because perceptions were shaped so long ago, one female participant explained that “Industries across the U.S are still very male-heavy in the leadership. You can’t separate out communications, it’s a reflection of how everything else is.” Most participants shared a similar sentiment, that the reason the gender gap exists in communications leadership is that there are still gender gaps all across society. Furthermore, these gaps will not truly go away until society as a whole makes a shift.

Some people want this long-standing tradition of male-dominated leadership to change while others simply do not. Both women and men participants explained that for whatever reason, there are still many holding companies of communications agencies that would prefer to see a man in a leadership role. Another male participant explained that greed is a large part of why the top continues to be male-dominated; he said, “Greed is still a very big part of why men hold on to the corner office and perceive women the way that they do.”

However, most participants believe this is changing. Many different female and male participants explained that things are shifting, but that it is a very slow shift. One male participant said, “It was hard to turn the Titanic and it is hard to turn this industry.” Several leaders explained that they believe that this shift will happen in communications; however, it is based on the number of qualified candidates entering the field. One male participant explained:

I truly believe it's a mathematics game. Historically, there have been more men in communications but with more and more women coming in it will balance out. It just takes time.

The pay gap is fueling the gender gap. This theme of the pay gap fueling the gender gap has no subthemes. Only female participants, not male participants, identified with this theme. Several participants explained that compensation discrepancies are what they believe is one of the largest factors contributing to the gender gap. One participant said, "The gender gap exists because of the pay gap." A participant explained that oftentimes a husband and wife will both be working and then when they decide to start a family they will look at finances. When they look at finances and the couple determines that they are likely going to have to lose one salary, they usually decide to quit the job that is paying less. Oftentimes, this job is the woman's job because of the pay gap. One female participant described this as:

When people make a decision like this, they go where the most money is. Unfortunately, when people get into upper management positions in PR, the choice is usually for the man to continue working and for the woman to stay home. So we lose a lot of women in the PR workforce, as they get older. We have a ton of women in their twenties in middle management positions in PR. However, when they have children, they make the decision to stay home and that's because it's an economic one.

In this case of this particular female participant, she was making more money than her husband then they decided to have children ,so she continued working while her husband stayed home with the new child. However, she explained that likely would have been different if her husband had been making more money than her.

Participants explained that there are a couple of reasons why the pay gap exists. First is a long history of women not having equal rights as men. One female participant explained that “First we got the vote, then we got the smoke...and it has taken hundreds of years to get to where we're at and it'll take a long time to get over that mentality.” Another reason why the pay gap exists is because of simple economics. One female participant explained:

I don't want to pay a cent more to anybody than I have to, not one cent more. Right, because that's my economics. So if a woman comes in, to my company, and, and she has made \$80,000, in her last job, and, and I'm willing to pay her \$90,000, that's a good deal for her. And it's a good deal for me. But the man, a man might come in at \$90,000 or \$100,000 and then I need to pay them \$120,000. But that's why this continues to persist. Because if I don't have to pay somebody another \$20,000, I'm not going to. Cause they're going to be happy with it. It would be very unusual to say, you're a woman making \$80,000, okay, I'm gonna give you another \$40,000 just to put you at par with the men. It just doesn't happen. It's an economically bad decision for the employer. Even though it's probably the right thing to do, it doesn't happen for that reason.

This participant went on to explain that women must fight and negotiate to be paid what they are worth and that that is the only way that the pay gap will be able to close.

Lack of awareness of the gender gap. Another smaller factor which contributes to the gap is the lack of awareness of the gap. It may seem difficult to believe that this is an issue, but it is. One female participant explained that a simple lack of awareness is contributing to the gender gap because “It doesn't feel like there is a gap because there are so many women around.” This participant explained that simple training education efforts can help to mitigate this factor.

Sexual harassment and sexual assault. Several female participants shared they have been victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault. Out of respect to these women, additional details will not be shared in this study. However, the takeaway that they wanted to be shared is that sexual assault is still very much a real thing for many women and that it is not okay and should not be tolerated in any situation. Situations of sexual harassment and sexual assault should be reported immediately, and the individual should do whatever is in her power to get help and to get safe.

Biases. As previous studies have found, biases, especially unconscious biases, are a large reason why the gender gap exists. There were nine themes identified around the topic of biases: how to tell if something is biased, what contributes to bias in the workplace, people feeling there is a gender bias in their workplace, biases in hiring, biases in compensation, biases in promotions, biases in treatment, biases in recognition, and biases against men. This study confirms that biases are a massive factor in how women and men are perceived and why the gender gap is as wide as it is today. This study also provides additional types of bias that senior-level communications leaders have observed.

How to tell if something is biased. As participants described different types of bias, discussions arose around how to tell if someone is being biased. One pattern that multiple participants described is that often biases “aren’t being done in a pervasive way” and are “totally subconscious.” One participant explained “if you listen to them long enough, you’ll be able to tell if they’re really being insensitive” while another participant explained that “identifying biases is kind of like pornography—you can’t define it, but you know it when you see it.” Regardless of whether some poor behavior was a result of someone being biased versus someone being a jerk, participants agreed that it is bad at any level and that we need to “call it out.”

What contributes to bias in the workplace? Similar to what was described in some other factors that contribute to the gender gap, participants explained that one of the causes of bias in the workplace is that people tend to “like people that think like themselves.” One female participant explained that it takes “a lot of conscious effort to make sure that all types of people are being heard—women, men, LGBTQ, different races, and disabilities.” Additionally, participants explained that bias can be a result of attitudes that people have been forming since the time they were very young.

People feeling there is a gender bias in their workplace. Participants were asked if women and men at their organizations felt there are biases at their organization. Most participants did not respond with a definitive “yes” or “no” when asked if people at their organization felt there was gender bias at their workplace. Participants tended to respond with phrases like, “I hope not,” “I don’t think so,” “the women might think so,” “maybe they used to but things are getting better.” Some participants did explain that they had conversations with individuals in their workplace who expressed frustration with different types of bias but often they were quite minimal.

Biases in hiring. Several participants explained that they had observed multiple cases of gender bias in hiring. One female participant explained that she found out that after she was hired that one of the main reasons her manager hired her is because “she is cute.” One male participant explained that he had observed some people hire a man over a woman because they were leery how long the woman would be at the organization before getting pregnant and leaving. Other participants explained that they had seen women brought into leadership roles, including boards, just to fill the quota of having a woman. A female participant said that if a

woman has a strong skillset that she can work through the “quota hire” but that if she does not, it likely will not end well for her and, in many cases, it does not work out well.

Biases in compensation. Multiple participants noted that they had observed gender bias in compensation. As discussed previously, the pay gap is a large factor that contributes to the gender gap. Several participants noted that they have been part of teams who have gone through internal audits to correct pay discrepancies between women and men.

Biases in promotions. While multiple reasons came up for why a man might be promoted over a woman, both male and female participants explained that the biggest bias they had observed with promotions related to the “the unknown factor with how long a female will be around.” Other factors for bias in promoted focused around general perceptions of why a man may be more suited for the role than a woman.

Biases in treatment. Participants described multiple different types of bias that they had observed in seeing how people treat each other in the workplace. One bias that was brought up by multiple women and men is that “women are often viewed as the notetaker.” Another common bias that came up is that in a meeting a woman will share an idea and it is ignored, then a few minutes later a man will same the same thing and everyone loves it. Similarly, women will start talking in meetings but often get talked over by a man or even another woman. Other participants explained that they have observed women being called ‘ladies,’ ‘girls,’ or ‘gals,’ which can be offensive. Another place where participants observed treatment-related bias is in the social setting, for example, when a male leader will only invite men to a social outing such as lunch, dinner, or golf.

However, one female participant explained that she has had a different experience, and that “being a woman has only helped me.” She explained that because people were always trying

to be mindful of gender bias, she received special treatment in a good way, which helped her to excel in her career. While this experience appears to be more of an exception than the rule, it is an interesting experience to explore.

Biases in recognition. While this bias was something that both female and male participants had observed, this bias was observed a fewer times than other types of bias. Participants who had observed this type of bias explained that this tied back to the fact that often men are more connected to leadership and that oftentimes a woman will bring up an idea and it will be ignored and then when a man brings up the idea, everyone loves the idea.

Biases against men. While both female and also male participants identified with this theme, this theme was mostly brought up by men. While much of the topic around the gender gap in communications is focused on women, many female and male participants brought up challenges against men in the communications field. One challenge is that women are not the only victims to gender bias, men are too. RQ2 explored perceptions of women and men leaders, and many participants explained that men can be perceived as villains when discussions of gender gaps arise, when in fact, that is not always the case. Men can also be perceived as poor leaders and poor communicators and as those who want to keep women oppressed; however, that is not always the case. Several participants, both female and male, expressed that they believe women are simply better leaders. That said, the most overarching message the participants conveyed is that there needs to be a balance of genders and other diversities at all levels of leadership to create the best outcome for individuals and the organization. Multiple participants independently brought up their concerns that fewer and fewer men are entering the field of communications. These participants explained that because the pipeline for new communications leaders is so saturated with women, that eventually the gender gap will likely become flipped to

where there are few communications leaders that are men. One female communications leader said, “we want and need more men in communications.” As previous research has suggested and as this study has reaffirmed, the best business outcomes are achieved when there is diversity at all levels throughout the organization.

RQ4: Closing the Gender Gap

RQ4 asked about what communications leaders believe can be done to mitigate factors that are adding to the gender gap. Participants were asked to explain broadly what they feel can be done to help close the gender gap and then to explain what advice they would offer to a woman and a man to help to close the gender gap. This section will be divided into two themes: mitigating factors that add to the gender gap and advice from communications leaders to women and men. In summary, there are a broad range of solutions discussed, but several key things were identified that communications leaders feel will help to close the gap. Unless specified, both female and also male participants shared similar sentiment within each listed theme.

Mitigating factors that add to the gender gap. Participants shared a multitude of tactics that they felt would be helpful in mitigating factors that contribute to the gender gap. These tactics can be boiled down into three themes: organizational mitigating factors, cultural mitigating factors, and personal mitigating factors

Organizational mitigating factors. There were seven subthemes identified as organizational mitigating factors. These subthemes are all interconnected in that in one way or another and they tie back to mitigating factors within the organization. These seven themes are: cultivating a flexible work environment, making men part of the solution, hiring and promoting women, demand and negotiate for pay equality, set goals and hold people accountable, organizational policies, and a pipeline thing that will change with time.

Cultivating a flexible work environment. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme; however, it was mostly brought up by women. In regard to challenges associated with working mothers, participants agreed that creating a flexible work environment is the main thing that can be done to help eliminate the gender gap. Some participants explained that they have observed some teams who believe in “flexible working” but in reality, their team is the exception to the rule and that they expect “butts in seats from 8 am to 5 pm.” However, participants explained that flexible working means flexible working locations and flexible working hours because in the office from 9 am to 5 pm is no longer suitable for the lifestyle that people want and need. Participants explained that technology has gotten to the point where it makes it easy to work from anywhere and that organizations simply need to create flexible cultures that make it easy for people to work from wherever they need to be. Several participants noted that beyond the organization as a whole, that every supervisor should be mindful of the type of culture they want to create, and that each manager should work hard to help create a flexible work environment. One female participant explained that organizations simply need to figure out how to “not kill everyone off.”

A flexible work environment extends beyond day to day, and participants explained that it also includes generous maternity and paternity leave and adequate ramping-up time for women when returning back to the workplace. Several participants explained that they had observed situations where a woman started back part-time or solely from home before coming back fully from maternity leave. Participants also explained that oftentimes men get shorted when it comes to paternity leave, but that leave for a new child is very important for men, and more time than just one week.

Making men part of the solution. Several participants shared that they had observed that situations where women tried to solve things themselves and were unsuccessful. Participants explained that men must be part of the solution. One female participant said:

Make sure that women are given equal opportunity, that they are brought to the table.

You do this by partnering with men. We need men to see that this is an issue and know that they are part of the solution.

Another female participant said:

This can't just be a conversation of women with other women. We have to bring our male counterparts along to make this truly a diverse and inclusive conversation so that the high tide raises all boats.

One male participant said:

Men are often completely blind to biased behavior because we've never experienced it.

We need to become more aware of the struggles that everyone faces.

Other participants shared similar sentiments and explained that there are a lot of men who want to do something to help but who may just not know how to do it. Participants agreed that as women and men partner together on this issue that progress will continue to be made.

Hiring and promoting women. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme; however, it was mostly brought up by men. One male participant explained that closing the gender gap starts with hiring a diverse slate of candidates and that this is "the secret sauce." This participant described that in his experience that this is something that will not just happen but something that needs to be "demanded," and he said, "Demand that recruiting teams dig deeper and work harder to provide a diverse slate of candidates." Several participants noted that organizations still hire on a "check-box mentality" when they should be hiring the best candidate

regardless of gender. Most participants felt that their HR teams are good at finding diverse candidates, but they need to push and they need to know it's a priority for leadership. Another male participant explained that we simply need to "widen the funnel at the bottom" and "be mindful of how many referrals you look at." This participant explained that pulling candidates too heavily from referrals can lead to "more people like you already have" and that it may not be helpful in trying to get more diverse candidates. One female participant suggested omitting anything relating to the gender of candidates on resumes in order to hire people purely based on qualifications.

In addition to interviewing a diverse slate of candidates, another male participant explained that "communications groups need to be mindful of figuring out ways to help women to rise through the ranks." Other participants explained that if the funnel is widened at the bottom that it will make it easier for more women to rise up and become leaders. One male participant suggested that there need to be "more opportunities for leadership and lower levels where people can grow and be recognized." As people have the opportunity for recognition, other participants suggested that it is critical to hire and promote from within.

One male participant explained how his organization was able to make changes and build this mentality "into the fabric of who we are." He explained:

It begins and ends with first and foremost understanding that gender bias is in fact, a competitive disadvantage to your business. Every business today reacts to really one thing—is what you're doing accelerating the business or diminishing the business? That's really what it comes down to. If you believe that gender bias is hurting your business, you've got to take very stringent, clear, specific steps to show safely that you're serious

about eliminating it. Then start with who you hire, promote, recognize, etc. It's really not that complicated.

Demand and negotiate for pay equality. Several participants explained that the pay gap is fueling the gender gap. In order to help mitigate this, participants explained that it is important to understand what this role should be paid and then work to negotiate that. One female participant said, "Learn how to negotiate from those who have been before and then fight hard to be paid what you are worth." Multiple female and male participants explained that women simply must be better at promoting themselves and other women.

Set goals and hold people accountable. Several participants noted that in seeking to close the gender gap that it is important to set goals and then hold people accountable for those goals to ensure that change actually happens. They explained that if accountability and follow-up are not part of this then change will not happen. One female participant explained:

I've been part of committees to help improve gender equality and diversity, and the only way change happens is when people consciously make a plan to change and then hold people accountable.

Organizational policies. Most participants agreed that varying types of company policies and informal practices are helpful in eliminating gender bias and in closing the gender gap. Organizational policies were defined to participants as those types of things that the organization drives or mandates in their practices. Participants explained that some of these things just happen organically, while others, such as recruitment pipeline and total gender count in certain roles, were constantly measured and were discussed regularly in executive leadership meetings.

One of the things that most participants noted is that in their company handbook or policy book that there is clear verbiage about anti-discrimination and equality throughout the

organization. Some participants explained that their leadership team had signed a pledge to consider a certain number of qualified women for every qualified man they considered while other participants explained that this process was something they themselves would have to demand from recruiting teams. One male participant explained that they had observed that even small company policies such as “not reimbursing receipts from Hooters” helped to take a stance on positive gender equality through the workplace. One female participant noted that she has observed making gender initiatives part of someone’s KPIs and making more formal celebrations of success so that discussions around gender are a positive thing. Multiple women and multiple male participants explained that their organization mandated at least annual training to help identify and eliminate different types of biases and other unacceptable behaviors. One male participant explained that his leadership team brings in a legal training team every year to help raise awareness, to train, and to help resolve any outstanding issues. Other participants explained that whatever the method, organizations should go to greater lengths to make it easier for those who are victims of gender biases to be able to report it.

Several participants explained that while these types of formal can be valuable, there can be some potential downsides. Certain policies that require a certain percentage of a board or leadership team to be diverse can be especially problematic. One participant explained that a recruiter reached out to her for a board position and the only question he cared about was if she would be in attendance at each of the board meetings. This participant explained further that they were only really interested in having her because she was a woman. To mitigate this type of behavior, this participant explained that she said no the role and that others need to be ready to do the same thing so these types of behaviors do not persist. One male participant explained that he has observed organizations that put too much in training:

To solve the gender problems in our organization, we just hired and promoted women. Period. There's no bullshit. We hired and promoted women who are incredibly smart, incredibly engaged, and incredibly respectful. We also hired men who are incredibly smart, incredibly engaged, and incredibly respectful. That's how we made it work. The problem with a lot of organizations is that they don't do anything. They don't hire and promote, and they expect tons on trainings.

A pipeline thing that'll change with time. Only male participants identified with this theme, female participants did not. Many participants explained that they believed that the gender gap is an issue that will ultimately change with time, especially as greater societal shifts continue to happen. Several participants explained that they believe that the gender gap is simply a "pipeline thing" or a "mathematics or number issue" that will work itself out with time. Several participants also said something such as "it's a generational thing that'll phase out" or "we need the leaders to retire." One male participant said:

The majority of those most senior-level leaders came from a generation where the communications industry was predominantly male. With the shift to where about 70 percent of the field is women, it is only a matter of time before things shift back to where the majority of the leadership is women.

A theme that came up over and over was that the communications industry is a reflection of society. One male participant said, "Society as a whole is still quite bigoted and chauvinistic. Until that changes, I don't know that we're going to see a ton of progress." That said, participants as a whole felt that while there is an element of waiting, that there still is a lot that can be done. With the changing generation and CCOs now coming from a diverse background, participants agree that gaps at all levels will continue to close. Participants were amazed at how

far we have come over the last 10 years and are excited to see where things will be in another 10 years.

Cultural mitigating factors. There were six subthemes identified as cultural mitigating factors. These subthemes are all interconnected in that in one way or another and they tie back to mitigating factors relating to culture. These six themes are: informal policies or cultural norms, not just rewarding those who are the loudest, strong examples of female leaders, a grassroots effort to driver leadership change, parents, educators and professional societies influencing the industry, and making communications a serious function.

Informal practices or cultural norms. Informal practices were defined to participants as those less formal or organic things that come about naturally. Participants also described a series of less formal things that happen at their organizations to help eliminate the gender gap. Several participants explained that they have observed that groups for women are important in helping to close the gender gap. Varying types of women's groups were common amongst many organizations, and participants noted that those women's groups that are most successful are those that include both women and men, provide some type of educational opportunity, and have executive sponsorship. Lean in Circles, women's lunches, and other types of out-of-office outings were also common types of informal practices. One female communications leader noted that all the men on her organization's executive team would take an annual hunting trip, so she organized an annual wine-tasting trip for the women—something that was positively received by both the women and men on this executive team. Another female participant explained how several members of her team will just walk around the office and talk with people to try to get to know them more on a personal level. Several other participants explained that they have seen a

lot of value in getting employees out of the office where they do activities together in order to get to know each other on a more intimate and personal level.

Not just rewarding those who are the loudest. Participants agreed that it is often the nature of the workplace that those who are loudest are often those who get the attention and who get what they want. Multiple participants explained that women are not as good at promoting themselves as men are. One female participant said, “Women need to be better about tooting their own horn, but leadership teams need to be better about evaluating people other than their own praise.” Participants explained that often they have observed those who are the loudest getting the most praise and promotions. Participants explained that the criteria for a leader have changed and that the leaders need to change their mentality. One male participant explained that we can get more women into leadership roles when leaders “...stop judging people with the criteria that you always have. Things have changed and leaders need to adapt to these changes.” In addition to looking at employees not just who are the loudest and judging on old criteria, another male participant explained that it is also important to make sure the makeup of the executive team “is a good representation of the groups that their organization serves.” A female participant explained that it is also important to:

Make sure all departments in your business are having their voices heard. Greater recognition of multiple voices and multiple perspectives will help raise women in communications but also throughout the enterprise.

Participants agreed that while having overly vocal people can lead to doing things the way that they have always been done, by making some of these small changes, it can make a big difference.

Strong examples of female leaders. Many participants explained that having strong examples of female leaders is essential in helping to close the gap. Participants noted that examples need to be seen in multiple places including in individual organizations, in publications from professional societies, in agency rankings, and in “hiring profiles.” One male participant said that observing successful women in high-ranking roles will “impact the trickle down to the rest of the industry” while another male participant explained that this will help “shape mindsets to have a more diverse communications leadership group in the future.”

Participants believe that we are starting to see more and more examples of strong and successful female communications leaders but there is still a long way to go before hitting the critical mass. One male participant explained, “women have had many opportunities over the past few years to be able to speak out for their own when it comes to sensitive topics such as mass shootings, stance on LGBTQ, and other topics. This has helped to elevate women in the organization and the pendulum is swinging back.” One female participant expressed her frustration in the lack of women in leadership and that having data that proves the value that women add and why we need more examples may be the only way to get more successful women. She said, “You can beg, plead, persuade but sometimes the only way to get someone to move is to show them the data.” Another female participant explained that we need to show leadership that we will have better business results if “we have all different kinds of viewpoints” while another female participant explained, “we need to put women in top spots and let them succeed.”

A grassroots-effort change to drive leadership change. Both female and also male participants identified with this theme, however, it was mostly brought up by female participants. One trend that came up with many different participants is that in order for sweeping change to

happen that it needs to come from the top in a top-down approach. However, participants explained that it often does not happen this way without pressure to change. However, participants explained that, in general, most leaders are willing to help adapt and change things if they know that something is important to the employees and other stakeholders. One female participant shared that this needs to be a “grassroots-level” movement. This participant explained:

Make your boss aware of your career aspirations. Let them know that gender diversity is something that is important to you and work with them to impact change at your level. This will eventually bubble up to leadership where a more sweeping and lasting change can happen. Eventually we'll get to a critical mass from the grassroots level.

One male participant explained that in order for a lasting change to happen that it must come from the CEO, and he explained:

It all starts from the top. If the CEO understands that he or she has an imbalance from a gender perspective, then it's that person's responsibility to, one, acknowledge that there's not a balance and then, two, be willing to lead and to show how he or she is going to close that gap. That's absolutely where it starts. Otherwise, you have fits and starts within other departments and among other leaders, but you don't have that overarching organizational support that starts at the top.

Multiple participants agreed that it is key to work with leadership and to make it known in order to help move the needle. Participants noted that even those outside of the organization such as shareholders and stakeholders need to demand change in order for it to happen.

Parents, educators, and professional societies influencing the industry. These groups influence the industry and need to continue to drive change in the field. Although these groups

are not the ones that will ultimately close the gap, there is a lot they can do to help drive change. One of the things that participants expressed that they would benefit from is more real-world stuff and tactical how-tos shared by professional societies to show all organizations how to close the gender gap.

Other participants explained that students need to be exposed to female leadership early on in their educations. One participant explained that while educational leaders should be helping to close the gender gap, most of the responsibility lies with individual organizations, “I think the professors think this should start in undergraduate classes, but I feel that for people to really grasp this that it needs to be reaffirmed in grad school and in individual organizations.” While the majority of conversations with participants focused on pushing initiatives in higher education, participants explained that things need to start early in the individual's education—high school, junior high, and elementary school.

But for many participants, the root needs to change even earlier, as children are being born and raised, they need parents who will begin teaching women and men that they can do anything. Several female participants expressed that it is especially important for little girls to be told by their fathers that they can do anything they want, promoting the fact that both women and men can do anything and both can be strong leaders starting in the home when children are born. One male participant said, “Teach equality at every level of the system, beginning in pre-school and reaffirming on a regular basis in the workplace.”

Making communications a serious function. There is a lot of existing literature that talks about helping communications to have a seat at the table. This is something that female and male participants brought up. Participants explained that working to make communications a “serious function” will help to close the gender gap. Women can have two strikes against them when they

are a woman and coming from what some view as a “softer function” of communications. Participants explained that this starts by “seeing ourselves as a serious function within the enterprise” (female participant). One male participant explained, “The more we see ourselves as a serious function, the more we’ll build a career-minded profession.”

Personal mitigating factors. There were four subthemes identified as personal mitigating factors. These subthemes are all interconnected in that in one way or another and they tie back to mitigating factors relating to something with one’s self. These four themes are: identifying and eliminating personal biases, women need to fill holes in their skillset, spend time getting to know people, and just do not let it happen.

Identifying and eliminating personal biases. Multiple participants explained that another key to eliminating the gender gap is to be able to identify and eliminate your own personal bias. Everyone has biases that are often shaped over years of experiences, but learning how to “audit” biases is a skill that multiple participants felt is critical. Participants described two levels to this bias audit, the first level being more high level as a “gut check” and the second level deeper when the individual really “analyzes their interpersonal communications” and a “self-evaluation.” One female participant explained that it is important to “not focus on people you can’t change, but rather focus on changing yourself. You can change yourself.” Participants explained that after you have identified your personal biases that the next step is to make an action plan. One female participant explained that part of this plan includes determining how you will respond when something happens so you know how to respond. This participant goes beyond calling something bias and says that it goes into drawing a clear line of what is harassment and knowing exactly how you are going to act when that line is crossed. One male

participant described that another part of this process is determining what specifically you can do to help close the gap, and he said:

The first step is to start with me and determining where I can insert myself appropriately into conversations that'll help to gently raise the question of how to help close the gender gap. The only way things will change is if we're willing to make the effort to bring about change.

Multiple participants brought up that talking with a close friend or participating in various types of in-office training are “helpful in making you realize how many of your judgments may not be accurate.”

Women need to fill holes in their skillset. This particular item was brought up only by female participants. These participants explained that women need to hold a self-examination and determine what holes they have in their skillset and to determine how to eliminate those holes. One participant explained how she worked a lot to learn how to work with private equity and venture capital partners so that she could excel as a leader. Another participant explained how she spent time learning how the stock market works. This participant explained that she would also follow major sporting events so that she would be able to speak intelligently about sports when they came up in the workplace. Beyond filling in gaps in skillsets, participants agreed that women need to put themselves out there in order to stretch. One participant explained:

Women need to make more of an investment in being intentional about how we can identify, grow, invest, create conversations where there aren't any being had right now with other women within networks to give women the confidence to take on stretched

roles, to identify themselves for opportunities that they may not be 100% ready for, but should go through the experience and put themselves up for these types of positions.

Spend time getting to know people. Several female and male participants explained the importance of everyone getting to know people as people and not just as co-workers. They explained that doing so will help people to see people as people and will make work easier. Participants explained that this is something that should be done inside and outside the workplace. One highly successful female participant explained her process in the workplace for doing this:

Women need to spend more time with people. Spend a lot of time developing relationships with people. Getting people to trust them, to understand their value, and then making sure that the woman is understanding the other person. Hold a lot of one-on-ones and really get to know people. It has been on my calendar for 15 years, to stop, get out and go talk with people.

Just do not let it happen. At the end of the day, most participants agreed that one of the main keys to closing the gender gap is to just not allow biases and inequality to happen. Many participants said that “you just have to call it out when it happens.” Participants explained that both women and men have equal rights to call things out when they see them and to prevent things from happening and one female participant said that “it’s a constant effort to stay attuned to not let it happen.” Another female participant explained:

Call people out publicly if they’re doing something that’s not okay. It won’t take long for them to learn. Be conscious of it. Help to create multiple women and men advocates to help you to do this. Also, work with your HR department to make it happen.

Other participants suggested that using humor can help to diffuse a tense situation by being light-hearted. One female said, “I use jokes with goodwill and humor to help defuse and correct when overt biases are shown.”

In addition to not letting it happen by calling it out, one male participant explained that we need to make discussing gender issues “topic of frequent conversation” and that that we should all “talk about how you should behave in the workplace and how to take things seriously.” Other participants explained that you need to “talk openly about the expectation,” and then you need to “hold people accountable and commit people so it’s not just lip service,” and that this is the key to getting people to “truly operate this way.”

Advice from communications leaders to women and men. Participants were asked what advice they would offer to women and men to assist in closing the gender gap. Some participants had advice that they felt was applicable to both while others had specific advice for women and specific advice for men. Participants were excited by this question and in one way or another were excited to help contribute to closing the gender gap. Three themes were identified for this area: advice to women and men, advice to women, and advice to men.

Advice to women and men. Participants suggested a plethora of advice that had an application to both women and men. Some of this advice included the situation that women and men put themselves in, making sure that situation is not a toxic environment but also is an environment that will push them and help to grow and develop as leaders. Participants elaborated that women and men need to be an example, work hard, be mindful of their physical appearance by dressing the part of a leader, speak up when issues arise, and to hold frequent “gut checks” to be aware of personal biases. One female participant explained that she hoped that everyone

would come to realize that “the world is going to be a better, healthier place when we can have a true diversity of thought and interaction.”

Advice to women. Participants also gave advice that they felt was especially important for women. Several successful female participants explained that pretending like the gender gap does not exist has helped them. These women said, “play and work like the gender gap doesn’t exist” and “don’t let gender be an issue; if you don’t make it an issue, others won’t.” Another female participant explained that while there are still negative perceptions held around women and that women should not have any “holes in their skillset,” that they should find a support group and that they should go above and beyond to be the best they can be. Several men offered advice that women should “never doubt themselves,” “never be something you’re not, be yourself,” and to “be confident without being overbearing.”

Advice to men. Several participants explained that to close the gender gap they really need to be part of the solution and that this “isn’t just a women’s issue” and that men should simply: “Don’t do it. Don’t tolerate it. Don’t let gender biases live on.” Other participants suggested that men “acknowledge that there is a gap” and to “look at the data” to see the value that diversity can bring, and to “be deliberate in what you’re doing to close the gap and to make sure that you set a woman up to succeed.”

Discussion

The Value of this Study in Gender Gap Research

The gender gap is still important, and in recent years it has become an even more relevant topic. One participant from this study praised this research despite gender being a topic that has been studied by many scholars, and this participant said, “I commend you for studying this topic; many people are studying new and upcoming biases, but focusing on gender biases is still

critically important because it's still an issue" (male participant). This study confirmed how important the study of gender is and how important it is to study gender in specific fields, in this case, communications, in order to understand small nuances that are specific to this field. The real value of this particular study is the in-depth nuances that it identifies of factors that are contributing to the gender gap in addition to what things can be done to help to mitigate the gender gap. The study of gender in the field of communications is also important because of misbeliefs that it can help to dispel and the concrete evidence that it can provide. One of the things to close the gender gap that participants shared is by not just listening to the loudest people. Inaccuracies can be cleared up with data and data provides greater clarity on how to best go about solving problems such as the gender gap in communications leadership.

Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this study is to contribute to some of the amazing research conducted on this topic and to provide additional lenses through which to study the field of communications. This study provides additional insight into the process by which individuals become communications leaders and identifies some of the key challenges that women and men face in their journey to the top. Additionally, the study helps by building a bridge of previous research into career advancement, biases, leadership, and gender.

Specifically, this study has shown that gender still very much is an issue and that there are many complexities and nuances around the topic of gender. In thinking about the process of becoming a leader, this study uncovered the key points in a person's life when they begin to start considering leadership. While these points in the lives of women and men are largely the same, it is important to note these points so that parents, educators, workplace leaders, and professional societies can help to encourage both men and women to stretch themselves and to lead. In

comparing conversations with women and men, it is apparent that in large part the path to leadership is still easier for men than it is for women because of the reasons identified in this study.

This study also spelled out perceptions of women and men in the field of communications from the perspective of the most experienced people in the field. Participants have been working in the field of communications, in many cases multiple decades, which provided them great insight into how women and men communications leaders are perceived and into how women and men in communications are perceived generally. It was brought to light that there are negative perceptions of both women and men but that there are easy and pragmatic ways to dispel these. Studying the perceptions of communications also helped to show what some of the attributes of the best communications leaders are.

Prior to this study, a lot of excellent research was conducted to understand gender in the workplace and gender gaps. Over the past few years, scholars in the field of communications have begun to put a more targeted focus on understanding these gender gaps. Oakes & Hardwick (2017), KPMG (2018), and Place & Vardeman-Winter (2018) were a few of the studies that helped to inspire this study and further exploration into this topic. This study confirmed that mentorship, work-life fit, confidence, and unconscious bias, previously identified by other scholars, are indeed large factors that contribute to the gender gap. This study added additional nuances and details to those factors. This study also helped to uncover additional factors contributing to the gender gap not specifically called out in previous academic communications literature, such as people like people like them, the CEO and the CCO relationship, gender saturation in certain functions and industries, the funding club, sources of influence and

recruiting for leaders, clients are part of the problem, attrition of talented women from the field, and the pay gap fueling the gender gap (see Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap).

This study is also unique because of those things that were identified that are necessary to help mitigate the gender gap in communications leadership. This study identified things that are more overarching causes as well as identifying more tactical things that individual leaders can take back to their organizations to assist in mitigating the gender gap. Specifically, this study showed many pragmatic things that can be done to help close the gender gap: making men part of the solution, identifying and eliminating personal biases, cultivating a flexible work environment, helping to create strong examples of female leaders, hiring and promoting women, parents, having educators and professional societies influencing the industry, leveraging grassroots efforts, demanding and negotiating for pay equality, not just rewarding those who are the loudest, helping women to fill holes in their skillset, spend time getting to know people, setting goals and holding people accountable, making communications a serious function, and implementing organizational policies and informal practices or cultural norms at organizations that can help to drive change (see Mitigating Factors that add to the Gender Gap).

Practical Implications

To begin mitigating the gender gap in their individual organizations, leaders should consider starting conversations with their executive teams about this topic, if they are not already, and determine if this is something that is an issue at their organization and then develop a plan to mitigate any issues. This is a process that should take place at the highest levels of leadership at each organization; however, individual department and team leaders should consider this process as well.

Additionally, all practitioners should conduct a personal bias audit and determine what perceptions they may have that may be inaccurate. In a less formal setting, leaders may also want to consider sitting down with their individual team members to learn more about them and to see if and how each person on their team may be impacted by the gender gap or other types of gaps.

Individuals at their organizations should work to create groups of both women and men to drive the change that they want to see in an organization. At the end of the day, most organizations exist to make some type of financial return for the organization's stakeholders. However, one of the most key stakeholder groups that any organization has is its employees. As such, groups of employees should work together to create the type of culture and organization that they want to work for. In doing this, greater diversity and inclusion will be created, and a great financial return will occur for the organization.

Beyond doing things in their respective organizations, individuals should work within their sphere of influence to drive change in professional societies, educational institutions, and other groups. Additionally, individuals should work to drive change not only in the field of communications but in other industries as well. Gender gaps are also highly prevalent in other fields and in areas outside of work. As was mentioned by several participants, the communications field is a reflection of society, and these areas should be an area of focus as well. As each person decides that closing the gender gap is important to them, they will be able to make a lasting difference.

The Gender Gap Conceptual Model

Similarities and difference in the career path. Within this first phase of the communications leader's journey to leadership, we see that leaders largely view the path the same. Both women and men begin aspiring for leadership during the same time life and their

motivations for aspiring for leadership are largely the same. However, the one key difference is that women aspire for leadership to escape gender biases, while men do not. Additionally, multiple male participants described the journey to leadership as an “organic process” while female participants did not describe it this way. Although the journey for women is getting easier, both women and also men agree that that path to leadership for a woman still remains more difficult than for a man. Although both women and also men believe the path is getting easier, some women, especially older women felt that good progress had been made while others; however, younger women, felt frustrated with the lack of progress that has been made. Conversely, men do not feel frustrated with the lack of progress that has been made. It makes sense that younger women are the group most frustrated with the lack of progress and often the most vocal because they have not seen first hand the progress that has been made. However, largely the most horrifying stories shared were from the older women in the study. These are the same women who have described a lot of progress over the past several decades.

Perceptions of women and men communications leaders. While there were contrasting views in whether or not women and men are perceived differently in the workplace, there were both women and men that believe that there is and is not a difference. There were also women and men who independently identified themes of perceived difference such as differences in how people are perceived when they are being assertive.

Factors contributing to the gender gap. There was a greater variance in the response of female and male participants in this section than any other section. For example, the theme of people hiring people that are just like them was a theme that was mostly identified by female participants, as was complexities that women face in socializing situations, especially in working with funding partners. Conversely, men were the primary ones to bring up biases against men

and were the only ones to bring up the process of the talent pool that leaders are generally considered from. This is interesting because it indicates that women are more attuned to socializing complexities because of first or second hand experiences and men more easily explained the recruiting process for a head of communications because they are more likely to have been through that process before.

Closing the gender gap. Many male participants brought up the the gender gap is simply a “numbers” or “pipeline” issue that will change over time (male participants). Only male participants brought this up, which is interesting because it shows that for some men, they believe this is something that will eventually just work itself out, a belief not overtly shared by female participants. Men were also the primary group to bring up hiring women and explaining it as something you just must do. Women did not describe this process the same way. When describing how to drive change to close the gender gap, women described the process as a “grassroots” effort that everyone needs to work together on. While some men brought up similar sentiments, driving grass root change was mostly a topic discussed by women. Men primarily bringing up a “pipeline” mentality that will sort itself out is vastly different than the women “grassroots” mentality that shows the need to individually act, see Table 2.

Table 2

The Gender Gap Conceptual Model

| Theme | Subtheme / Sub-Subtheme | Identified by women and men | Identified by women | Identified by men |
|---|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Similarities and Differences in the Career Path | | | | |
| When Aspirations Begin | Never remember aspiring for leadership | X | | |
| | At a young age with encouragement | X | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| | During high school or college | X | | |
| | Within the first few years of their career | X | | |
| Why aspirations begin | To have more control of their career outcome | X | | |
| | To be a better leader | X | | |
| | To escape gender bias | | X | |
| The Leader's Career Path | Historically a more difficult path for women | X | | |
| | A mixed belief on the current path for women and men | X | | |
| | Women simply encounter things that men do not | X | | |
| | An organization's culture has a great impact on women and men | X | | |
| Perceptions of Women and Men Communications Leaders | | | | |
| Women and Men Leaders Viewed Differently in the Workplace | Felt there was no difference in how women and men are viewed | X | | |
| | Felt there was a difference in how women and men are viewed | X | | |
| | [sub-subtheme] Viewed differently when being assertive | X | | |
| | [sub-subtheme] Childbearing | X | | |
| | [sub-subtheme] Socializing Complexities | X | | |
| | [sub-subtheme] Men are Naturally Perceived with | X | | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| | More Credibility | | | |
| | [sub-subtheme] Communications is a Reflection of Society | X | | |
| Differences between a Woman and Man Leader | Felt there was no difference | X | | |
| | Felt there was a difference | X | | |
| Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap | | | | |
| Relationships | Building relationships with leaders and touting themselves | X | | |
| | The CEO and the CCO relationship | X | | |
| | Sources of influence and recruiting for leaders | | | X |
| | People like people who are like them | X | | |
| | The funding club | | X | |
| Unique Challenges to Women | Lack of assurance that it can be done | X | | |
| | Lack of business acumen | X | | |
| | Childbearing and rearing | X | | |
| | Women are not as confident as men | X | | |
| | Lack of quality examples and mentors | X | | |
| Issues in the Communications Field | Attrition of talented women from the field | X | | |
| | Communications not viewed as strategic | X | | |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| | Clients are part of the problem | X | | |
| | Gender saturation in certain functions and industries | X | | |
| A long history of male dominance | n/a | X | | |
| The pay gap is fueling the gender gap | n/a | | X | |
| Lack of awareness of the gender gap | n/a | X | | |
| Sexual harassment and sexual assault | n/a | | X | |
| Biases | How to tell if something is biased | X | | |
| | What contributes to bias in the workplace? | X | | |
| | People feeling there is a gender bias in their workplace | X | | |
| | Biases in hiring | X | | |
| | Biases in compensation | X | | |
| | Biases in promotions | X | | |
| | Biases in treatment | X | | |
| | Biases in recognition | X | | |
| | Biases against men | X | | |
| Closing the Gender Gap | | | | |
| Organizational Mitigating Factors | cultivating a flexible work environment | X | | |
| | making men part of the solution | X | | |
| | Hiring and promoting | X | | |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | women | | | |
| | Demand and negotiate for pay equality | X | | |
| | Set goals and hold people accountable | X | | |
| | Organizational Policies | X | | |
| | A pipeline thing that'll change with time | | | X |
| Cultural Mitigating Factors | Informal Practices or Cultural Norms | X | | |
| | Not just rewarding those who are the loudest | X | | |
| | Strong examples of female leaders | X | | |
| | A grassroots-effort change to drive leadership change | X | | |
| | Parents, educators, and professional societies influencing the industry | X | | |
| | Making communications a serious function | X | | |
| Personal Mitigating Factors | Identifying and Eliminating Personal Biases | X | | |
| | Women need to fill holes in their skillset | | X | |
| | Spend time getting to know people | X | | |
| | Just do not let it happen | X | | |

Conclusion

Approximately 75 percent of the communications field but less than 20 percent of senior-level communications leaders, are female (FitzPatrick, 2013; Oakes & Hardwick, 2017). This is

due to a long-standing history of social norms, because people are comfortable hiring people like themselves, childbearing and rearing responsibilities are primarily handled by women, the relationship of the CEO and the head of communications, lack of quality mentors and examples, and varying types of biases are some of the reasons why this gender gap exists. Although both women and men generally begin aspiring for leadership around the same points in my life, given these factors, men have a much more “organic process” to becoming a communications leader than women do. In some cases, women are expected to go through roles or jump through hoops that men are not required to. Additionally, this study shows that women simply have more doubts about their abilities and fewer opportunities to grow into leadership than men do. This study also showed that there are a number of negative perceptions of women that make it more difficult for women to advance to be a senior-level communications leader.

Given the importance of this topic, there has been a greater focus on the study of the gender gap in communications leadership. This study seeks to build on this research and to provide additional insight into what can be done to close the gender gap. Through interviews with senior-level communications leaders, this study provides pragmatic things that communications leaders can do to help eliminate gender gaps at their organizations and what all communications practitioners can do to help close the gender gap. This study also provides additional insight on implications around the pay gap in communications and the attrition of men out of the communications field.

This study builds on Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018), which calls on additional research to be conducted to help improve the field of communications for future generations. The author of this study wishes to extend the same invitation to other practitioners and scholars. Closing the gender gap is critical for many of the reasons described throughout this study.

Through the dedicated commitment of practitioners and scholars alike, closing the gender gap becomes a real possibility.

Limitations & Additional Research

While this study has a lot of value that it adds, there are some limitations to this study. One limitation is the reach and diversity of the participants. The majority of participants in this study were white and were located in the United States. While it was not the intent of this study, this study lacks a quantitative component to provide robust data across the field to determine the reach of each of these factors identified and to quantify how impactful each of the mitigating factors identified are. Another limitation of this study is that participants were collected via referrals and that largely all participants appeared to want to help to close the gender gap.

Hopefully, this study will help to inspire additional research on this and adjacent topics. More specifically, a deeper quantitative study is needed to quantify these findings and additional qualitative and quantitative studies are needed with more communications leaders outside of the United States. Additionally, more targeted studies would be valuable in the client/agency relationship and how this impacts culture and bias, a study on higher education to better understand biases of communications students and what academia can do to help mitigate these biases, and a study on why fewer men are entering the communications industry. Continued study on this topic is needed to help mitigate gender gaps and gender bias and to provide practical and tangible applications for practitioners and academics.

The research in this study is especially insightful and valuable because of the participants. These participants are very senior, very smart, and very busy. Gaining their perspective has given this study the value that it has. This is in large part due to the partnership and support from the Institute of Public Relations to facilitate introductions to these fabulous participants. This

study is also unique because, unlike any other study of this topic, this study employed 60-minute one-on-one interviews with these senior-level communications leaders. One-on-one in-depth interviews are different than any other research method because they provide a unique experience to dive deep into a topic with an individual. This study builds other excellent research and opens new doors for additional excellent research on this topic.

References

- Andrews, S. (2017). The leadership gender gap. *Training Industry*. Retrieved from <https://trainingindustry.com/magazine/may-june-2017/the-leadership-gender-gap/>
- Aldoory, L. (2007). The social construction of leadership and its implications for women in mass communication. In P. J. Creedon, & J. Cramer (Eds.). *Women in Mass Communication* (pp. 247–256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. (2004). Leadership and gender in public relations: Perceived effectiveness of transformational and transactional leadership styles. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 16*, 157–183. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1602_2.
- Algren, M., & Eichorn, K. C. (2007). Cognitive communication competence within public relations practitioners: Examining gender differences between technicians and managers. *Public Relations Review, 33*, 77–83. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/j.pubrev.2006.11.010>.
- Arvate, P. R., Galilea, G. W., & Todescat, I. (In Press). The queen bee: A myth? The effect of top-level female leadership on subordinate females. *The Leadership Quarterly*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.03.002>
- The Balance Careers. (n.d.). Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills: What's the Difference? Retrieved from <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/hard-skills-vs-soft-skills-2063780>
- Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., & Atwater, L. (1996). The transformational and transactional leadership of men and women. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 45*(1), 5–34.

- Berger, B. (2012). Key themes and findings. The cross-cultural study of leadership in public relations and communication management. Paper presented at the Plank Center Leadership summit in Chicago, IL.
- Berger, B. K., & Heyman, W. C. (2005). You can't homogenize success in PR: Top PR executives reveal 10 patterns in success. Conference paper presented at the International Communication Association annual conference (pp. 1–29).
- Berger, Meng & Heyman (2017). Gender Differences Deepen, Leader-Employee Gap Remains and Grades Slide. *The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations*. Retrieved from <http://plankcenter.ua.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Report-Card-2-Research-Report.pdf>
- Berger (2012). The cross- cultural study of leadership in public relations and communication management. *The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations*. Retrieved from <http://plankcenter.ua.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Summary-of-Themes-and-Findings-Leader-Survey.pdf>
- Berakova, D. (2017). How do companies benefit from gender diversity and female leadership? *Recruiting Blogs*. Retrieved from <https://www.recruitingblogs.com/profiles/blogs/how-do-companies-benefit-from-gender-diversity-and-female>
- Bowen, S. A. (2009). What communication professionals tell us regarding dominant coalition access and gaining membership. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 37(4), 418–443.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887 Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>

- Brennen, B. S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Burns, J.M, (1978), *Leadership*, N.Y, Harper and Row.
- Chirikova, A. Ye. (2003). Zhenshina and myzhchina kak top menedzhery rossiiskix kompanii: Ponyat' znachit prinyat' [Woman and man as top managers of Russian companies: To understand means to accept]. *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya*, 1, 1–24.
- Daymon, C., & Surma, A. (2012). The mutable identities of women in public relations. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1, 177–196.
- Devillard, S., Hunt, V., & Yee, L. (2018, March). Still looking for room at the top: Ten years of research on women in the workplace. *McKinsey Quarterly*. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/still-looking-for-room-at-the-top-ten-years-of-research-on-women-in-the-workplace>
- Erzikova, E., & Berger, B. K. (2016). Gender effect in Russian public relations: A perfect storm of obstacles for women. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 56, 28-36. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2016.02.011
- Everbach, T. (2014). Digital depression: Where are the women in tech? *Media Report to Women*, 42(3), 24. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1560163802?accountid=13381>.
- Feser, Mayol, & Srinivasan (2015). Decoding leadership: What really matters. *McKinsey & Company*. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/decoding-leadership-what-really-matters>

- McKinsey & Company (2012). The State of Human Capital 2012—Why the human capital function still has far to go. *McKinsey & Company*. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-state-of-human-capital-2012-report>
- Fitch, K., & Third, A. (2014). Ex-journos and promo girls: Feminization and professionalization in the Australian public relations industry. In C. Daymon, & K. Demetrious (Eds.). *Gender and Public Relations: Critical Perspectives on Voice, Image and Identity* (pp. 247–268). New York, NY: Routledge.
- FitzPatrick, M. (2013, February 1). A strong case for female inclusion at the top level. *PR Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.prweek.com/article/1276818/strong-case-female-inclusion-top-level>
- Fontaine, S. (2017). What's not to Like?: A Qualitative Study of Young Women Politicians' Self-Framing on Twitter. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 29(5), 219–237.
- Geyer-Semple, V. (2011). Classroom to boardroom: The role of gender in leadership style, stereotypes and aptitude for command in public relations. *Public Relations Journal*, 5(2), 1–17. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2011.625364>.
- Gino, F., Wilmut, C. A., & Brooks, A. W. (2015). Compared to men, women view professional advancement as equally attainable, but less desirable. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*, 112(40), 12354-12359. Retrieved from <http://gap.hks.harvard.edu/compared-men-women-view-professional-advancement-equally-attainable-less-desirable>

- The Holmes Report (2017). Global top 250 PR agency ranking 2017. *The Holmes Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.holmesreport.com/ranking-and-data/global-pr-agency-rankings/2017-pr-agency-rankings/top-250>
- Janus, J. M. (2008). Gender roles, leadership and public relations. University of Missouri-Columbia.
- Jiang, H. (2009). Gender, leadership, and teams: Examining female leadership in public relations from a new perspective. Conference paper presented at the International Communication Association annual conference (pp. 1–32).
- Jin, Y. (2010). Emotional leadership as a key dimension of public relations leadership: A national survey of public relations leaders. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(2), 159–181.
- Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2008). Focus groups: Strategic articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd edn, pp. 375–402). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- KPMG (2018). KPMG Women’s Leadership Study. *KPMG*. Retrieved from [KPMG.com/WomensLeadership](https://www.kpmg.com/WomensLeadership)
- Kransy (2012, February 17). Infographic: Women control the money in America. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/infographic-women-control-the-money-in-america-2012-2>
- Krivkovich, A., Robinson, K., Starikova, I., Valentino, R., & Yee, L. (2017). Women in the workplace 2017. *McKinsey & Company*. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2017>

- Lee, J. (2011, Mar. 4). Diversity of agency leadership remains up for debate. *PRWeek*. Retrieved from <http://www.prweek.com/article/1264912/diversity-agency-leadership-remains-debate>
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mack, C. E., Kelly, K. S., & Wilson, C. (2016). Finding an academic home for fundraising: a multidisciplinary study of scholars' perspectives. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 21(3), 180-194.
- Martinellia, D., & Erzikova, E. (2017). Public relations leadership development cycle: A cross-cultural perspective. *Public Relations Review*, 43, 1062–1072.
- McKie, D., & Willis, P. (2015). Advancing tendencies? PR leadership, general leadership, and leadership pedagogy. *Public Relations Review*, 41, 628–635. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.02.020
- Mintz, L. (2017). Creating a Culture of Conscious Inclusion: An Interview with Adrienne Penta. *Inc*. Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/laurel-mintz/crafting-change-creating-a-culture-of-conscious-inclusion.html>
- Meng, J. (2013). Learning by leading: Integrating leadership in public relations education for an enhanced value. *Public Relations Review*, 39, 609-611. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.09.005
- Meng, J., Berger, B. K., Gower, K. K., & Heyman, W. C. (2012). A test of excellent leadership in public relations: Key qualities, valuable sources, and distinctive leadership perceptions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24(1), 18–36. doi: 10.1080/1062726X.2012.626132.

- Molleda, J. C., Kochhar, S., & Wilson, C. (2015). Tipping the balance: A decision-making model for localization in global public relations agencies. *Public Relations Review*, 41(3), 335-344.
- Morgan Stanley (2017, January 17). An investor's guide to gender diversity. *Morgan Stanley*. Retrieved from <https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/gender-diversity-investor-guide>
- Neill, M. (2012). *Seat at the Table(s): An Examination of Senior Public Relations Practitioners' Power and Influence Among Multiple Executive-Level Coalitions* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/22093/neill-dissertation-20126.pdf?sequence=1>
- Nelson, L. (2017, July 5). Why is good leadership important? *Career Trend*. Retrieved from <https://careertrend.com/about-6546564-good-leadership-important-.html>
- Oakes, A. & Hardwick, S. (2017). GWPR survey reveals significant gender gap at top. *Global Women in PR*. Retrieved from <http://www.assorel.it/it/news/240/>
- Noland, M., Moran, T., Kotschwar, B. (2016). Is gender diversity profitable? Evidence from a global survey. *Peterson Institute*. Retrieved from <https://piie.com/publications/wp/wp16-3.pdf>
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G.R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Place, K. R. (2011). Power and gender at the crossroads: A qualitative examination of the nexus of power and gender in public relations. *Prism*, 8(1), 1–13. Retrieved from <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>.
- Place, K. R. & Vardeman-Winter, J. (2018). Where are the women? An examination of research on women and leadership in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 44, 165–173.

- Pompper, D., & Jung, T. (2013). Outnumbered yet still on top, but for how long? Theorizing about men working in the feminized field of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 39(5), 497-506. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.08.007>
- Racioppi, R. (2018). Three Obstacles Hindering Women's Career Advancement. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnycouncil/2018/04/18/three-obstacles-hindering-womens-career-advancement/#6552060d99e9>
- Resnick, H. S. (2003). Can leadership be developed, learned? *Jacksonville Business Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.bizjournals.com/jacksonville/stories/2003/01/06/smallb3.html>
- Rigoglioso, M. (2011). Researchers: How Women Can Succeed in the Workplace. *Insights by Stanford Business*. Retrieved from <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/researchers-how-women-can-succeed-workplace>
- Rogers, T. (2011, October 16). Why do men and women talk differently? *Salon*. Retrieved from https://www.salon.com/2011/10/16/why_do_men_and_women_talk_differently/
- Sanow, (2015). 21 Eye-opening ways men and women communicate differently. *LinkedIn*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/21-eye-opening-ways-men-women-communicate-differently-arnold-sanow/>
- Shah, A. (2015, Apr.). Why aren't there more female CEOs in PR? *The Holmes Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.holmesreport.com/long-reads/article/why-aren't-there-more-female-ceos-in-pr>.
- Silverstein, M. J., & Sayre, K. (2009, September). The female economy. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2009/09/the-female-economy>

- Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. M., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice* (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Storie, L. K. (2017). Relationship Cultivation in Public Diplomacy: A Qualitative Study of Relational Antecedents and Cultivation Strategies. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 29(6), 295-310.
- Tsetsura, K. (2010). How female practitioners in Moscow view their profession: A pilot study. *Public Relations Review*, 36, 78–80. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.10.001
- Tsetsura, K. (2011). Is public relations real job? How female practitioners construct the profession. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(1), 1–23. doi: 10.1080/1062726X.2010.504763
- Tsetsura, K. (2012). A struggle for legitimacy: Russian women secure their professional identities in public relations in a hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace. *Public Relations Review*, 6(1), 1–21. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/academica.edu/documents/30864122/2012Tsetsura.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1540259229&Signature=D4kZftDIPGDDXpmCcvDkk7UjGmg%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DA_struggle_for_legitimacy_Russian_women.pdf
- Tsetsura, K. (2014). Constructing public relations as a women's profession in Russia. *Revista Internacional De Relaciones Públicas*, 8(4), 85–110. Retrieved from <http://revistarelacionespublicas.uma.es/index.php/revrrpp/article/view/293>

- Waters, R. D. (2013). The role of stewardship in leadership: Applying the contingency theory of leadership to relationship cultivation practices of public relations practitioners. *Journal of Communication Management*, 17(4), 324–340.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2329488415598429>.
- Werder, K. P., & Holtzhausen, D. (2009). An analysis of the influence of public relations department leadership style on public relations strategy use and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(4), 404–427.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10627260902966391>.
- Wilson, C., Callister, M., & Seipel, M. (2018). Everything is not *Pleasantville*: Reframing Public Relations Encroachment as Work Group Autonomy in Higher Education. *Public Relations Journal*, 11(3). <https://prjournal.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/4.-everything-is-not-pleasantville-reframing-public-relations-encroachment-as-work-group-autonomy-in-higher-education-1.pdf>
- Wolf, K. (2010). Fast Track Opportunities for High Achievers? A Comparative Investigation into Career Advancement Patterns for In-House and Consultancy Practitioners. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 16, 235–246. doi: 10.1080/10496490903579566
- Wu, M.-Y. (2006). Perceptions about male and female managers in the Taiwanese public relations field: Stereotypes and strategies for change. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 51(3), 36.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Introduction [0:00-5:00]

[BEGIN RECORDING] Thank you for joining me today for this interview. Today we'll be chatting about your experience becoming a leader and perceptions and interactions with other leaders. This study is part of a larger effort of understanding the gender gap in public relations leadership.

I'm recording our conversation so that I don't miss anything that you have to say. I assure you that this is a blind, totally confidential interview. In my final report, I won't identify any remarks by any particular individual, and we will be careful to eliminate any information that might indicate who participated. I hope you will feel free to speak your mind over the next 60 minutes that we'll be together. Thanks again for your help.

RQ1: For male and female communication leaders, how similar or different are their experiences to becoming a communication leader? [5:00-15:00]

1. At what point in your career did you start aspiring for leadership?
 - 1a. Early in your career, mid-career, late in your career? (early, mid, late)?
 - 1b. Why at this point did you start aspiring for leadership?
2. Do women and men have a different career path to become a communications leader?
 - 2a. How so?
 - 2b. Why are their paths different?
 - 2c. Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing? Why?

RQ2: How are women and men communications leaders perceived? [15:00-25:00]

3. Based on your experience as you've become a leader in the field, do you feel that women and men communication leaders are viewed differently in the workplace?

3a. How are women viewed?

3b. How are men viewed?

3c. Why do you believe that women and men are viewed differently?

4. In communications, are there any distinct differences between a male and a female leader? What are the differences?

4a. Have you noticed any differences in terms of how female and male leaders lead?

RQ3: What factors do communications leaders identify as contributing to the gender gap in communications leadership? [25:00-45:00]

5. Studies have shown that approximately 70 percent of the communications field is women; however, men make the majority of leadership roles—creating a gender gap in communications leaders. What factors do you think contribute to the gender gap in communications leadership?

6. What, if any, gender bias have you observed in the workplace?

[Ask yes/no on 6a. through 6e. If yes on any then dive into follow-up questions].

6a. Have you seen gender biases in hiring? What experiences? Why was the bias shown?

6b. Have you seen gender biases in promotions? What experiences? Why was the bias shown?

6c. Have you seen gender biases in compensation? What experiences? Why was the bias shown?

6d. Have you seen gender biases in how someone is treated? For example, within the workplace a woman being treated differently than a man. What experiences?

Why was the bias shown?

6e. Have you seen gender biases in recognition? For example, within the workplace, a woman receives more or less praise from a superior than a man does.

What experiences? Why was the bias shown?

6f. Within the workplace, have you seen gender biases in anything else?

7. What do you think contributes to gender biases in the workplace?

8. Do you feel like women in your workplace feel that there is any kind of gender bias?

Do you feel like men in your workplace feel that there is any kind of gender bias?

9. Of the things that you've observed that could be contributing to a gender gap in communications leadership, which do feel are the most important to address? Why?

10. Does your organization have policies in place to eliminate gender gaps in the workplace? Are they effective? Why? Why not?

11. Are there any informal practices or cultural norms in your workplace (e.g. women's lunch, clubs, groups, etc.) that could help to eliminate gender biases? Are they effective? Why? Why not?

12. Is it more difficult for a woman or a man to find a mentor in the workplace that will help them advance through their career? Why?

13. From what you've observed, are women more confident in the workplace than men or vice versa?

14. What, if anything, have you observed that could give a man an advantage (in hiring, compensation, and/or promotion) over a woman in the workplace?

15. What, if anything, have you observed that could give women an advantage (in hiring, compensation, and or promotion) over men in the workplace?

RQ4: What do communications leaders believe can be done to mitigate factors that are adding to the gender gap? [45:00-60:00]

16. What do you think can be done to close the gender gap in communications roles?

17. What advice would you offer women to help mitigate gender bias? What advice would you offer men?

18. Is there anything else in regard to anything that we've discussed today that you feel would be important for me to know?

Appendix 2: Recruitment Emails

Initial Email

Email subject:

BYU PR Leadership study

Email body:

Hi, [name],

I'm working with a team of researchers at Brigham Young University to interview senior-level public relations leaders on their experience becoming a leader and perceptions and interactions with other leaders. This study is being conducted under the direction of Pamela Brubaker, Ph.D., faculty advisor, and is part of a larger effort of understanding the gender gap in public relations leaders.

Your perspective is very important to what I'm seeking to understand with this study. As such I'm hoping to set up a time when we can chat on the phone about your experiences in leadership. Please let me know if you are willing and able to assist me with this research.

Best,
Steven

Steven Pelham
Graduate Student
School of Communications
Brigham Young University
360 Brimhall
Provo, UT 84602
Cell: (801) 922-0492
Email: s.b.pelham@gmail.com

Follow-up Email (No Response) — Reply to sent initial email one week later

Email subject:

RE BYU PR Leadership study

Email body:

Hi, [name],

Last week I reached out to you about setting up a time to chat about your experiences in public relations leadership. Your particular perspective is crucial to this study. Please let me know if you are willing and able to assist me with this research. Thanks in advance for your help.

Best,
Steven

Steven Pelham
Graduate Student
School of Communications
Brigham Young University
360 Brimhall
Provo, UT 84602
Cell: (801) 922-0492
Email: s.b.pelham@gmail.com

Initial Email (Positive Response)

Email subject:

RE: BYU PR Leadership study

Email body:

Hi [name],

Thank you for your time, I appreciate your response. I would like to hold a 30-40 minute Zoom interview with you to discuss the aforementioned topics. Your opinions are very important and all responses are confidential.

Attached you will find an implied consent form which provides additional information about the study. Please review and let me know if you have any questions.

When is the most convenient time to chat with you?

Best,
Steven

Steven Pelham
Graduate Student
School of Communications
Brigham Young University
360 Brimhall
Provo, UT 84602
Cell: (801) 922-0492
Email: s.b.pelham@gmail.com

Initial Email (Negative Response)

Email subject:

RE: BYU PR Leadership study

Email body:

Hi [name],

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your response. Please let me know if you are ever available in the future to discuss this topic.

Best,
Steven

Steven Pelham
Graduate Student
School of Communications
Brigham Young University
360 Brimhall
Provo, UT 84602
Cell: (801) 922-0492
Email: s.b.pelham@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Implied Consent Document

This research study is being conducted by Steven Pelham, master's student, under the direction of Pamela Brubaker, Ph.D., assistant professor in the School of Communications at Brigham Young University and advisor of this study, to discuss the pivotal moments in the careers of senior-level public relations leaders to understand the gender gap in public relations leadership. You were invited to participate because you are a senior-level public relations leader.

The study consists of about 15 questions and will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. The interview will take place via Zoom. You may be asked to answer clarifying questions via email following the interview which means that the total time commitment is no more than 60 minutes.

There are minimal risks for participation in this study. You may experience minor psychological or emotional stress as a result of discussing your previous experiences. Your involvement in this research will help increase the public relations industry's understanding of the gender gap in public relations leadership.

Involvement in this research project is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or refuse to participate entirely. There will be no reference to your identity at any point in the research. An audio recording of our conversation will be kept on an external hard drive for three years for auditing purposes. Each audio recording will be identified a number rather than a name in order to de-identify the data. Audio recordings will be kept in the locked office of the researcher.

If you have questions regarding this study you may contact Steven Pelham (801-922-0492 or s.b.pelham@gmail.com) or Pamela Brubaker (801 422-5591 or pamela_brubaker@byu.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the IRB Administrator at A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu; (801) 422-1461. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

The completion of this interview implies your consent to participate. If you choose to participate, please proceed with completing the interview. Thank you!