WOMEN AT WORK: A DOCUMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ORAL

TESTIMONIES REGARDING THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH AND

PERCEPTIONS OF BIAS, INEQUALITY, AND THE GLASS

CEILING IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents and analyzes women's perceptions of bias and inequalities in the public relations and mass communication industries. As a public relations student, I was interested in looking into and learning more about the problem of the glass ceiling, and why women believe it still affects them and continues to be an obstacle for them.

This study examines honest and uncut stories, thoughts, and opinions of women who work in public relations and mass communication professions on their personal situations in the workplace. This thesis examines what factors and obstacles stand in the way of equal progression and opportunities in the workplace for women. These topics are relevant to any young woman getting ready to enter the professional world of public relations and mass communication, who wants to understand the current climate of the profession. This past year, the push for women's equality and women's rights has been extremely prevalent, thanks to movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp. Efforts are constantly being made to fight for women to have access to every opportunity available. Although it seems from the outside that major efforts towards change have been made and recent events have helped encourage women to speak up, this raises the question of whether or not the women who work have felt the effects and seen real changes for themselves in the workplace. My hope is that this push toward equality continues, so that one day the glass ceiling will be shattered completely.

I chose to study this topic because I grew up with my mother working full-time and my father being a stay-at-home dad, without realizing that this was an unconventional family dynamic that did not follow stereotypes. Being exposed to powerful, influential working women such as my mother throughout my life, I care about women having the same opportunities as men in the workplace.

This conversation regarding women and gender equality in the workplace is a large one that has been going on for many years. This study will add to the larger conversation by examining exactly what progress and changes have (hopefully) been made over time, through learning and listening to working women's views and opinions of their situations. The scholarly journal article "Glass Ceiling? What Glass Ceiling? A Qualitative Study of How Women View the Glass Ceiling in Public Relations and Communications Management," written by scholar and professor Brenda Wrigley in 2002, has been an inspiration and base for this research project. In her study, Wrigley used focus groups and in-depth interviews to gain insight on women's perspectives on the effects of the glass ceiling in their professions in public relations and mass communication. Through my research, I aim to discover what changes and advancements, if any, have occurred in the public relations and mass communication workplaces for women since 2002.

In this thesis, there will be a literature review of secondary information from various sources to provide background knowledge on this problem. This secondary research will provide insight into some of the key contributors to the glass ceiling as well as bias and inequality in the workplace. Following this literature review, primary research will be conducted through in-depth interviews with women who used to work or currently work in the public relations or mass communication industries. Women will be asked to relay their honest thoughts and opinions of gender bias and inequality in the workplace, whether they have experienced the effects of the glass ceiling, and how they have dealt with these issues. My goal will be to discover what has, or has not, changed in the past 15 years; and I hope to learn what needs to be changed in order for women to equally progress in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background information about women in the workforce, as well as knowledge about the glass ceiling, is critical to understand before discussion and analysis of findings. The following sections will address these critical knowledge bases – the glass ceiling and context of women in the workforce – as well as more specifically, the context of women working in public relations and mass communication industries. Then I will analyze prior research focused on the public relations glass ceiling, particularly the Brenda Wrigley study that has been a base for this project.

Context for women who work

Although it has been prevalent for a number of years, the glass ceiling is still doubted and somewhat disregarded by many. Described as an "invisible barrier to advancement" (Jones, 2018) that women face in higher workplace levels, the effects of the glass ceiling are felt by women across all industries. In 1989, the U.S. Department of Labor conducted an investigation to discover whether the glass ceiling was a real problem and how it should be fixed. The Department eventually defined the glass ceiling as being "artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

The issue of qualified individuals being kept from doing their best work, something mentioned in the department's investigation, is one of the biggest problems of the glass ceiling. The phenomenon of "brain drain" is a characteristic of this very problem. All too frequently, "talented, experienced women leave [their] business in search of less oppressive work environments" (Bronstein & Lambiase, 2018). This causes the best brains in certain businesses to literally drain out due to the glass ceiling. As described by Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin in

the Department of Labor Glass Ceiling Report, the glass ceiling "hinders not only individuals, but also society as a whole" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). Some might consider it a tragedy that the glass ceiling deprives our world of potentially incredible leaders, thinkers, and doers simply because of their gender or age. Many great women who could have influenced society may have lost their chances due to glass ceilings. Sandra M. Jones from the University of Chicago wrote about how these characteristics of the glass ceiling are actually affecting the economy. She reported that "talent is left on the table when women are not placed in leadership positions," which results in the brain drain we see among companies where women feel their progress has halted. She continued to say that "an economy that does not fully tap into the leadership skills offered by women is necessarily inefficient" (Jones, 2018).

A fact that not many people might know is that women have actually "been earning more bachelor's degrees than men" (Krivkovich et al., 2018) for more than 30 years. Although this fact is true, these women are "less likely to be hired into entry-level jobs" (Krivkovich et al., 2018). Research suggests that companies should be inclined to hire the more qualified individual over the male individual. In their 2018 article, "Women in the Workplace," Krivkovich et al. suggest that women can "never catch up," and that companies need to stop disadvantaging women in hiring and promotions. They reported that companies have promised to commit to gender diversity while hiring and promoting individuals, yet this promise "has not translated into progress." These women go as far as to say that progress "on gender diversity at work has stalled."

The issue of women's inequality in the workplace and experiences with the glass ceiling have been made very public more recently, which has created more awareness of this problem. Academic journal article "Mythologized for Its Misogyny" reports that the "recent developments

in Hollywood around the #MeToo movement and the Time's Up movement have heightened attention to these issues" (Bronstein & Lambiase, 2018). Time's Up, a movement that seeks to prevent sexual harassment and workplace discrimination, "rocketed into public consciousness" due to efforts made by popular Hollywood actresses, who had experienced inequality and pay gaps themselves. This movement helped to "foster solidarity among women and encourage them to speak out" (The Time's Up movement against sexual harassment, 2019), but the road ahead is still a long one. One source even mentioned that she "considers [Time's Up] the civil rights movement of the 21st century" (The Time's Up movement against sexual harassment, 2019). Time's Up, despite being created primarily by Hollywood actresses, has promised to make efforts for all industries, so as to not focus solely on the entertainment industry. Despite the fact that it's been slow progress for women for many years, Time's Up has "freed women to speak up" (The Time's Up movement against sexual harassment, 2019) and share their stories of bias, inequality, and discrimination in the workplace. Over time, movements such as Time's Up may help encourage faster moving progress for women's equality in the workplace.

Before analyzing what the current context for women who work in the public relations industry is, it is necessary to take a look at some general statistics about American working women. In her 2018 report for the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Ariane Hegewisch broke down the 2017 gender wage gap, looking at the earnings differences "by gender, race, and ethnicity." She reveals the 2017 gender wage gap, stating that "women's full-time, year-round earnings in 2017 were $41,977 compared with $52,146 for men" (Hegewisch, 2018). This data shows that not even two full years ago, men, on average, were earning over $10,000 more than women. Throughout this report, Hegewisch goes as far as to display the average wage gaps of every single year beginning with 1960. In 1960, women's full-time, year-round earnings were

$23,657, while men's were $38,991. Hegewisch states, "if the pace of change…continues at the same rate it has since 1960, it will take another 41 years, until 2059, for men and women to reach parity" (Hegewisch, 2018).

Figure 1, shown below, is a visual for some of the wage gap numbers that Hegewisch reported in her 2017 fact sheet. These numbers are the yearly real earnings among men and women from 2002 up until 2017. It is clear to see with this visual that the wage gap has barely progressed at all in the past 15 or so years. Men's average salaries fluctuate between $51,000 and $54,000, whereas women's average salaries fluctuate between $39,000 and $42,000. These numbers show the lack of progress there has been for equal pay in America.
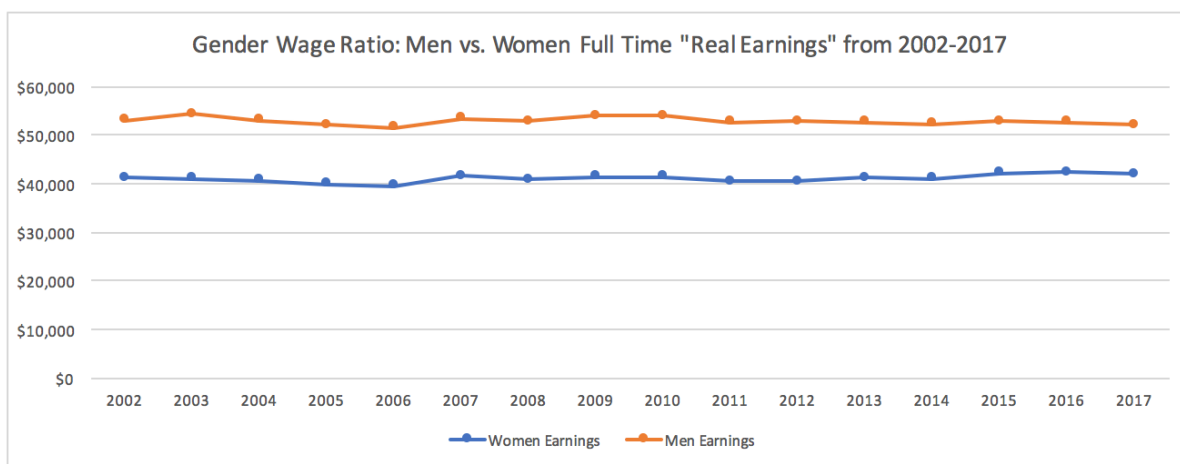

Figure 1 - (Hegewisch, 2018)

Not only is there a wide gap in wage, but there is also a wide gap in leadership looking at different representations of men and women in high level positions across all industries. In their 2017 article published on the Center for American Progress website, Danielle Corley and Judith Warner discuss the leadership gap in America. Before revealing what the leadership gap is, they examine different statistics about women. Women earn almost 60 percent of undergraduate degrees, 47 percent of law degrees, and 38 percent of MBAs, as well as hold 52 percent of professional-level jobs (Corley & Warner, 2017). Despite these positive statistics, women are

only "25 percent of executive and senior level officials and managers, hold only 20 percent of board seats, and are only six percent of CEOs" (Corley & Warner, 2017). Although there has been considerable nationwide debate regarding equality in the workplace, especially very recently, this debate paints a picture of what equality in the workplace looks like. Talking about how women have greater access to equal opportunity and equal pay influences people to think that the gaps in working America are not that large and are closing – but the numbers do not lie. The data exhibits how disadvantaged women have been and still are today, across all industries in this country. Why do women "outnumber men on college campuses," yet "have not moved up to positions of power in America at anywhere near the rate" that men are? (Corley & Warner, 2017).

Context for women who work in public relations and mass communication

Although public relations is extremely female dominated, with the industry being "nearly two-thirds female, one third male" (Bulldog Reporter, 2017), data shows that women in this industry face the same, if not worse, workplace discrimination, bias, and inequality. According to an article written in 2017 regarding the battle women face in public relations, "very few PR women make it to the top of the profession." Some might consider it surprising that "78 percent of CEOs in the top 30 PR agencies worldwide are men" (Bulldog Reporter, 2017). The facts are clear: women dominate the public relations industry, yet men dominate the higher-level positions and seats at the boardroom table. Why is this?

Taking a look at Data USA's Public Relations Specialist report in 2016, more numbers reveal that women may be falling behind in public relations. Data USA reports that the average public relations salary is $79,587. The average male salary, however, is $96,326, whereas the

average female salary is $70,745 (Data USA, 2016). This enormous wage gap shows the massive

inequity within the public relations industry, with women earning around 73 cents for the men's

dollar. While some might say these numbers alone are staggering, these are just the numbers for

average public relations positions – not even boardroom level positions.

In 2002, Brenda Wrigley found through research that in 1997, "men made, on average,

nearly $23,000 per year more than women make in public relations" (Wrigley, 2002). Wrigley

also reported that *Business Week* magazine noted that women who do make it to the top are paid

"substantially less than their male counterparts." Data shows that in the past 15 or so years, the

pay gap in public relations has not even made baby steps toward progress.

Jennifer Risi, Head of Media Relations at Ogilvy Public Relations, wrote an article in

2016 asking the question, if public relations industries are dominated by women, why are these

agencies led by men? Risi reported that women hold "anywhere from 61 percent of all PR jobs,"

whereas "only 30 percent of all global PR agencies are run by women" (Risi, 2016). The facts

are clear that although women hold "majority of PR positions, men hold the bulk of leadership

roles" (Risi, 2016). She goes on to mention some ways to create opportunities for women to "be

PR leaders," some of which were adding more women to boards, increasing work-life flexibility,

eliminating stereotypes, and promoting oneself in the workplace. Many would say that these

suggestions are all easier said than done.

Risi's article led to a Catalyst study done in 2004, which revealed a connection between

"corporate performance and gender diversity." Some might agree that the findings of this study

were shocking and surprising in the best way. To give a quick summary of what Catalyst

reported, companies that have the most women represented on "top management teams"

typically perform better financially, versus companies that have low representation of women

(Catalyst, 2004). Results indicate that gender diversity provides a competitive advantage – Catalyst noted that companies who advance women "access a large part of the talent pool," as well as more accurately reflect their consumers or target market. It is important to note that these findings were presented 15 years ago, which shows how little work has been done despite the facts proved through research.

This research shows that women can greatly help their companies advance; so why is it that the majority of high-level positions at different companies are still held by men? It is only natural to assume that, since public relations is a woman dominated field, women would also be holding the high level, boardroom positions in these companies. Research shows that is not the case. Through primary research, this thesis will aim to understand this dichotomy.

The glass ceiling in public relations

The Brenda Wrigley study mentioned in the abstract seeks to answer the question of what it is like to be a woman working in the public relations industry. Wrigley's goal with her research was to "seek to identify factors that support and perpetuate the glass ceiling for women in PR" (Wrigley, 2002). Wrigley also brings up an important point that some might say has not been addressed often enough – women who are struggling in their own personal situations focus on the positive stories to use these stories as hope for the future and hope for change in the workplace. She mentioned that this phenomenon is called "compensatory feminism: those who have not made it to the boardroom just yet can take comfort from the stories of those who have" (Wrigley, 2002). She refers to public relations scholar L.A. Grunig, who brought up the term "compensatory feminism." Grunig herself "contends this type of research [to be] designed to

compensate for the absence of women," which data suggests only helps to perpetuate the problem, instead of addressing and fixing it.

Wrigley remarks that her "study builds on important earlier work to examine" the issue at hand. This thesis relates to this line of hers because it will also build off of important earlier work, more specifically her work. Through her primary research of interviewing women who work in public relations, she was able to identify five factors that contribute to the glass ceiling. These five factors are: denial, gender role socialization, historical precedence, women turning against women, and corporate culture.

Denial suggests that women tend to deny that gender bias exists in their workplace, or try to pretend like it doesn't exist at all. Gender role socialization suggests that people are biased against women at work due to gender stereotyping potentially experienced growing up. It goes as far as suggesting that women have been socialized to accept limited views of success. Historical precedence suggests that people tend to only focus on what has done before, and are socialized to not be comfortable with big changes in the workplace. This factor also deals with the "good old boy network," which indicates that men tend to only network and connect with other men, leaving the women out. Women turning against women suggests that women are competitive with one another in the workplace. Finally, corporate culture suggests that large corporations provide fewer opportunities to succeed in the workplace, whereas smaller agencies are better for women who care about furthering their careers.

This thesis will examine whether or not these factors still contribute to and perpetuate the glass ceiling. It will also discuss whether there are potential new factors that contribute to the glass ceiling that Wrigley did not find through her research 17 years ago. This thesis adds to the larger conversation by comparing its data and findings with previous research to recognize

whether or not there have been any changes in progress for women's equality in the public relations workplace.

METHODOLOGY

For the primary research in this thesis, in-depth interviews were conducted with women who work in public relations and mass communication; the goal being to document and analyze very honest opinions about experiences with bias and inequality in the workplace. The purpose of this research is to learn what these women thought about the glass ceiling and what they thought should be done in order to make better progress towards their overall equality in the workplace.

Secondary sources and previous research about the glass ceiling were analyzed and read, as well as studies about working women and women in the public relations industry – all of which can be found above in the literature review. The Brenda Wrigley study, "Glass Ceiling? What Glass Ceiling? A Qualitative Study of How Women View the Glass Ceiling in Public Relations and Communications Management," is the study that this thesis will build upon and add to with updated research. In-depth interviews will be utilized to ask the women being interviewed whether the five factors Wrigley identified in her study that contribute to the glass ceiling have changed, are still in place, or if there are more that she did not address.

Before primary research of interviewing working women could begin, there were some important preliminary steps that needed to take place. First, it was necessary to complete an Institutional Review Board Protocol review form in order to gain approval and permission to work with human subjects. IRB approval is required to prove that all research efforts dealing with human subjects are ethical, professional, and safe. As a principal investigator of this project,

I was "responsible for the ethical conduct of the study" (TCU IRB). On the protocol review form, I described the study in detail, outlining the purpose and background of the topic. I then outlined exactly how I planned to recruit participants, get their consent to be interviewed and recorded, and analyze the data to answer the research questions. It was necessary to ensure that there was no risk to potential participants, as well as to ensure that their identities and stories would be kept confidential and anonymous, had they agreed to let me interview them. Also included in the IRB forms were official "Consent to Participate in Research" forms, mine and Dr. Lambiase's Certificates of Completion for the web-based training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants," the official recruitment email message, and finally the official topic guide.

Once IRB approval was attained, participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method of research. I utilized snowball sampling by recruiting participants among the networks of my acquaintances, colleagues, and professors. I reached out to women who my connections knew who have worked, or still work, in public relations and mass communication, to see if they would be interested in sharing their stories with me. Women were chosen to be contacted based on their experiences and professions. Messages were sent to several women in the public relations and mass communication industries through email and LinkedIn. In these messages women would find the official recruitment message: which outlined exactly why I was reaching out to them by explaining that I was working on a senior honors research project about women's equality in public relations and mass communication industries. Some women who were contacted replied right away, and some didn't reply at all. Others replied and ask me to explain my topic in more detail and talk about the purpose of the study. After numerous conversations online, 10 women agreed to participate.

After women agreed to participate in my research, I would send them the official "Consent to Participate in Research" forms for them to read over and sign. In these forms, participants read more details about the study, and read about how their identities, stories, and experiences would be kept anonymous and confidential. After that they were encouraged to sign that form as well as the "Media Release Form" attached, because the interviews were audio recorded.

Before the start of each interview, participants were given an overview of the details of the study, such as the expected time of the interview, the purpose of research, and the goal of understanding barriers that working women have to face as well as understanding what it is like to be a working woman in today's more progressive day and age. An IRB policy was also restated to participants, which says that the participants could choose not to answer a question or pull their participation at any time. This policy also reassured complete confidentiality of the participants identities, stories, and experiences.

The topic guide followed during each interview is as follows:

- Name, age, other demographics if necessary (Voluntary)

- Profession and position

- Describe your career path so far and how you've gotten to the position you're in right now.

- In recent history, women have had to find their place in the working world – could you talk about that a little bit in relation to your own career path and maybe provide your opinions on the matter.

- Could you talk about a time when you maybe felt like there were barriers impeding your progress or success?

      i.   Do you think any of these barriers were based on your gender?

- Do you think you've ever worked in conditions that someone might describe as being sexist and/or misogynistic?

- What are your opinions on the glass ceiling in the workplace?

      i.   What are some factors that you think contribute to/perpetuate the glass ceiling?

      ii.   What do you think needs to be done in order to get rid of the glass ceiling completely?

- Explain Brenda Wrigley study "Qualitative Study of How Women View the Glass Ceiling" – talk about and explain factors/contributors to glass ceiling: Do you think these contributors are still in place/do you think most of them or any of them have changed?

- Anything else you'd like to talk about/tell me?

This topic guide was created in hopes that interview conversations would become more specific as time went on. The topic guide started out with broader, career focused questions, and as participants got deeper into the topic guide the questions started to get more and more specific. None of the participants chose not to answer a question or pull herself from participation. The topic guide typically led to a more natural conversation evoking different follow up questions for each participant, based on their personal story and/or experience. About a month was contacting, scheduling, and interviewing the 10 women who agreed to participate in research for this thesis. Findings from these interviews can be found below in the next section.

FINDINGS

10 women who work in the public relations and mass communication industries were interviewed. Each woman had a unique story to relay regarding their lives and career experiences within their respective industries. In order to keep their identities and experiences private, participants will be addressed throughout the findings section by the number in order of which they were interviewed them from first to last. Below are the 10 separate profiles of the interviewees, organized by age:

- 29 years old. Works in Journalism and Communication. Works as a reporter for a large newspaper. Caucasian.

- 31 years old. Works in Public Relations. Works as a Senior Account Executive at a medium sized Public Relations firm. Caucasian.

- 32 years old. Works in Public Relations and Communication. Works as a Communications Specialist for a large corporation. African American and Latina.

- 32 years old. Works in Marketing and Communication. Works as a Director of Marketing at a small high school. Caucasian.

- 36 years old. Works in Public Affairs and Crisis Communication. Works as an Account Director at an Integrated Communications Industry. Caucasian.

- 40 years old. Works in Public Relations and Marketing. Works as a Director of Communication for a local company. Caucasian.

- 46 years old. Works in Marketing and Public Relations. Works in the capacity of leadership at a large corporation. African American.

- 49 years old. Works in Public Relations and higher education. Works as a Public Relations and Communication Professor at a prestigious university. Caucasian.

- 49 years old. Works in Public Relations and higher education. Works as a Professor of Public Relations at a prestigious university. Caucasian and Latina.

- 70 years old. Works in Public Relations and Communication. Works as the President of her own Communications firm. Caucasian.

Of these interview participants, one self-identified as being lesbian, mentioning that she was married in a same-sex relationship. The remaining nine women identified themselves as heterosexual, four of whom were married. One woman indicated that she was previously married and is now divorced. All four of the married women have children. Seven of the 10 women identified as Caucasian. Two women identified as Latina, and one woman identified as African American.

Nine of the 10 in-depth interviews were conducted over the phone, whereas one was conducted face-to-face. Once all 10 interviews were complete, data and results were analyzed in order to come up with main themes among each interview. The data posed the question of, what are some present day factors that women identified as contributors to the glass ceiling in their respective industries?

RESULTS

Before initially identifying main themes among the interviews, results were first analyzed regarding the five factors that Brenda Wrigley identified as contributors to the glass ceiling.

Current Participants Thoughts on Brenda Wrigley's Factors

FACTOR 1: DENIAL

The first factor Wrigley identified in her study was denial of a glass ceiling in public relations. When participants were asked if denial was still present today, they were pretty evenly split between yes and no. Participant 9 said "yes, absolutely. No one wants to view themselves or their industry as exclusive or in the wrong, or exclusionary," whereas Participant 3 mentioned that she didn't "think that's true anymore. We've been talked about this for a long time, there is too much research being done." Four women out of the 10 said that they believed denial was still in place, whereas the remaining six women said that denial is not true anymore.

FACTOR 2: GENDER ROLE SOCIALIZATION

Again, participants were somewhat evenly split between yes and no. Some women talked about how implicit bias is such a large part of gender role socialization and due to this, the factor is still in place. Other women, such as Participant 3, went back to the explanation of how "women are so empowered today," and how the difference for women in the workplace by generation is very clear. Participant 9 mentioned that when she was younger, "no one talked about this issue. Now people are talking about it and it's great," but she believes it still happens.

FACTOR 3: HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE

There was not a unanimous agreement regarding this factor. Some women said that it was still around, but others disagreed. Along with this factor, participants mentioned the good old boy network quite a bit. Participant 7 mentioned that she believed it is still around to a degree, and that "men network by doing things that women generally don't do," such as going golfing or to a

happy hour together. Participant 9 said that she thought historical precedence "is much more prevalent in the older generation," implying that due to their older age, this demographic is more likely to rely on what has been done before than trying something completely new within the workplace.

FACTOR 4: WOMEN TURNING AGAINST WOMEN

This factor, women turning against women, was the one where an overwhelming majority was present of the participants reporting that women are extremely cutthroat and competitive in the workplace. This was surprising to me, as I did not expect this reaction. Participant 5 talked about her experiences with this, mentioning that a female colleague in her workplace would "find ways to discount [Participant 5's] work and elevate her own," which made for a hostile work environment. Nine out of 10 participants said that this factor still exists today, and the one woman who was not an absolute yes hinted at a maybe rather than a no. Women used language such as how unfortunate this factor is, how this factor is a huge problem, and how this factor is actually growing with the times.

FACTOR 5: CORPORATE CULTURE

This factor had participants split evenly between yes, no, and maybe, or somewhat. Participant 7 believed that this factor no longer exists, stating that "at a large corporation she had countless opportunities to move up and grow," whereas Participant 9 explained that "at large companies, it's easy to put yourself in one box and not stray from it, preventing you from wearing many hats and getting good at lots of different skills."

From the questions regarding Brenda Wrigley's five factors from 2002, the one factor that women wholeheartedly agreed was still affecting their workplace today is women turning against women. The others were an even split, which could be dependent upon specific positions and job titles, but from the data it seems that women are extremely competitive with one another across the board of public relations and mass communication. After hearing and learning about my participants views on these factors that were identified over 15 years ago, the topic guide was used to pick their brains and learn about what new factors are inhibiting women in the workplace today, rather than 17 years ago. Upon completion of the interviews, five new factors emerged that could be contributing to a present-day glass ceiling for women who work in public relations and mass communication.

Current Participants' Present-Day Factors

FACTOR 1: MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILIAL OBLIGATIONS

This was the first factor identified because participants who don't even suffer from this factor discussed that having children and having a family to tend to can set a woman back in her profession. Participants discussed how upon having children, it was typical for a woman to take a good portion of time off to be with her baby, or decide to work part time in order to stay home and raise her child. Participant 7 mentioned that she chose to stay home and work part time when she had her children, and that it "impeded her from moving up the ladder" at work, but it was a sacrifice that she felt she had to make.

Participant 4 mentioned that, at a younger age, she had felt more inclined to be the best at work, be the most successful, and climb the ladder as best as she could. But, now that she is newly married and expecting, she reflected that her priorities have changed. The results showed

that having children and a family can put a woman behind at work, because it is seen as something that can greatly hinder a woman from ensuring that all of her attention is on her work, not on any other distraction.

Participant 5 talked about friends of hers who she works with who have things they need to take care of at home due to their children, which can sometimes make them late to work. She mentioned that "men at [her company] were less understanding if a mother needed to go take care of her child, or other things at home." She mentioned that having an environment where there were more women in charge might be more understanding when family and child issues came up.

FACTOR 2: AGEISM

Another factor that emerged that was prevalent in nearly every interview was the phenomena of ageism. Women who worked with colleagues and clients that may be older than them felt that they are scrutinized and judged harshly due to their age. Participant 6 mentioned that she thinks "there is a real misconception of experience level" when it comes to looking young in the workplace.

Women felt that they had to ensure that their work spoke for itself in order to portray to coworkers, colleagues, and clients that they were capable of doing the work they were responsible for. Participant 4 mentioned that she feels that she "might not be the first person they look at for one project because she looks young." She talked about having to work extra hard in order to elevate her work and to prove herself, her talents, and her skills to coworkers. Participant 5 mentioned that at her workplace which had a leadership board dominated by men, it felt more challenging to her and she sometimes felt that these men put words in her mouth due to

her age and appearance. But, she said "once she opened her mouth, they could tell she knew what she was talking about."

It seems that age can create a barrier for women, whether that be due to their actual age or just simply looking like a young woman. The data proves that age can put women at a disadvantage in the workplace despite experience level.

FACTOR 3: LACK OF FEMALE MENTORS AND ADVOCATES

Another thing that women felt could be a factor for lack of success in the workplace is the lack of female mentors and female advocates. Participants thought that having more female mentors within the workplace would help them enormously, but they feel that the women they work with do not advocate for them or have any desire to help them. This factor relates directly back to Brenda Wrigley's factor of "women turning against women," which participants reported that they still experience today.

A common theme within this factor related specifically to older women who had to endure bias and inequality in the workplace years and years ago. Participant 6 reflected on an experience she had with a female manager who was about 15 years her senior. She discussed how she found it so impressive that this woman could manage their entire team, yet she mentioned how "having her as the manager was kind of a downfall, because she had endured a lot in the past, and she sort of reflected in back in my face."

Participants reflected on women older than them using language such as "you have it so much easier than I did 20 years ago," or, "you have nothing to complain about in this workplace." Participant 6 also mentioned that she felt that older women in the workplace have a much higher standard for the younger women because of the climate surrounding gender equality

in the workplace today. These older women see movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp and believe that younger women don't struggle with bias and difficulties, when these issues are still prevalent today.

Participant 7 talked about how the older women in her industry "think that they want to help other, younger women, but they will still make comments." She felt that these women were harder on the younger women in the industry. Nearly all participants echoed each other in mentioning that having someone, specifically a female mentor, pull them along and mentor them in the workplace would be extremely beneficial and make them feel more confident to succeed.

FACTOR 4: CONFIDENCE CHALLENGES

The word "confidence" was a key term mentioned throughout the interviews. As mentioned above, women feel that having confidence would help them and other women feel good about their skills and encourage them to push the envelope of success. Unfortunately, the key term "confidence" was also used to describe how hard it is to be a confident woman in the workplace, no matter what the industry.

Participant 2 talked about how she believes "women can create their own barriers" by not wanting to come off as an overconfident person. Women echoed each other by saying that by nature, women have a hard time promoting their own work and their accomplishments in fear of not wanting to sound cocky and egotistical. Participant 3 mentioned how it is so common that "women are just as qualified [for a position] but are more reticent about their accomplishments." Participant 6 said something similar and added that "it's not received well when women ask for things. People for some reason don't like it when women ask for things" in the workplace. This stigma surrounding a women's confidence can relate directly to negotiating salary, which was

discussed in the literature review. Participant 5 even mentioned that she thinks "women should probably learn to negotiate better and command what they are worth being paid."

This factor of confidence challenges in the workplace makes women feel that they shouldn't come off as having a strong, overbearing personality, in fear of what people might think of them – which ties in with Factor 5.

FACTOR 5: PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN

This factor ties in with Factor 4, confidence challenges, because participants talked about how seeming "too confident" in the workplace might give people a negative perception. The reputation of "too confident" in the workplace can make one seem overbearing, egotistical, and simply unfriendly. This is another instance where participants said that they feel the need to work harder to let their work speak for itself, so they don't have to go out of their way to show that their work is the best work. This point of discussion is somewhat ironic because, referring to Brenda Wrigley's 2002 study, she mentioned in her final thoughts that "hard work and competence are usually not enough to guarantee promotion…yet many women seem to hang onto the notion that they will be promoted if they just work hard enough" (Wrigley, 2002). Clearly, women still feel this way.

Participant 4 talked about how she felt the need to "instill confidence in her coworkers so that they trust her." She mentioned how there have been times at her job where she's felt that she has to work harder than her coworkers in order to earn trust and respect, so that she doesn't have to promote her own accomplishments and achievements. Participant 1 said she feels that women have to work twice as hard to ensure that their voice is heard, but that "people still underestimate you." It's an ongoing cycle of not wanting to promote oneself, to working extra hard to get one's

work noticed, to still being underestimated and discounted – just because women feel reluctant to promote themselves.

Participant 3 even brought up the presidential race of 2016 and talked about Hillary Clinton. She reflected on how people generally disliked Clinton, "because she was a woman, and she was strong, and that bothered people." Why is it that a woman who is strong, confident, and goes after what she feels she is capable of is a bad thing?

DISCUSSION

I have found evidence, through these participants' voices and stories, that a glass ceiling does still exist in the industries of public relations and mass communication. While there may be progress, and while the workplace has most definitely changed for women, a glass ceiling is still present. Based on the data gathered from this study, it seems that no matter what steps have been made to advance, some sort of implicit bias may always be around.

I had assumed upon starting my research that the glass ceiling contributors that Brenda Wrigley discovered would no longer be present today, but participants stressed heavily that women turning against women was the one out of the five that unquestionably happens today – not just in public relations, but in every industry. The participants couldn't help but express their disappointment and disapproval of this phenomenon. Many of the women I spoke with mentioned how much they would love to see women building each other up in the workplace, rather than stepping on one another to get to the top. It can be presumed that it would make much more sense for women to help each other, because doing so would, in a perfect world, help the overarching problem. Helping one another would encourage all women to do their best and work their hardest together, which would be benefitting multiple women at once rather than just one

woman who feels threatened by others. While discussing this factor, participants highlighted how hard it is to deal with women who still think that competing with one another and creating hostile environments are the answers to success.

Prior to starting primary research, I did not think I would discover as many common themes and patterns as I did. I was expecting two, or maybe three factors that women feel contribute to a glass ceiling to emerge. I was shocked to find five, as well as confirm that one of Brenda Wrigley's factors was still very much felt by many today.

So, what do these factors mean for the future of the glass ceiling in public relations and mass communication? Firstly, participants communicated that factors such as having children and being a woman who is considered to be generally "younger" than her coworkers should not have any influence on one's success in the workplace. Participants communicated that these factors strike an implicit bias in others that cause them to believe that mothers will not give work their full attention due to their children, or that young women simply do not have the amount of experience needed to complete a high-level task. Assumptions such as these are what cause these "factors" to be setbacks, even though they are not setbacks in and of themselves. Working women feel that the beliefs and biases people have surrounding identities such as "mother" and "young woman" are things that cause women with these identities to fall behind, when every woman deserves an equal chance of success.

Next is lack of female mentors and advocates. This factor goes hand in hand with the Brenda Wrigley factor still present today, women turning against women. Younger women in the workplace see older women around them and wish that the older women would mentor them. It's unsure if there is a communication barrier between older women and younger women that could cause and perpetuate this problem for them, but not once did one participant say that she had an

honest conversation with her female manager or an older female colleague to ask for advice and guidance. Young women have the ability to break down these stigmatized walls and have open and honest conversations with older women that they would like to be mentored by. "Girl culture" in the present day is constant gossip, rumors, and talking behind people's backs. Removing this type of culture from the workplace might help younger and older women better communicate with one another, and even encourage younger women to be more open with their female managers or uppers. Doing so may even stimulate the older women to feel more inclined to offer help, guidance, and support.

Lastly are the factors of confidence challenges and perceptions of women. Research showed that women, stereotypically, are reticent when it comes to talking about their accomplishments, their performance at work, and even their career goals. Women tend to be more reserved about these things due to the consensus that powerful, strong willed, and confident women are generally disliked. To echo Participant 6, people don't like it when women ask for things, especially in a professional and workplace setting. This setback has more than likely plagued women for a number of years before it was even addressed, and addressing it is at least one small step forward. To contrast this view of the participants is a quote from 17-year-old musician Billie Eilish. In 2018, Eilish mentioned to the LA Times that "girls and women with strong perspectives are hated. There are still people who are afraid of successful women, and that's so lame" (Brown, 2018). This quote provides hope that the young generation of girls today can be confident without worrying about possible perceptions surrounding them. Participants urged that strong and confident women should be celebrated, not neglected.

With regards to the research questions, it was easy to identify and learn what has and has not changed in the past 15 years. As mentioned above, though changes have been made, progress

has not always come from it. Thankfully women see less of denial, gender role socialization, historical precedence, and corporate culture, but they see more of bias against mothers, young age, "having it easier" compared to older women, and confidence in the workplace. It has been inferred that although some glass ceiling contributors can slowly fade away, others will more than likely continue to pop up. These factors seem to change with the times, which is something future researchers may want to factor into their research questions. Future research might focus on what it is exactly that causes certain factors to fade away, and what causes other factors to come into existence. In a perfect world we could discover how to make every factor contributing to a glass ceiling fade away for good. A lot needs to be changed, but future researchers should really focus in on the *how* rather than just the what; how can we create these changes in the best, most successful way possible in order to see positive results for women in every industry, not just public relations.

CONCLUSION

The sample size of participants was limited, as the 10 women who were interviewed were all living and working in the same general geographic area. Unfortunately, 10 women is not a representative sample of all women who work in public relations and mass communication all over the country, so these results have limitations and cannot be generalized. Still, there were common threads found in nearly every interview. It is hopeful that by analyzing and addressing these common threads, women in public relations and mass communication will realize that a lot of them feel the same way and are on the same page regarding the topics discussed in this thesis. A large number of participants constantly made remarks such as, "I'm probably the only one who has said this, but..," or "My story is probably not giving you much to work with." Little did

these women know that they were *not* the only ones feeling a certain way about the glass ceiling, and that their stories were helping this research insurmountably. No matter how different experiences may be, common feelings are shared.

Unfortunately, just because the problem of the glass ceiling is being talked about, people all over the country need to realize that these promises and conversations are not always being translated into progress. A few women mentioned that at their workplaces, they have had to take part in equality training courses as new employees. They talked about how these courses have been so beneficial for not only others, but also for themselves, in the workplace. Future research on this topic might prompt more of these types of programs to be implemented, while discussing the factors discovered through this research, into industries and workplaces across the board to make people more aware of the problems working women face today.

The conversation surrounding this issue of getting everyone to understand the struggles of a working woman is a large one that would benefit from more attention. Just this year, the Institute for Public Relations and KPMG collaborated on a research effort to discover just how the public relations industry can make progress when it comes to the success of women. Through focus groups with both men and women, a call-to-action was created. This call-to-action included the following: "Gender equality is not just a cause for women, but men too; pay gaps can be addressed by organizations now; leaders must prioritize change and action, while having open conversations with their employees" (McCorkindale, 2019). This call-to-action essentially summarizes some of the things discussed throughout these research findings – that men and women need to be involved in this effort to create gender equality, as well as that open conversations and honesty in the workplace are critical to the success of every employee, whether it be a man or a woman. The results of this study, as well as the other studies mentioned

in this thesis, suggest that we need to make an effort as a greater population, not just as an industry, to address factors and issues that perpetuate a glass ceiling. Doing so may one day ensure that these factors fade away for good.

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