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## **'One of the Guys': Women Leaders and Tokenism in Male-Dominated Environments**

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**‘One of the Guys’:  
Women Leaders and Tokenism in Male-Dominated Environments**

Beth Duyvejonck

Leadership Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Literature Review.....	8
Discovering the Unseen Gender Barriers Entrenched in Corporate Culture .....	9
One Popular Individual Intervention: Fix the Women .....	15
Transforming Corporate Culture.....	20
Gaps in the Literature.....	25
Theoretical Framework.....	26
Method .....	29
Participants.....	31
Data Gathering & Analysis.....	32
Limitations .....	34
Findings.....	35
Gender Barriers .....	35
Loyalty .....	38
Distancing .....	41
Ray of Hope Just in Time .....	46
Discussion.....	49
Summary .....	54
Recommendations: Toward a Model of Professional Learning .....	55
Conclusion .....	59
References.....	61
Appendix A.....	66
Appendix B.....	69
Appendix C.....	87
Appendix D.....	92

**List of Tables and Figures**

Figure 1: <i>Catalyst's 2020 Pyramid: Women in S&amp;P 500 Companies (1/15/2020)</i>	13
Figure 2: <i>Catalyst's 2020 Historical List of Women CEOs of the Fortune 500</i>	17
Figure 3: <i>Belonging/Value in Uniqueness Matrix based on Shore and Chung (2021)</i>	25
Figure 4: <i>Participant Descriptor and Pre-Screen Data</i>	32
Figure 5: <i>Summary of Findings</i>	49
Figure 6: <i>Iterative Process of DEI Learning in Support of Gender Equity</i>	55

## Abstract

The percentage of women in corporate leadership has been on a slow rise over the previous decades and the statistical representation of women in top management and executive positions continues to change at a very slow rate. Researchers on gender and organizational development are observing a shift towards interventions focused on improving the gender-balance inside organizations and systems (Burke, 2017). My research contributes to the understanding of women leader's experiences with gender and corporate culture in male-dominated environments with a specific focus on how organizational diversity initiatives affect the working experience of woman leaders. Using qualitative research methods, I interviewed six women leaders inside male-dominated industry about their experiences with gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives. Though not intentional, all participants were White women in predominantly White-male led organizations. I employed Laws' Psychology of Tokenism (Laws, 1975) to frame and inform my findings. Four themes emerged from my data to detail the experiences shared by the participants, including *Gender Barriers*, *Loyalty*, *Distancing* and *Ray of Hope Just in Time*. I reviewed my findings using each of Laws' "agreements" of Tokenism and Laws' prerequisites for disruption. I concluded that the dynamic between Token and Sponsor, and the underlying social system, work together to maintain the status quo, actually slowing the pace of positive change towards gender equality and inclusiveness in predominantly White settings. Finally, I recommend awareness of the agreements of tokenism combined with strategies of gendered organizations and inclusive leadership as tools to disrupt the cycle of tokenism.

To mark International Women's Day, *The Economist* (2021) posted their "glass ceiling index" to demonstrate if improvements were being made worldwide in advancing female executives. According to *The Economist* (2021), the United States has much room for improvement concerning the working conditions for women. Overwhelmingly, research tells us that progress towards gender parity remains slow with a lack of women in leadership (World Economic Forum, 2021). Through qualitative research, I explored how White women leaders experience gender and corporate culture in predominantly-White male-dominated environments with a specific focus on how organizational diversity initiatives affect the working experience of these leaders.

As a woman leader with over twenty years of experience in the construction industry, I meet all criteria to have been a participant in my own study. I have experienced both subtle and not-so-subtle gender barriers in a male-dominated, corporate environment, and observed thousands of dollars invested in diversity interventions that simply made no lasting impact. I bring all of these experiences with me as a researcher. I have worked at my organization since graduating from college and have reached a level of status that allows me the opportunity to influence our corporate culture. Further, I am a leader on my organization's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Team. My experience and the privilege of my current position drove me to explore why gender equity has been so long in coming and to bring back to my organization new tools to make improvements in my own workplace.

The purpose of this study was to further understand the experience of women leaders as an underrepresented group in male-dominated environments in efforts to pursue organizational culture change that is inclusive, effective, and sustainable. In this thesis, I review the relevant literature to provide context to the problem, highlighting the gaps in literature. I then outline the

theoretical framework and methods I used to conduct my research. Finally, I present the limitations, findings, and recommendations that resulted from my study.

In this study, I use the term *gender*, instead of *sex*, to acknowledge the current understanding of sex as a biological classification and gender referring to socially constructed roles and identities (American Psychological Association, 2020). I capitalize all racial and ethnic groups, such as “Black” and “White,” to designate and respect proper nouns (American Psychological Association, 2020). My study does not explore the intersection of differing identities, as described further in the Limitations section. In addition, though not by design, my participants all identified as White women, and their organizations were predominantly White, thus the results should be considered with this limitation in mind.

Also in this study, I have used the Catalyst (2020c) definition of *male-dominated*, meaning an industry or occupation comprising of fewer than 25% women. Another important distinction is the use of the terms *parity*, *equality* and *equity* throughout this study. I used definitions that align with the existing literature and current understanding. Gender parity is defined as a descriptive statistical measure to compare indicators (such as workforce participation, average income, or representation in leadership) between women and men (Swenson, 2017). Gender equality is defined as a state of equal ease of access to resources and equal outcomes regardless of gender (Wong, 2019). Gender equity is defined as a process of fair, unbiased, and just distribution of resources based on need (Clow et al., n.d.; Chisamya et al., 2012). Finally, in some cases, I have used research on women in upper leadership *in general* (not always in male-dominated environments) to expand my understanding. It should be noted that the terminology used in the literature and research on the topics of gender and diversity have evolved significantly since 1975, which is the earliest article used in my study.

## Statement of the Problem

Women are on a slow rise in executive positions in all industries as widespread social and economic initiatives continue to close the gender gap (St. Catherine University, 2021). Although women make up nearly half of the United States' labor workforce and more than half of the United States' bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, women are still significantly underrepresented in elite corporate and political leadership nationwide (Northouse, 2019).

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has generated an annual Global Gender Gap Report for the past 15 years. The WEF (2021) advises that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women in the workforce; women are being hired back at a slower rate than men are; and women are now less likely to be hired for leadership roles. These impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic reverse progress made over the previous two years and indicate, given the current pace of progress, it will take 69 years for women to reach overall gender parity in the United States. The WEF report reinforces that progress towards gender parity remains slow, and "there is a persistent lack of women in leadership positions" (2021, p. 5).

My research seeks to improve understanding of the experiences of women leaders in male-dominated environments. Specifically, my research explored how women leaders in male-dominated environments experience gender and corporate culture before, during, and after diversity initiatives.

## Literature Review

This literature review investigated how gender barriers in corporate culture and reliance on organizational interventions focused primarily on women leaders contribute to the slow pace of progress towards gender equity. The main themes of literature include (1) gender barriers faced by women in their pursuit of leadership roles; (2) a historically popular *individual*

intervention resulting from gender barriers, known as "fix the women"; and (3) *organizational* change and transformation measures intended to eliminate gender barriers. I cover each of these in detail, then outline the gaps in the literature that currently exist to highlight how my research contributes to the knowledge of women in male-dominated industry experiencing gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives.

### **Discovering the Unseen Gender Barriers Entrenched in Corporate Culture**

The legal system has enacted protections against blatant sexual harassment and sexual discrimination in today's workplace; however, women leaders still face the subtle impact of second-generation discrimination and biases (Bligh & Ito, 2017; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017). Second-generation gender biases, defined as "subtle forms of structural, relational, and situational biases that affect women," often go unnoticed by both men and women, but their influence in organizations has a significant impact on women leaders (Bligh & Ito, 2017, p. 290). The barriers created by gender bias are often "unseen" because they are built into organizational structure and present themselves in every aspect of a women leader's experience.

Current literature revealed that the information technology (IT) and information systems (IS) industry leads other male-dominated fields in academic research on gender diversity and retention. In one example of IT research, Annabi and Lebovitz (2018) categorized gender barriers to include "stereotypes, questions of legitimacy, isolation, access, masculine organizational climate, and work-life balance" (p. 1050). Diehl and Dzubinski (2017) also developed a comprehensive list of twenty-seven leadership barriers in all industries, organized into three categories: "macro (societal), meso (organizational), and micro (individual)" (p. 273). For this study, I focused on *organizational*-based barriers affecting women in male-dominated environments as women pursue leadership positions. I used a similar categorical structure to

Diehl and Dzubinski (2017) and summarized organizational barriers into five categories that frequently overlap with the findings by other researchers and were mentioned by the participants in my study.

***Barrier Category One: Leadership Perceptions/ Devaluing of Communal Practices***

The traditional assumption that leadership is associated with men is deep-rooted. This perception disadvantages women leaders in many ways as they pursue leadership roles, including performance evaluations and consideration for promotions (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017; Eagly, 2007; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Reality in counterpoint to this perception is long standing. Dating back over 25 years, Eagly et al. (1995) studied this extensively and found female and male leaders were equally effective overall. The researchers concluded that context is critically important. Women in male-dominated industry, where leadership roles are defined in masculine terms, faced more severe stereotypes against their ability to be effective leaders (Eagly et al., 1995).

Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) built on these early studies by Eagly et al. (1995), suggesting, "that, in general, prejudice toward female leaders follows from the perceived incongruity between the characteristics of women and the requirement of leader roles" (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014, p. 1130). Eagly et al. (1995) summarized "to the extent that female leaders violate their associates' gender expectancies, they may be subjected to prejudiced reaction, which may include biased performance evaluations and negative preconceptions about future performance" (p.126).

The devaluing of traits that are commonly associated with women is a secondary barrier to women leaders. Ely and Meyerson (2000) studied the perception that individualism is associated with men and masculinity, while collectivism is associated with women and

femininity. The authors specifically studied the extent to which the following traits are associated with individualism: "strong, assertive, independent, self-sufficient, risk-taking," while the following traits are associated with collectivism: "collaborative, consultative, inclusive, non-hierarchical, supportive and concerned with relationships" (Ely & Meyerson, 2000, p. 124). In summary, when organizational practices value the preceding traits differently or assume which of these traits might come more naturally for one gender or the other, the existing structure is contributing to gender inequity (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). More recently, Campuzano (2019) studied how women leaders influence organizational culture in male-dominated (referred to as "dominant" in this study) environments. Through a comprehensive literature review of 277 texts, published between 2005 and 2015, the author sought to explore gendered traits in leadership and discussed that dominant organizations continue to resist the long-term influence of women in leadership. The author presented that a women leader's strategic use of feminine traits (such as caring and open communication) was valued by dominant organizations only as a counterbalance to men's "traditional leadership behaviors" (Campuzano, 2019, p. 453).

***Barrier Category Two: Tokenism/ Scrutiny/ Unequal Standards***

Kanter (1977a, 1977b) describes *tokens* as the minority member of a majority group. In Kanter's research, the token position exists inside a group when the minority holds up to approximately 15% representation, such as women in male-dominated environments. Kanter's theory of tokenism highlights three phenomena of negative experiences that token members will encounter in these circumstances: visibility, polarization, and assimilation.

The first phenomenon is "heightened visibility;" the feeling of being in the public eye experienced by the token, resulting in increased pressure to perform at higher standards to prove their position is deserved (Holgerson & Romani, 2020). Many researchers have expanded the

impact of increased visibility on the token members to find a prevalence of increased scrutiny and unequal standards between minority and majority group members. Diehl and Dzubinski (2017) reported in their findings "women are often held to higher performance standard than their male counterparts" (p. 279). Holgersson and Romani (2020) found that increased scrutiny and pressure frequently result in the female leaders perceiving they represent all women and must overachieve.

The second phenomenon of tokenism is "polarization" based on differences and can result in the token feeling isolated or experiencing isolating incidents (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b). I will discuss this phenomenon in more detail in the section below regarding exclusion from informal networks.

The third phenomenon of tokenism is "assimilation;" the conscious or unconscious belief of majority group members that the token needs to fit into limited and stereotyped roles (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b). Kanter named this specific type of stereotyping *status leveling*, in this case meaning that women in an unusual or unexpected role are assumed similar to the stereotypical average and treated as such, even when it becomes clear that is not situationally correct. For example, Kanter describes a woman salesperson assumed a secretary or wife. Status leveling exists when others discovered the woman was not the secretary, but in fact a salesperson, and did not modify treatment of the woman to be in line with her status. Holgersson and Romani (2020) reported observing assimilation and status leveling during their investigation of the IT industry, a well-explored example of women in male-dominated work settings. In Holgersson and Romani's study, female consultants observed male colleagues would assume all women worked in sales or customer service and did not work with the data or infrastructure, which had a male connotation. Senior women in Holgersson and Romani's study described having learned through experience to

mention their advanced degrees in math and science during introductions to new clients to combat the phenomenon of status leveling.

***Barrier Category Three: Exclusion of Formal and Informal Networks***

Women leaders in all industries experience exclusion from formal organizational supports, presenting decreased opportunities for mentoring, sponsorship, and professional support (Bligh & Ito, 2017). A lack of supporting professional network is especially apparent in male-dominated environments where women leaders are a significant minority or are the first woman to accomplish an upper leadership position in an organization (Eagly, 2007).

Without strong mentors or sponsors, women leaders are less likely to be promoted (Bligh & Ito, 2017). Catalyst's "2020 Pyramid: Women in S&P 500 Companies" (2020b) highlights what has sometimes been referred to as the "leaky pipeline." Women are nearly reaching parity in the overall employee population but are reported at decreasing levels of representation in upper management and leadership positions. I summarize the Catalyst (2020b) data in Figure 1, showing the percentage of women in S&P 500 companies as of January 15, 2020.

**Figure 1**

*Catalyst's 2020 Pyramid: Women in S&P 500 Companies (1/15/2020)*

<b>Title/position</b>	<b>Percent of women</b>
Total Employees	44.7%
First and middle-level managers	36.9%
Executive and senior-level managers	26.5%
Board seats	21.2%
Top earners	11.0%
CEOs	5.8%

Women are also often excluded from informal social events in the corporate environment, which reduces a woman leader's ability to form mentoring relationships, and to access networking, information, and decision-making shared informally in casual settings (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017). "Old boys" networks are still a force in male-dominated corporate America, continuing to hold influence, control the exchange of information and determine who is mentored (Bligh & Ito, 2017). Annabi and Lebovitz (2018) reported fifteen of 23 respondents in their IT study reported isolation and exclusion as barriers. Thirteen respondents reported the male-dominated culture created "a feeling of exclusion," resulting in the "camaraderie not being as strong" (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018, p. 1060).

In addition, women's exclusion from the same informal social networks shared by men excludes them from the small pool of candidates referred for jobs in the first place. Many organizations rely heavily on referrals from their existing associates for hires, especially at upper management positions. Most often, existing White male associates have social networks of similar candidates, thus minimizing the possibility a woman leader will be referred for open positions (Bligh & Ito, 2017).

***Barrier Category Four: Queen Bee Effect (Self-Group Distancing)***

Derks et al. (2016) explore *the queen bee effect*, described as the reaction of women leaders in male-dominated environments to distance themselves from junior women. The authors hypothesized the queen bee effect results from gender bias inside male-dominated organizations. They claimed that women in male-dominated organizations react as a disadvantaged group in a minority position. When women leaders are in a setting "characterized by gender inequality," they may experience feeling threatened or disadvantaged, resulting in distancing themselves from other women (Derks et al., 2016, p. 459).

### ***Barrier Category Five: Male Organizational Culture***

Historically, White men (as the majority group) have established corporate cultures that work well for White men (Bligh & Ito, 2017; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Bligh and Ito (2017) define *culture* as "the assumptions, values, and norms that have been developed over time in order to solve problems of both internal integration and exterior adaptation, and that are taught to new employees" (p. 289). Ely and Meyerson (2000) describe the impact of gender in organizational culture as "ranging from formal policies and procedures to informal patterns of everyday social interaction, within formal organizations. These social practices tend to reflect and support men's experience and life situation, because they have been created largely by and for men" (p. 113). Furthermore, the authors argue these organizational practices appear gender-neutral and thus equally accessible by men and women; however, these practices maintain the status quo, including a gendered social order where men are more comfortable and continue to dominate (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

### **One Popular Individual Intervention: Fix the Women**

A generalization has developed that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions because they struggle to successfully navigate male culture (Bligh & Ito, 2017). Mainstream media and many academic researchers have argued that women must better "fit in" to the male culture to "earn their success" and thus resolve the gender gap in leadership (Bligh & Ito, 2017). The most popular approach by organizations to increase gender parity has focused on the individual level, specifically with leadership training for women (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018).

Inside male-dominated environments, women experienced extensive organizational barriers, including isolation and exclusion, access to legitimacy, discrimination, lack of network,

and a general men-dominated environment (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). Over half of the women in Annabi and Lebovitz's study reported making individual-level changes to cope with organizational barriers. The authors reported that 83% of organizations provided additional professional development opportunities for the women, which was by far the most frequently applied intervention and which they found "alarming." The authors noted:

It seems as though interventions are primarily directed at the women as though they were lacking and in need of corrective measures. This is especially concerning when compared to the barriers women face in IT, which are predominately due to the men-dominated culture. (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018, p. 1063)

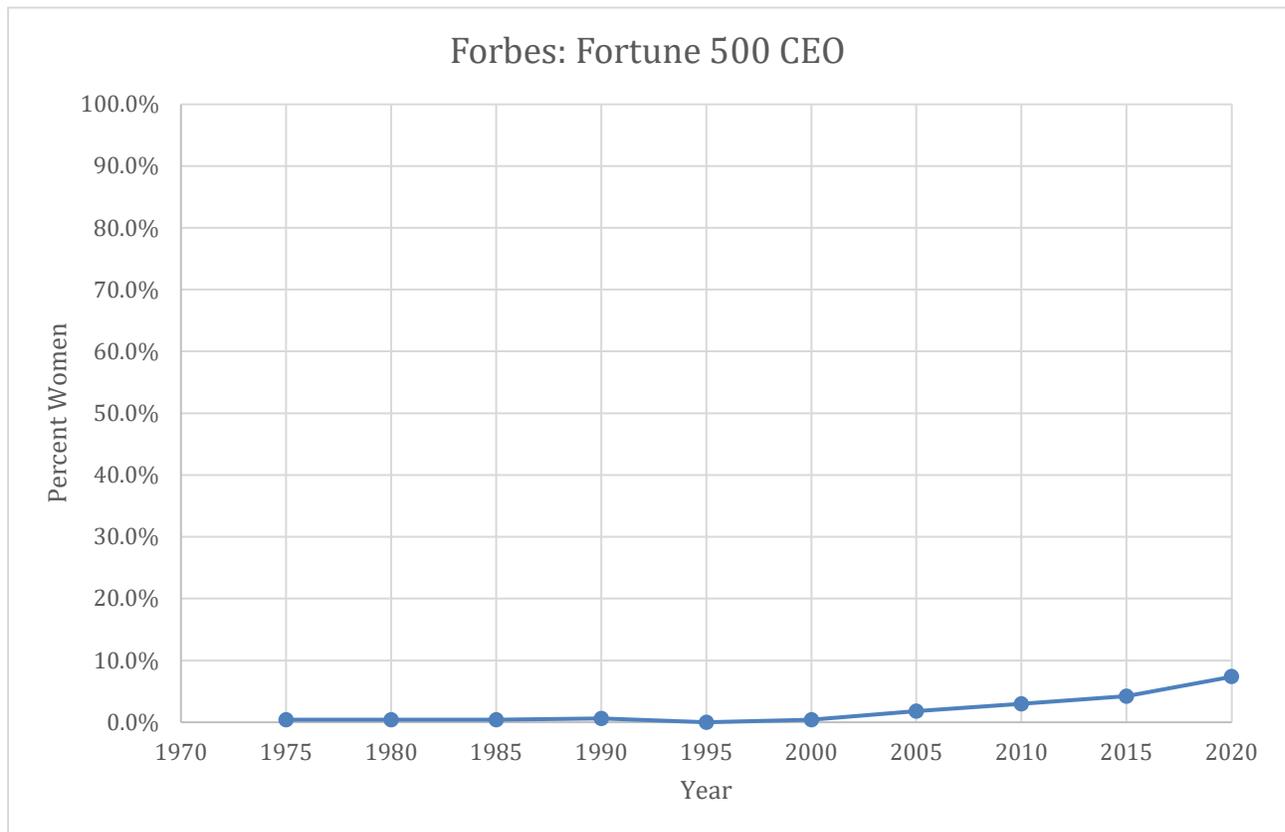
Individual skill-based training has successfully increased the number of women in the overall organizational pipeline; however, the statistical representation of women in overall top management and executive positions is changing at a very slow rate. Catalyst's (2020a) "Historical List of Women CEOs of the Fortune 500" revealed it has taken forty-five years to increase the number of Fortune 500 women CEOs from 0.4% to 7.4% (see Figure 2).

The idea that men and women are fundamentally different leaders purely based on gender is often the "problem" that gains attention when attempting to resolve the gender gap in leadership. Ely and Meyerson (2000) present that women are perceived as less skilled because of their underrepresentation. As a result, additional training of the under-skilled population of women is the necessary (and often deemed as the only) "fix" to solve their underrepresentation. However, research overwhelmingly reports there is not a significant difference in leadership effectiveness between genders (Eagly et al., 1995; Eagly, 2007; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Two themes of literature that challenge the effectiveness of focusing on individual interventions

aimed at women leaders include *Gender-Difference Research* and the *Double-Bind for Women Leaders*.

**Figure 2:**

*Catalyst's 2020 Historical List of Women CEOs of the Fortune 500*



***Gender-Difference Research***

Gender-based leadership perceptions have changed over time. In 1995, Eagly et al. conducted a meta-analysis of quantitative studies to compare the effectiveness of women and men as leaders and to search for any leadership characteristics that might differ between men and women. Female leaders were found to be no more or less effective than male leaders overall. Female leaders were evaluated, however, as less effective in environments that defined leadership in masculine terms, while male leaders were evaluated as less effective in environments that defined leadership in feminine terms. The study concludes, "gender role

expectations spill over onto leadership roles within organizations and groups and produce important consequences for the effectiveness of the leaders" (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 140).

More recently, media has brought attention to a possible "female advantage" in leadership. Zenger and Folkman (2019) report for the Harvard Business Review and have studied leadership competencies in men and women since 2012. In 2012, Zenger and Folkman reported very little difference in competencies, with the slightly significant statistical difference advantaging women leaders. In 2019, Zenger and Folkman updated their research using 360-degree reviews to rate leader's effectiveness and again confirmed that women in leadership are perceived as being at least as effective as male leaders. The authors provided this summary of the conditions as of 2019:

The disturbing fact is that the percentage of women in senior leadership roles in businesses has remained relatively steady since we conducted our original research. Only 4.9% of Fortune 500 CEOs and 2% of S&P 500 CEOs are women. And those numbers are declining globally. (Zenger & Folkman, 2019, para. 4)

Eagly (2007) describes this contradiction: "women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and, in fact, women, more than men, manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance as leaders. Nevertheless, more people prefer male than female bosses" (p. 1). To analyze this new question of a female leadership advantage, Eagly revisits their 1995 study. Eagly (2007) found again, this time through a meta-analysis of 96 studies, that the existence of a female disadvantage in leadership effectiveness occurs only in male-dominated roles.

### ***Double-Bind for Women Leaders***

The expectation that individuals will react and behave in a certain way because of their gender, specifically that women are naturally more communal and helpful and men are more agentic, aggressive, and self-directed, results in stereotypes that often reside at a sub-conscious level (Eagly, 2007). This tension between communal and agentic qualities is a well-documented challenge for female leaders (Bligh and Ito, 2017; Eagly, 2007). Specifically, these cultural stereotypes place female leaders in a "double-bind" where they are expected to be communal as women and, at the same time, expected to be agentic as a leader (Eagly, 2007). Eagly summarizes, female leaders "often experience disapproval for their more masculine behaviors, such as asserting clear-cut authority over others, as well as for their more feminine behaviors, such as being especially supportive of others" (2007, p. 4).

Bligh and Ito (2017) further explore the double-bind dilemma for women leaders inside a masculine corporate culture. The authors expand on research explaining women are evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts when exhibiting the same behaviors of assertiveness and decisiveness. As a result, the organization creates a self-fulfilling prophecy by perpetuating "the belief that women are less suitable for leadership positions by defining them as such" (Bligh & Ito, 2017, p. 294).

In Eagly's research (2007), the double-bind dilemma and the related cross-pressures result in women leaders rating the need to find an effective leadership style as a significant hurdle in their career progression. This results in organizations and women leaders turning to professional development opportunities, ultimately aiming to fix the women instead of changing the system.

## **Transforming Corporate Culture**

As discussed earlier, many organizational efforts have focused on fixing the women, and the resulting pace of change in the percentage of women in leadership positions has been very slow. Researchers on gender and organizational development are observing, "today the emphasis is being placed on changing organizations (that is, systems) to make them more gender-balanced" (Burke, 2017, p. 413). Three specific approaches, *Organizational Self-Awareness*, *Gendered Organizations*, and *Inclusive Leadership*, frame my research and stand in contrast to traditional interventions focused only on women. In this section, I describe the background and best practices of each approach.

### ***Organizational Self-Awareness***

The first approach, Organizational Self-awareness, is the process of organizational study, assessment, and understanding of the existing social order. Organizational change required to shift culture is as a process that takes place inside a very complicated context. Many researchers have explored this issue; in this section, I highlight those that help to frame my study. Experts advise that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy is "best understood as a journey, not a specific destination" (Coe et al., 2019, p. 589). Coe et al. advises that while important to have milestones and monitor progress, the work is never "done."

Ely and Meyerson (2000) explore three "traditional" interventional approaches to gender inequity, including "Fix the Women," "Value the Feminine," and "Create Equal Opportunities" (Ely & Meyerson, 2000, p. 106). Ely and Meyerson found that Fix the Women interventions resulted in "existing organizational policies and structure remain intact and are meant to assimilate (some) women with minimal disruption to the status quo" (2000, p. 108). The authors argue that real change to gender equality requires a challenge to existing power structures.

Ely and Meyerson (2020) analyzed a fourth, complex intervention strategy devised to "Assess and Revise Work Culture." The authors acknowledge their vision for change is a process that never truly ends and a goal few can fully visualize by stating that organizational change requires "a radical reframing of both gender and the role organizations play in shaping it" (2020, p. 114). Ely and Meyerson propose a three-step process of incremental changes leading to shifts in organizational culture:

1. Critique. The authors describe the purpose of this first step as to "identify oppressively gendered social practices in the organization, especially those that appear to compromise organizational effectiveness" (2020, p. 135).
2. Narrative Revision. This phase includes the communication of findings and inviting feedback from the larger organization. The authors describe the second step as "internal partners on the project team begin to see a different reality and develop a different story" (2020, p. 137).
3. Experimentation. This final phase includes what the authors describe as a series of small interventions intended to "change the way work is defined, executed, and evaluated" (2020, p. 139).

Individual leadership development will be limited in success and sustainability if it ignores the context and culture of the workplace (Bierema, 2017). The author cautions:

Women are being left behind when they continually get pushed into the same oppressive organization structures that have not worked, are not working, and will not work. If organization leaders are to meet their goal of creating strong, sustainable, and successful businesses, they must fully embrace diversity and discover new ways of thinking and structuring that eradicate gender bias. (Bierema, 2017, p. 145)

### ***Gendered Organizations***

The “gendered organizations” approach presents and explores the changes needed in an organization to improve the working experience for women (Acker 1990, 1992, 2006, 2011). In this area of study, gender is considered a “patterning of difference” between men and women, interwoven into the social structure of organizations (Acker, 1992, p. 565). Gendered organization theory differed from most organizational theories at the time by taking the stand that organizational structure is not gender-neutral. Because Acker’s theory is not gender-neutral, a worker is not a bodiless, abstract model that is preferred by many organizational researchers (Acker, 1990). Acker’s theory of gendered organizations claims that organizations cannot be understood without consideration of the ways gender influences processes and structure, such as the division of work, organizational vernacular, individual interactions, and individual identity (Acker, 1990).

Acker (1990, 2006) tackles the topics of gender, sexuality, and the female body in her analysis of organizations. Acker (1990) posits that women are “devalued” because they are “unable to conform to the demands of the abstract job” (p. 152). Acker (2006) provides these examples of organizations using sexuality and the female body as a method of control over women in organizations: subjecting women to sexual banter and innuendos, expecting women to dress attractively for the job, and sexualizing male/female relationships in the workplace. Acker (2006) acknowledges the perception of the traditional ideal leader as masculine, although also presents that men as ideal leaders are allowed to demonstrate feminine qualities, such as flexibility and sensitivity, if needed by his team. Using Acker’s theory of gendered organizations allows analysis to move beyond efforts to “fix the women”, instead giving another lens to review organizations at a systemic level (Acker, 1992).

### ***Inclusive Leadership***

Another theme in the literature on best practices for diversity initiatives is that of organizational training and education towards inclusive leadership. Blight and Ito (2019) propose that organizations promote inclusive leadership as a way to "raise awareness of men in addressing these biased processes" (p. 299). Bierema (2017) advocates for a learning and development environment that "creates new organization structures" and "pursues organizational transformation" (p. 158). To this end, Bierema (2017) recommends what they call "critical gender-conscious leadership development," which strives to create "high action – high awareness advocates" inside an organization. High action- high awareness advocates will practice behaviors such as:

- Speak up about inequity.
- Engage in critical activism in the organization.
- Take risks.
- Advocate change and transformation.
- Challenge asymmetrical power relations.
- Focus outward and help other women. (Bierema, 2017)

Annabi and Lebovitz (2018) studied male-dominated environments and summarized that to combat "lack of access and legitimacy," scholars recommend to "educate employees and examine current practices to build a culture of diversity and accountability" (p. 1053). To combat "isolation and exclusion", the scholars recommend to "provide networking opportunities and make role models visible" and improve supervisor relationships (2018, p. 1053).

Best practices recommend all of these organizational interventions *in addition to* flexible arrangements to accommodate work-life conflict (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Burke, 2017) and *in*

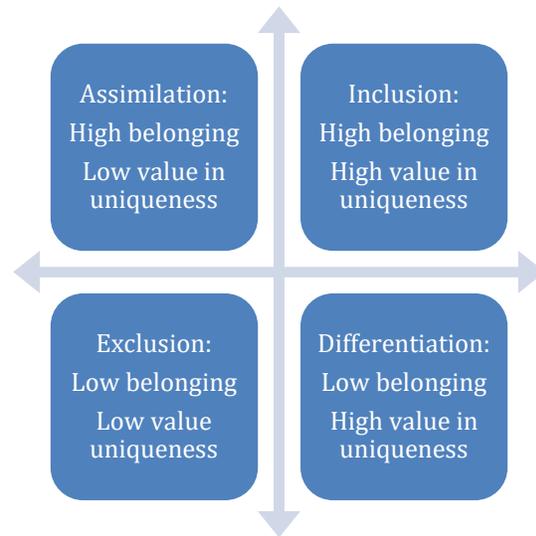
*addition to* professional development opportunities intended to maintain and strengthen technical knowledge for women leaders (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). Annabi and Lebovitz (2018) also reinforced that participants felt most intervention leaders had other duties beyond diversity interventions, and this limited assigned responsibility and accountability.

Inclusive leadership is an essential component of successful diversity programs (Blight & Ito, 2019; Coe et al., 2017; Shore & Chung, 2021). Inclusive leadership acknowledges that organizational change towards diversity and inclusivity must not fall to the underrepresented populations (Coe et al., 2017). Coe et al. measured inclusive leadership as the "ability to recognize and remove the minority tax" (2017, p. 589). Burke (2017) recommended companies interested in combatting gender inequity "note that men must play a part in supporting women's career development" (p. 413).

Very recently, Shore and Chung (2021) studied the importance of inclusive leadership on employees that have marginalized social identities. The researchers found that organizations were most effective in promoting an inclusive culture when diversity in the workplace was accompanied by leaders actively promoting both the value-proposition of diversity and the unique perspective that employees with marginalized social identities brought to their team (Shore & Chung, 2021). Shore and Chung highlighted the importance for leaders to be aware of the potential for low inclusion of team members with marginalized identities by looking for opportunities to discourage exclusion, assimilation, and differentiation (see Figure 3). The authors encouraged inclusive leaders to use equity, not equality, to drive their actions by treating team members according to their needs to accomplish inclusion.

**Figure 3**

*Belonging/Value in Uniqueness Matrix based on Shore and Chung (2021)*



### **Gaps in the Literature**

The IT industry has led other male-dominated industries in analyzing gender barriers, the effectiveness of interventions, and the organizational benefits of gender parity. The WEF states:

As an industry, the technology sector has been taking steps towards the advancement of women, who accounted for nearly 30% of the industry's entry-level workforce in 2019.

Last year, 13.2% of women were promoted, compared to 12.1% of men, and the overall hiring rate of women increased to 27.3%. While this progress is inspiring, it also serves as a reminder that true diversity of thought and contribution is only achieved when accompanied by belonging. (Tans, 2020, para. 6)

Outside of the IT and IS industry, there is limited research available on the experience of women leaders inside highly gendered corporate cultures as their organizations attempt to implement gender diversity initiatives. A search in Business Source Premier (April 2021) for "women leaders" AND "diversity training programs" resulted in no content. This gap in literature

allows an opportunity to further the understanding of women in pursuit of leadership inside male-dominated corporate environments.

Further, I intentionally focused my literature review on the for-profit business in the United States. As a result, the literature is limited to presenting Western culture and predominately-White dominated organizations and perspectives. Although improving in recent years, a majority of the research available on women leaders excludes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand the experiences of women leaders inside male-dominated organizations, I selected Laws' (1975) Psychology of Tokenism as a theoretical frame. Tokenism Theory, which is often credited to Kanter (1977a, 1977b), actually predates this author's work. Kanter cites Laws' (1975) "The Psychology of Tokenism: An Analysis" which provides a rich perspective that is lost in Kanter's use of the theory. Kanter's use of Tokenism Theory has been critiqued, developed, and evolved since it was made popular in 1977. See Appendix A for additional context on the criticism of Kanter's interpretation of Tokenism Theory and the critiques provided by scholars Zimmer (1988), Yoder (1991), and Lee (2020). Laws' (1975) original psychologically-based analysis proved enduring across the decades and is best suited as a theoretical frame for this study.

Laws (1975) presents an analysis that studies tokenism in academia within the context of a skewed gender population with very few women. Laws writes about tokenism through the perspective of the Token. The analysis defines the Token as "a member of an underrepresented group, who is operating on the turf of the dominant group, under license from it" (Laws, 1975, p. 51). The Token is a "double-deviant," where deviance means difference. The Token is double-

deviant by being both female (“primary-deviant”) and aspiring to the traits, advantages and status of the dominant (male) class (Laws, 1975). In other words, the Token, as female, is different from other successful associates in the workplace who are all male. The Token is also different from other women in the workplace because her success differentiates her from them. The Token becomes essentially “homeless”, without a group of work peers. Another important attribute of the Token, in Laws’ analysis, is her “unusual competence” which she demonstrates by excelling in the traits and behaviors that are valued by the dominant class (men) and thus disassociates herself from her primary-deviant class (women).

Laws (1975) explored the underlying psychology of the Token experience with a focus on the implied partnership between the Token and her Sponsor (or oftentimes, a series of sponsors that can begin as early as childhood). The Sponsor, most often a man, is a member of the dominant class and the primary source of recruitment, approval, acceptance, and positive reinforcement for the Token (Laws, 1975). Although the Sponsor is an individual in Laws’ analysis, the sponsor role has been applied to an organization as a whole through later interpretations (Lee, 2020). Through the role partnership of the Token and Sponsor, a series of agreements occur, often below the level of consciousness. These agreements reward the Token with positive reinforcement and professional credentials and serve to perpetuate the existence of the dominant class (Laws, 1975). By designating the Token as unusually capable, a number of phenomena can occur:

1. **Exceptionalism.** In Laws’ (1975) analysis, the Token’s high level of competence in the traits and behaviors of the dominant class serve to separate her from the primary-deviant (female) class. By stressing the exceptionalism of the Token, the organization is giving credit to any stereotypical differences or weaknesses in the primary-class. For example, a Token woman

may be seen approaching challenges with a very measured and controlled approach, more typically associated with men, as opposed to an emotionally charged approach that might be more typically associated with women.

Exceptionalism can result in self-group distancing, as mentioned in Gender Barrier Number 4, the Queen Bee Effect. In extreme settings, Exceptionalism can result in the Token taking on the role of gatekeeper, preventing upward mobility for other women, and releasing the dominant class from this responsibility (Law, 1975). The presence of the Token also affirms for the dominant class that they are open-minded and successfully improving the experience for all women (Laws, 1975).

2. Individualism. Laws (1975) presents that the ideology of Individualism is an integral component of the implied agreement between Token and Sponsor. Individualism is the belief that hard work and striving for excellence leads to achievement. The ideology of Individualism places great value in the act of pulling oneself up from hardship, for example, and leads to a false worldview that equal effort results in equal success for anyone, regardless of disadvantages.
3. Meritocracy. Laws (1975) presents that Meritocracy builds on the dimension of Individualism through the beliefs that success must be achieved and that high standards require exclusivity. For example, an organization might argue that only the very best candidates can meet the standards of their job descriptions and that affirmative-action programs are both unnecessary and undesirable, because all candidates must earn access solely through their merits (Laws, 1975).

Meritocracy has been studied extensively more recently, partially in response to the national focus on racial equity that is described further as context in the Methods section of

this paper. The “myth of meritocracy” is widely understood to argue that upward mobility solely through one’s own effort or work ethic is impossible in capitalist societies due to wealth disparity and other structural biases (Adams, 2018; Sandel, 2020).

4. **Boundary Maintenance.** Laws (1975) presents that Individualism, Meritocracy, self-group distancing, and affirmation of the dominant group, as discussed above, all serve to legitimize the social distance between the dominant and primary-deviant class. For example, organizations often request that Tokens take on the role of screening other female applicants. In this way, any rejection of female candidates is legitimized and maintains the distance between dominant and deviant classes. The Token’s support of the organization plays an important role; her exceptionalism confirms the superiority of the dominant class and her professional success confirms for the organization that their diversity efforts are appropriate and effective (Laws, 1975).

Laws (1975) concludes that the Psychology of Tokenism and the roles of both Token and Sponsor serve to maintain the status-quo. Laws stops short of offering strategies to disrupt this cycle, but posits that change is possible through the expansion of consciousness of either Token or Sponsor, and through change at the structural level forced by either internal or external pressures. The experiences of the women I interviewed can be understood using Laws’ (1975) psychological analysis of the Token, and the implied partnership with her organization and/or her Sponsor. Using this as a theoretical framework, I explored the experiences, contradictions, and tensions described in my data.

### **Method**

Independent research is guided by a research question. The research question for this study was “How do women leaders in male-dominated environments experience gender and

corporate culture before, during, and after formal or informal diversity initiatives?” The open-ended nature of my research question was well suited for a qualitative study. Qualitative research strives to give voice to the participants in the study, focuses on a small number of participants in order to gain a depth of understanding, studies emotionally charged topics that can be otherwise difficult to study, and allows the researcher to reflect on one’s own experiences (Creswell & Báez, 2021). Finally, qualitative research was best suited to study my central phenomenon because of the opportunity for advocacy and lifting the voice of women leaders that have been marginalized in male dominated environments (Creswell & Báez, 2021).

This qualitative study included six semi-scripted interviews with women leaders working inside male-dominated environments. Interviews were selected for data collection to facilitate an open exchange of information that could include lengthy descriptions of individual experiences (Creswell & Báez, 2021). I developed interview scripts to explore my research question and the central phenomenon of women leaders’ experience with gender in male-dominated environments. (See Appendix C for interview questions.) Participants were asked open-ended questions about times they experienced a difference in treatment that could not be explained by job-related causes. All participants were aware that my study was focused on women in male-dominated environments and would include questions on gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives.

The study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required all interviews to be held virtually. The study also took place during a high level of anxiety in the Twin City’s community fueled by crimes against Black Americans. This backdrop of social justice presents in my study through the unprompted discussion of the George Floyd murder.

I recruited women leaders from my personal and professional network that self-identified as having experienced the positive and negative influence of gender and corporate culture in for-profit, male-dominated industries, or male-dominated environments. Once I identified potential women leaders from my personal and professional network, I pre-screened participants using a short pre-survey to ensure that a number of criteria for interviews were met. (See Appendix C for pre-survey questions.)

I used “purposeful sampling” to set the parameters for the participants in my study; participants were selected as a homogenous group that met a specific set of criteria in order to provide a focused data set that allowed for analysis of my central phenomenon (Creswell & Báez, 2021.) Women leaders who participated were required to have experienced either formal or informal initiatives inside their organizations intended to improve the work environment for women. A leader was defined as holding (or having held) at least an upper management position, including C-suite and board of director positions. I sought to interview women with this higher level of responsibility in order that they might offer insight into the results and impacts of diversity initiatives; this generally translated to a vice-president or higher position, although one director qualified based on her leadership responsibilities. I used the Catalyst (2020c) definition of *male-dominated*, meaning an industry or occupation comprised of fewer than 25% women. I qualified participants if either their workforce or their leadership team (again defined as upper management, i.e.: vice-president and above) was less than 25% women.

## **Participants**

Figure 4 introduces the interview participants with a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality and provides relevant descriptor data for each. Due to the nature of my study, all participants identified as women leaders inside male-dominated industry or male-dominated

environments. Figure 4 provides information on the participants' industry, years in industry, percent of women in the workforce, percent of women in leadership, whether the participant discussed the influence of a female boss/supervisor, and a self-reported rating of the masculinity of their corporate culture. Five of the six participants were located in the Twin Cities metro area and one participant was located in a neighboring state. As discussed in more detail in the Limitations section of this study, all six participants were White.

#### Figure 4

##### *Participant Descriptor and Pre-Screen Data*

Pseudonym	Industry	Current Role	Years in Industry	% Women in workforce	% Women in leadership	Influence of female supervisor	Rate Masculinity of Culture
Ann	Manufacturing	CEO	37	21-30	16+	No	10
Jane	Construction	CEO	30	0-10	6-10	No	5
Becky	Engineering	RVP	30	31+	0-5	Yes	7-8
Kate	Engineering	RVP	30	11-20	6-10	No	7-8
Carrie	Construction	VP	25	11-20	11-15	Yes	5
Mary	Construction	Dir	30	11-20	6-10	Yes	10

#### Data Collection and Analysis

I pre-screened potential participants using a short survey to ensure that a number of criteria for interviews were met. During the pre-screen, participants were asked six questions about their experience and organization. All participants reported that their organizations provided formal diversity initiatives at the organizational level (sometimes referred to as the “structural” level), meaning that initiatives were focused on processes and practices, such as

recruiting and hiring. Only three of the participants (Ann, Jane, and Kate) reported that their organizations provided diversity initiatives at the individual level, such as mentoring and coaching. Most participants reported that their organizations have been engaged in diversity initiatives for more than five years; two participants (Carrie and Mary) reported that their organizations' diversity initiatives began in earnest in 2020. Participants were asked to rate the corporate culture of their organization on a scale from 1-10 with 1 indicating highly feminine or matriarchal culture and 10 indicating highly masculine or patriarchal culture.

Once participants were pre-screened, I conducted six interviews; each was on-line, one-on-one, informal, semi-structured, and approximately 60 minutes in length. Questions were open-ended, focused on participant's workplace experiences, personal development and leadership style changes, and experiences with organizational changes towards gender-improved environments.

I used Microsoft Teams for recording and transcribing interviews and added notes during the interview process to each transcription, including notes on non-verbal cues. I entered the transcribed interviews into Dedoose coding software to organize the data. I reviewed each transcript line-by-line to highlight important excerpts from each interview, used open coding to search for patterns and keywords, and documented each codes' frequency of mention (Creswell & Báez, 2021). I used concept mapping and Dedoose data analysis tools to note the co-occurrence of codes and connections between participant descriptors and various codes (O'Leary, 2017). Through this analysis, I placed the codes into categories and identified themes that aligned with existing literature.

The literature on gender barriers predicted many of the experiences and patterns that emerged from the data. All questions, regardless of their open-ended nature, solicited response

that was heavily steeped in gendered context. For this reason, gender itself was not coded for individually as it was a consistent theme throughout the data. Although only one participant described her experience as a woman leader using the term “token”, Laws’ (1975) *Psychology of Tokenism* provided a valuable lens to analyze the patterns, similarities and contradictions that were presented by the data.

During data analysis, I checked for validity and accuracy of the qualitative data using triangulation, disconfirming evidence, and reflexivity (Creswell & Báez, 2021). To ensure triangulation, I considered the themes in my data valid if they were credited to at least three of my interview participants. I actively searched for and reported disconfirming evidence that did not fully support my themes to provide a complete picture of the data. Finally, I maintained an ongoing word document as a “digital scratchpad” throughout the research design, interview, and writing phases of my study to record my own experiences, expectations, opinions, and bias on the topics to inform my reflexivity statement. I am a woman in male-dominated industry, sharing many similar experiences with my participants. It was ethical and necessary for me to be aware of my own personal position on the issues, to communicate this clearly in my writing, and to ensure that I did not lead others towards conclusions in my interviews and survey.

### **Limitations**

I have selected a theoretical framework that was first discussed in 1975. Laws (1975) does not include mention of the cultural limitations of her work, although Laws does distinguish that the belief in Individualism is more commonly found in White male populations. All six participants in my interviews were White women with at least 25 years of experience in predominantly-White industry. Five of the six participants were located in the Twin Cities metro area and one participant was located in an adjacent state. The experiences presented by the

participants in my study is limited to that of White women in upper leadership in predominantly-White industries in the Midwest.

My study does not explore the intersection of differing identities; many researchers (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Coe et al., 2017) included in the literature review caution against ignoring the complexity of individual identities, including race, nationality, gender identification, and sexual preference. My research is not intended to explore the experience of all identities and communities. More research is needed on women leaders that face the challenge of multiple socially marginalized identities.

### **Findings**

I used qualitative analysis of the data provided by six interviews, as described in the Method section, to identify four themes as findings. The four themes are *Gender Barriers*, *Loyalty*, *Distancing* and *Ray of Hope Just in Time*. Each theme includes subthemes that detail the experiences discussed by the participants. As discussed in the Method section, participants were asked open-ended questions about times they experienced a difference in treatment that could not be explained by job-related causes. All participants were aware that my study was focused on women in male-dominated environments and would include questions on gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives. All questions, regardless of their open-ended nature, solicited responses that were heavily steeped in gendered context. Although only the first theme includes specific reference to gender, a gendered context is presumed in all four themes.

#### **Gender Barriers**

The participants experienced gender barriers at a high rate, regardless of any self-reported increase in the percentage of women in the workforce or in leadership in their organization. The rate of mention of gender barriers was higher by participants that self-reported their corporate

culture as highly masculine. Gender barriers occurred even though all participants reported having organizational diversity initiatives in place and gender barriers were reported whether the participant had a male or a female boss/supervisor.

The participants experienced gender barriers that are predicted by literature and connected to theory (Laws, 1975; Kanter, 1977a, 1977b; Zimmer, 1988; Yoder, 1991; Lee, 2020). The gender barriers are divided into sub-themes below, in order of quantity of reported occurrence by the participants. The gender barrier sub-themes include *Gendered Sexualization*, *Being Discounted*, *a Lack of Confidence*, and *Feeling Isolated*.

### ***Gendered Sexualization***

The most often-mentioned gender barrier, discussed by five of the six participants was experiencing gender or sexual based actions or assumptions, which I am titling “Gendered Sexualization.” Participants were required to be very aware of their gender status in workplace interactions as presented in the following examples. Mary described not being invited to join her colleagues for social events, because “the wives would not be comfortable if you came on a fishing trip with us or a camping trip or whatever.” Becky described an experience during an on-the-job health screen with a male medical professional, “He made a comment ‘Oh, I’d love to meet you at the hot tub later today’. And that was really alarming. You know, ‘cause I’m in this little trailer with this guy.”

Ann, now CEO of her own training company, described gender difference treatment as affecting her ability to effectively do her job in a field dominated by men:

I had to be very careful what I wore, who I talked to, how long I talk to people. If I was seen talking to the guy who ran the whole marketing for the organization, and we had a

lot to talk about, I had supply chain, he had sales and marketing. And if I was seen talking to him too long, you could see the eyes like, “what's going on over there?”

### ***Being Discounted***

Five of the six participants also discussed the experience of being discounted. Participants were assumed wives or administrative assistants, asked to take notes in meetings more frequently than their peers, and often needed to provide their qualification to be taken seriously. Kate, a vice-president, shared a story where it was assumed she was the new timekeeper. Carrie shared a similar experience, “It's assumed I was either the assistant in the room or somebody who really didn't know much about the topic versus the person who was going to make the decisions and was running the effort.” Ann described her experience on a board of directors, “It was hard to get your voice heard if I said something. Often times it didn't stick until a man said it.”

### ***Lack of Confidence***

Five of the six participants reported experiences where it was challenging to feel confident or experiences where others perceived that women lack confidence. Examples of participants feeling a lack of confidence came from Ann and Meagan. Ann discussed her growth as “I had a lot of coaching to help me use my own behaviors and help me develop my confidence.” Mary described the process of coming into her own as

Now I feel like I own the space that I'm in as much as possible, but early on I don't think I was confident in that because I felt like, if I was the one woman in a room of men, that I looked like I was different.

Participants shared their own perception, and that of others, that women lacked confidence. Jane was critical of other women, expressing “I think that there are a lot of women that just don't have

that confidence.” Kate shared a similar perception, “probably the one thing I hear the most about other female leaders is, you know, maybe they will lack self-confidence.”

### ***Feeling Isolated (Lack of Belonging)***

Finally, four of the six participants reported feeling isolated or experiencing a lack of belonging. Participants were often left out of social activities and experienced less camaraderie and fewer networking opportunities than their male peers. Jane described the response she got from her first boss, “He was just like ‘there's no girls out there’. You know that was the first thing he said.” Becky described her experience as being very different from her male colleagues:

They're more likely to enjoy socializing with clients or colleagues and therefore they're going to build stronger relationships, they're going to have all of that intel that they gain in that socialization. Whereas because I don't fit in as much at work, you know, because that's not where I get my social satisfaction, that definitely leaves out a lot of networking and relationship building that the men get. I think that's a huge factor.

Mary also voiced the impact of being left out:

It starts to permeate, just a bit of otherness throughout the work that you're doing, because you don't get those moments. So much, I think, about how we grow as professionals or how we grow, especially from a sequential leadership role is beyond just what people see in you from a day-to-day role. It's how do they see you interact at a corporate social event? Or some of these different things. And to just get excluded from them always felt very, it felt like I was already behind because I couldn't be a part of it.

### **Loyalty**

The participants were overwhelmingly complimentary about their organizations, their male leaders, and their organizations’ diversity initiatives. This sense of loyalty and connection

to their organization is detailed in two sub-themes, the *Presence of a Sponsor*, and the *Presence of Affirmation to the Dominant Group*.

***Presence of a Sponsor (Advocate)***

Four of the six participants mentioned the importance of male advocates in their career development. The participants' male advocates were frequently direct supervisors and hiring managers, but also colleagues that provided support. The participants described their male advocates as becoming more understanding when the advocates' daughters began experiencing gender barriers in the workplace. Finally, the participants described many aspects of inclusive leadership as being important in the advocate relationship.

Jane mentioned, "He became one of my good friends, you know, one of my advocates" and Carrie described a "CEO who is very supportive of women." Becky described her advocate, "He's been incredibly respectful and appreciative of my perspective, which further builds my confidence that they want to hear my voice." Jane expanded the perspective to describe, "a protective guy you know, he was going to make sure that no guys were bugging me." Finally, Kate gave a more detailed experience:

I benefit in the coaching and the help that I received from other leaders. Primarily male, 'cause that's almost exclusively male [coaching] that I received. You know, just coaching and mentorship. I can't say it was done because of the [diversity] program. I think it was done just because, you know, I used to say that some of them would take me under their wing.

Mentioned less often, but described again by four of the six participants, was how male supervisors gained increased understanding when they had a daughter that was entering the workforce and encountering gender barriers. Carrie described a male supervisor: "he's very

aware that women are very highly functional. He has three daughters. Obviously [he wants] what's best for them. So I think he's pretty mindful of it.” Kate shared that men would “help me because they had daughters the same age as I was and they were hoping that someone was, you know, giving their daughter and treating their daughter that way.” Ann described a general shift in attitude in “men that were fathers of daughters. I've seen a big shift because men will bring up if they see discrimination in the workforce, [because] ‘I wouldn't want that to happen to my daughter.’”

The male advocates described by the participants often practiced inclusive leadership. Carrie described the company CEO as “he really pushes to have women in leadership positions” and “modeling behavior that trickles down.” Kate described the actions taken by her hiring manager to ensure she was promoted: “He spent a lot of time talking to his boss and CEO.” Becky described the importance to her to “know that leadership cares and especially to see the male leadership as allies.” She went on to describe specific actions taken by her supervisor and hiring manager, “He's been incredibly respectful and appreciative of my perspective, which of course further builds my confidence that they want to hear my voice, they want to hear my perspective.”

### ***Presence of Affirmation to the Dominant Group***

All six of the participants affirmed that their organization was making best efforts towards gender diversity and working to provide positive experiences for women in the workplace. The participants expressed that their organizations and male leaders valued respect, valued diverse points of views, and that overall systemic changes were occurring.

Becky described her organization in glowing terms, stating the company “truly values diverse perspectives rather than just saying they value diverse perspectives.” Kate stated, “We've

worked really hard at diversity, both gender, ethnic, age. I mean, just trying to become more diverse in thought period.” Carrie shared “the company in general is, core values wise with respect for people and just the leadership that we hire in and/or grow internally, is welcoming and a good place to be a female, minority, LGBTQ, any of those.”

### **Distancing**

The participants often associated themselves more closely to their male peers, did not express a high level of appreciation for the impact of diversity initiatives on their own careers, nor did they generally want to be more personally involved in influencing their organization’s diversity initiatives. The participants were often concerned with making sure that diversity initiatives started by getting men on board and that initiatives were focused on “more than just” gender. Distancing of oneself from the efforts is presented in the data in three sub-themes: the *Presence of Exceptionalism*, the *Presence of Self-Group Distancing*, and the *Presence of Individualism/Meritocracy*.

#### ***Presence of Exceptionalism***

Five of the six participants discussed their behaviors or skillsets as being more comparable to men as opposed to women. This was typically noted as being “one of the guys.” Mary shared this experience of asking herself:

What can I do so that I look more like one of the guys? It would be even consciously coming into the room in the middle of the group versus at the end or the front, because if I felt like if I was in the middle, then some of those stereotypical things like being asked to take notes or get coffee might not come up because I might not have been seen.

Ann shared that she experienced a decrease in gender barriers “after the first year then I was one of the guys.” On the extreme end of associating with the dominant group, Jane provided this response when asked how diversity initiatives might be received differently by men and women:

The people that I deal with are men, so I don't know, if I would know if the women are experiencing that in a little different fashion. I'm just saying that for me, I probably would kind of feel the same way you know as the guys.

Finally, Kate described associating with men as being constant throughout her life:

I actually find being a female in a male dominated culture has been my entire life and all of my activities. I grew up on a farm; my dad didn't wanna have to go to a different [activity, so] I was in 4H. All boys in my 4H club and me. You know it's not surprising that I went into engineering, all guys in my classes, and so it's something that's followed me all along and so it's hard for me to know when I conformed. I'm sure I conformed at some point, but it was so long ago that it wasn't in the workplace.

Mentioned by three of the participants, another way of being different from other women was that [gender] “barriers don’t bother me.” Jane stated it this way, “maybe I was held back a little bit because I was a female, but I never really let that bother me.” Ann shared this reaction by men when a women’s network was established:

It was kind of a joke to a lot of the men that were at the same level. So if we were all managers at the time, the other men managers would be like. ‘Yeah, there they go in their little group’. So that part wasn't as accepted, but we learned to ignore that.

Kate excused the behavior of men who spoke inappropriately because “male employees were not used to seeing women leaders. I know he didn't mean anything by it. I'm not mad at him.” A final example of women leader’s reaction to barriers came from Ann: “Businesses were

built from a man's perspective, and to some extent you have to morph a little to, you know, to fit into that.”

### ***Presence of Self-Group Distancing***

As mentioned above, five of the six participants distanced themselves from their primary class (other women) by using “one of the guys” as a compliment or the ideal state of being. All six participants also associated themselves closely to the dominant group (men) through a high concern of not alienating men through diversity efforts. Carrie shared, “the object is not to alienate other men” and

I really just feel like some of our leaders are so uncomfortable because they don't know how to talk about it and they don't know what they can and can't say and they really don't want to offend anybody and so they just remain silent.

Ann shared an individual story about working with her supervisor:

The CEO's wife was a [high-ranking public official] and so I would do some comparisons to her sometimes. You know, like doesn't [your wife] ever do this or something like that, [in her role], so I would have to try to use examples. Real life examples with him to point out that my behavior was actually quite appropriate.

Kate shared, “You know it's like this, a White male in his 50s, he's not seen it. It was good to have those conversations and for people to share stories like that.” Finally, Mary shared,

We [women] have to work on assertiveness. We have to work on how you as a woman might have to educate some of your colleagues on what your needs are or what is appropriate or inappropriate and how you can find and create that support system that's going to help you succeed.

Four of the six participants expressed discomfort with personal advocacy or attention. When I prompted Becky about her overall positive response to advocacy, she clarified that she reacted positive only “when it's done as a general advocacy, if it were done as personal advocacy on my behalf, I wouldn't.” Ann discussed having this conversation with her supervisor when he would call her out individually in board meetings to solicit her input, “Please stop helping me. I know what you're trying to do, but it's not working. Let me forge my own way.” Ann went on to say, “The more he tried to help me, I had to really sit down with him at one point and say would you stop? You're making me more different. You're making me stand out.” Carrie shared a story of a high-potential woman in the organization,

There's an excellent project manager we have in [another state], but she does not want to call attention to the fact that she's a female so [she doesn't] wanna get involved with women in construction or [other programs].

Five participants discussed wanting diversity to be about “more than gender.” Becky succinctly stated, “I don't wanna be personalized. I don't want it be to be about me. I wanted to hear about some bigger issue.” Becky also stated, “It's not necessarily about a gender initiative; it's the whole global idea of inclusion and diversity and respect in the workplace and our workplace.” Jane stated, “I want the change to be because it's rewarded because it's due. I want to create more opportunities for everyone.” Ann elaborated on the topic,

People think of diversity initiatives as I'm going to get two of this color, three of that color, three of this gender for this, and then it's all going to just work. And it's not that simple. I think what we need to look for is diversity of thought, you know, and how we can represent the people that we serve.

Mary shared an overall opinion on the industry, “as a whole, I’ve experienced immense solidarity within our industry and support; I have not ever felt like I’m competing against someone just by virtue of gender.” Becky shared this story of mentoring:

I had a young engineer a month after I started approached me and asked me to go to lunch and just totally broke down about a situation. She would have left the organization, but I was able to help her maneuver through that situation, get it addressed and she stayed and she's with us today.

Carrie shared her story,

I’ve been very, very fortunate to have excellent leaders I worked with, and I’ve had multiple female leaders that I’ve worked underneath, and so I do think that you know, potentially plays into my career and my perception of what I could, you know, do within construction as well.

Kate described how her organization is challenging bias, “We’ve had a real corporate push in all portions of [diversity, equity, and inclusion] and really trying to challenge each other. When somebody says, well, I don’t think they’re ready yet, and it’s like, why not?”

### ***Presence of Individualism/Meritocracy***

Four of the six participants shared opinions that reinforce the importance of Individualism and Meritocracy in their personal beliefs. Many participants described working hard to get to where they are in their career and described an expectation that others would need to do the same. Ann shared the efforts she put into building her career:

I didn’t feel like a woman in the workforce. I felt like a person in the workforce so I didn’t wear any, I don’t believe I wore any chip on my shoulder about I’m a woman, so I should

be treated any certain way. I went into the workforce competing against myself to do the best job that I could do.

Jane shared, “no one deserves anything for free, and I believe that you need to work your way to get it and to make it” and “I want you to hire me because I'm the best that's out there; don't hire me because I'm a female.” Becky provided a number of opinions on the topic, including “I know no one wants to be the affirmative action hire,” and “you wanna make sure you're there 'cause you're good, not because they wanted a woman in this spot.” Finally, she went on to say that her organization was

looking for the best people and they're trying to build in inclusion so that we get the best people and that it's not about numbers, and it's not about quotas, but you know that that whole thing about it? It is so sensitive. It's just such a sensitive topic.

### **Ray of Hope Just in Time**

The interview participants expressed that there was an overall lack of impact by diversity initiatives so far. Many shared stories of personal exhaustion or stories of friends and colleagues that have left male-dominated industries. Participants shared stories of expanded consciousness and the significance of recent social unrest on their organizations. My final finding describes sub-themes of *Still Have Far to Go*, *Working Harder/Feeling Exhausted*, and the impact of *George Floyd and Resulting Bias Training*.

### ***Still Have Far to Go***

Five of the six participants expressed frustration with diversity efforts, stating, “We still have a long way to go” to accomplish gender equity. Mary expressed,

It's not just about getting that person in the door, it's about how can we foster that career all the way up because it doesn't do us any good to have a gap of leadership again where everyone is all White and male.

Carrie shared,

I think we have a lot of work to do to get there, but I think we're making efforts and I believe that we can, you know. Is here where it ends? Absolutely no. But don't expect the 20% to fix the issue. We need all hundred.

Ann had this reaction,

Women and their opinions are much more respected now because of the value proposition. Because we know that the diversity in the boardroom matters, and I think that there's been a big shift in how women are listened to and how they are asked to participate. I still think some of the other pieces of how we look, how we're judged, how we're scrutinized, have a long way to go.

### ***Working Harder/ Feeling Exhausted***

All six participants shared stories of needing to work harder to clear gender barriers as a woman in a male-dominated industry. Many participants shared stories of friends and colleagues that have left male-dominated industries and described their challenge in encouraging other women to pursue a similar career path. Mary discussed the added challenge of leading diversity initiatives while feeling the impact of bias,

I see some of those diversity initiatives failing when you put all of that burden on the one person of color or the one woman, or the person who's both of those things, to see something through because they're already bearing all of that emotional exhaustion just of being present every day.

Ann shared her reaction to being objectified for a pair of low-heeled shoes that showed her toes at a board meeting, “I was just ticked. I was so upset because I thought how dare this situation still exist? You know, I was 56 years old as a senior vice president. I had worked my way really diligently to the top.” Becky gave this example,

I think if I were surrounded by other women, I would feel more comfortable that I had support and other people had my back, whereas I think I think being a lone woman, one of the few women leaders, I felt more pressure to be perfect, more pressure to make sure I always made the right decision or always the best decision and so it made me more likely to want to vet with a whole bunch of people. Rather than just, you know what? This is, what I think, and it's my call, so I'm going to do it.

### ***George Floyd Murder and Resulting Bias Training***

Five of the six participants work in the Twin Cities metro area; all five of the local participants mentioned the impact of George Floyd’s murder on their personal consciousness and the mindset of their organization towards Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. Three of the six participants discussed their organizations’ efforts to provide associates with bias training. Ann shared, “I think it's much more [systemically] focused now, and that's making the difference. I think looking at the systems, looking at the inequities and then trying to understand how to change the system to respond to the inequities.” Mary shared,

The murder of George Floyd is one of the most horrific things that we could have experienced as a community, and it also catalyzed [my organization] in ways that I never expected, and it really did change the way [my organization] talked about diversity.

Becky offered,

They flew me out, and a dozen other people out to Broomfield, CO for two days to go through [unconscious bias] training in person, training to learn how to facilitate this course. And then now, especially after last year with the George Floyd and all of the racial injustice issues, it's now offered four times a month.

### Discussion

Laws' Psychology of Tokenism provided a lens to explore how women in male-dominated environments in my study reacted to their organization's efforts to influence change. Figure 5 is a representation of the findings from my study, built upon Psychology of Tokenism as a theoretical frame and highlighting the potential impact on organizations.

#### Figure 5

##### *Summary of Findings*

<b>Theoretical Frame – <i>Psychology of Tokenism</i></b>	<b>Relevant Findings reported by Participants</b>	<b>Impact to Organizations, based on Literature</b>
<u>Promoting</u> a belief in...		
Exceptionalism	Wanting to be “one of the guys”	Considering successful women to be “different” somehow than other women
Individualism	Taking pride in the hard work that build their careers	Expecting women to work harder to accomplish success
Meritocracy	Not wanting special treatment	Discounting the value of diversity efforts
<u>Practices</u> of Boundary Maintenance	Distancing from other women and affirming the actions of the dominant group	Believing their organization is already doing enough
<u>Potential</u> for Disruption	Expansion of consciousness and external pressures to make improvements	Seize the moment available now to drive change

The Psychology of Tokenism (Laws, 1975) was the theoretical framework that provided a useful lens to understand the findings from my study and the underlying social system that has reliably maintained women as underrepresented. The findings demonstrate that women leaders in male-dominated environments continue to experience gender barriers at a high rate. Seemingly paradoxical to the extent of reported gender barriers, the findings also offer data that token women remain overwhelmingly supportive of their organization and leadership while wanting to avoid personal advocacy or attention that might drive positive change. The women in my study fit the description and acted in the role of Token, as defined by Laws (1975). In addition, the organizations and advocates described by the women in my study fulfill the role and expectation of Sponsor. This ongoing dynamic supports my conclusion that each of these roles and the underlying social system work together to perpetuate and maintain the status quo, slowing the pace of positive change for gender equity, and inclusion. In this section, I describe how my findings align with Laws' "agreements" of Tokenism (*Exceptionalism, Individualism/Meritocracy and Boundary Maintenance*), as well as Laws' prerequisites for disruption (Laws, 1975).

### **Exceptionalism**

As described previously in the theoretical framework, Laws' (1975) analysis presents that the Token's high level of competence in the traits and behaviors of the dominant class (men) serve to separate her from the primary-deviant class (women). This can result in self-group distancing, and, in extreme settings, the Token taking on the role of gatekeeper, preventing upward mobility for other women, and releasing the dominant class from this responsibility (Laws, 1975). The presence of the Token also affirms for the dominant class that they are open-minded and successfully improving the experience for all women (Laws, 1975).

The experience of the participants in my study demonstrates that the male-dominated industries in which they worked have successfully maintained the “Exceptionalism” agreement between Token and Sponsor. As described in the findings, the women leaders expressed their ability to be “one of the guys” as a state of accomplishment, which makes them “exceptional” from other women. Three of the gender barriers reported by the participants, “gendered sexualization”, being discounted, and lack of confidence, acknowledged the perceived weaknesses of the deviant-class and provided potential motivation for the participants to prefer association with the dominant class.

The participants also spoke very highly of their organizations’ efforts and the work of male leaders. By vocally supporting their leadership and organizations, the participants were affirming the efforts of the dominant class.

It is important and positive to note that none of the participants mentioned any direct experience of gatekeeping or serving to actively judge the merits of other women leaders; in fact, five participants reported instances of being supported by female leaders or assisting less-tenured women in their organization.

### **Individualism/Meritocracy**

Again, from the theoretical framework, Laws (1975) presents that the ideology of Individualism is an integral component of the implied agreement between Token and Sponsor. Individualism is the belief that hard work and striving for excellence leads to achievement. The ideology of Individualism places great value in the act of pulling oneself up from hardship, for example, and leads to a false worldview that equal effort results in equal success for anyone, regardless of disadvantages. Meritocracy expresses that success must be achieved and that high standards require exclusivity. With these beliefs in place, Meritocracy contends that affirmative-

action programs are both unnecessary and undesirable, because all candidates must earn access solely through their merits (Laws, 1975; Adams, 2018; Sandel, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, the concepts of individualism and meritocracy are strongly associated with both Western and White culture; thus, the presence of these beliefs inside the participant pool of my study is not surprising. The findings demonstrate the way that individualism and meritocracy present themselves as obstacles to diversity initiatives. Token women in my study maintained the individualism “agreement” by often speaking about the hard work and effort that they had put into building their careers. Participants in my study confirmed the meritocracy “agreement” through their resistance to some diversity initiatives. As presented by Jane, “no one deserves anything for free, and I believe that you need to work your way to get it and to make it” and “I want you to hire me because I'm the best that's out there; don't hire me because I'm a female.”

### **Boundary Maintenance**

The literature (Laws, 1975; Lee, 2020) presented that Individualism, Meritocracy, self-group distancing, and affirmation of the dominant group, all discussed in the findings and summarized again below, serve to legitimize the social distance between the dominant and primary-deviant class. By legitimizing the social distance between the classes, this agreement serves to maintain the status-quo.

The findings demonstrate multiple ways that the boundaries between gender classes are maintained. Participants reported loyalty to their Sponsors, support of their organizations, distancing themselves from their primary-class, reluctance towards personal advocacy, belief in meritocracy, and concern with making sure that diversity initiatives started by getting men on board. From the findings, participants distanced themselves from other women, claiming they

“feel the same way as the guys” and do not “feel like a woman in the workforce.” In another example, multiple participants expressed belief that individuals must earn success, stating, “Hire me because I’m the best” and “you need to work your way.”

As described in the theoretical framework, the lens of Tokenism (Laws, 1975) presents that the Token’s support of the organization plays an important role; her exceptionalism confirms the superiority of the dominant class and her professional success confirms for the organization that their diversity efforts are appropriate and effective (Laws, 1975). The extant research on women in leadership, as presented in the literature review, overwhelmingly shows that this “agreement” is overall in industry successfully maintaining women as underrepresented in leadership.

### **Potential for Disruption**

Laws (1975) concludes her analysis that the Psychology of Tokenism and the roles of both Token and Sponsor serve to maintain the status-quo. Laws (1975) presents that change is possible through the expansion of consciousness of either Token or Sponsor, and through change at the structural level forced by either internal or external pressures.

Participants demonstrated their own expansion of consciousness by avoiding gatekeeping, actively seeking to mentor and support other women, and desiring to make diversity and inclusion about “more than gender.” The participants also discussed the expansion of consciousness in male sponsors as prompted by their own daughters experiencing gender barriers in the workplace.

Further, the experiences of my participants demonstrate a potential for disruption through societal expansion of consciousness, and both internal and external pressures for change. Participants reported that their organizations were relying on unconscious bias training as a

starting point for structural change. The organizational expansion of consciousness and external pressures discussed by participants were at least partially caused by the murder of George Floyd and the resulting unrest with the state of racial injustice.

### **Summary**

My research question asked how women in male-dominated environments experience gender and corporate culture before, during and after diversity initiatives. It was not surprising that the women in my study experienced significant gender barriers. The intent of my study was never to only explore the gender barriers encountered by women in male-dominated environments, but also to draw connections to organizational change efforts.

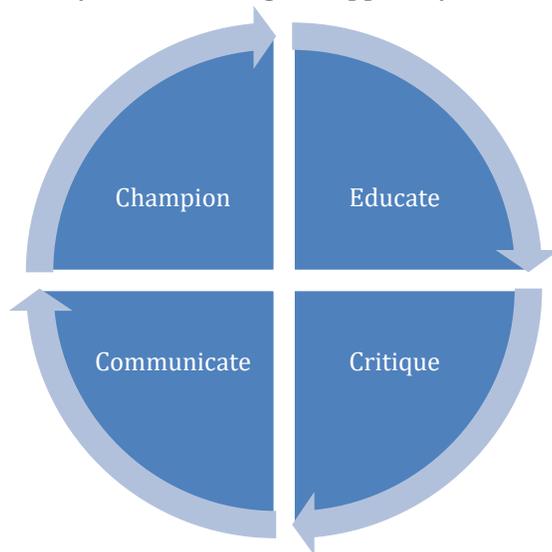
To date, initiatives to improve gender equality have overwhelmingly focused on leadership training for women (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). This approach has successfully increased the number of women in the organizational pipeline and improved the individual skills of many women leaders. However, the statistical representation of women in top management and executive positions is changing at a very slow rate. Researchers on gender and organizational development are observing a new emphasis on organizational and structural change (Burke, 2017). The findings in my study support the emphasis on organizational change and present that understanding the Psychology of Tokenism (Laws, 1975; Kanter, 1977a, 1977b; Zimmer, 1988; Yoder, 1991; Lee, 2020) against the background and best practices of gendered organizations and inclusive leadership provides a way forward that holds potential to disrupt the cycle of Tokenism. The following section will advance this summary into recommendations for organizational change.

### Recommendations: Toward a Model of Professional Learning

To implement practices of gendered organizations and inclusive leadership, I propose a model for DEI learning and cultural change shown in Figure 6. This model integrates concepts from the framework of gendered organizations and literature on inclusive leadership alongside the findings from my study to present a cycle of learning that supports organizational change. I offer this contribution against years of work by scholars that have studied gender discrimination and other societal inequities that hinder DEI in any workplaces and particularly those that qualify as male-dominated. The wheel presents four categories, *Educate*, *Critique*, *Communicate*, and *Champion* of learning intended to make progress towards gender equity. I selected a wheel as the model to highlight the iterative nature of the process, with no true beginning or end. The first topic discussed in the next section is “Educate”, which is often the starting point for organizations in their efforts toward improvement. However, organizations should use contextual awareness of their culture and environment to start the process. Simply making a start is the important first step. A further explanation of each category follows the figure.

#### Figure 6:

*Iterative Process of DEI Learning in Support of Gender Equity*



## **Educate on Bias**

Organizations must educate the entire workforce on unconscious bias. As discussed previously in the literature review, the barriers created by gender bias are often "unseen" and require education on unconscious bias to make them visible. Many organizations start their professional learning process with bias training because it is readily available through third-party sources. Half of the participants in my study described that their organizations were already providing formal training to their entire workforce around unconscious bias.

Five of the six participants in my study reported the experience of being discounted, often assumed to be a wife or administrative assistant, which is often the result of unconscious bias. The literature discussed *status leveling* (Kanter, 1977a, 1977b), meaning that women in an unusual or unexpected role are assumed similar to the stereotypical average and treated as such, even when it becomes clear that is not situationally correct. Status leveling is also often a result of unconscious bias. An organization that is more informed on unconscious bias will be better prepared for the rest of the work needed to improve a DEI culture. Education efforts do not need to end with unconscious bias training, however. More and more resources are available daily for organizations to access through video, podcasts, and book clubs. The process of continuous education serves as both the starting point to allow for understanding and progress, and an opportunity for inclusive leaders to get involved in ongoing educational efforts to interact with their teams.

## **Critique & Evaluate Existing Systems**

Organizations must critique and evaluate existing systems to gain visibility to existing bias. The findings in my study provide examples of gender barriers that may be present in any organization, but especially in those that are male-dominated, such as isolation from networks

and perceived lack of confidence in women. The framework of gendered organizations requires consideration of the ways gender influences processes and structure, such as the division of work, organizational vernacular, individual interactions, and individual identity (Acker, 1990).

Professional learning time should be spent evaluating processes for signs of bias. For example, organizations should evaluate which associates are doing recruiting and interviewing and how the practices are conducted, to ensure no presence of gatekeeping and minimize the opportunities for unconscious bias to unknowingly sway decisions. Leaders should critique processes for assigning projects and conducting performance reviews to ensure against favoritism or gendered stereotypes regarding ideal leadership. In a final example, organizational vernacular and vocabulary should be analyzed for gendered and sexualized language.

### **Develop Strategies & Communicate Openly**

Once systems are evaluated and critiqued for bias, the results of the evaluation must be communicated along with the plan to rebuild the impacted processes. Leaders must develop strategies towards DEI and communicate these openly throughout the organization to gain consensus. From the literature review, Ely and Meyerson (2020) recommend that changes in process should be done in small, incremental, steps, which the authors refer to as “experimentation.”

When rebuilding processes, leaders should strive to disrupt the cycle of tokenism by eliminating language and practices that support the “agreements” of Tokenism. For example, avoid describing successful women as being exceptional or different from their peers, and be aware of how the belief in individualism and meritocracy might diminish the value of DEI practices.

The participants in my study spoke very highly of the influence of male advocates and the importance that leaders communicate the value of diversity. At this point in the wheel model, male advocates, and all leaders, must take the opportunity to actively promote both the value-proposition of diversity and the unique perspective that diverse employees bring to their team (Shore & Chung, 2021).

### **Create Inclusive Leaders**

Organizations must recruit, train, create, and motivate champions (advocates, allies, and inclusive leaders) for DEI inside their workplace. Shore and Chung (2021) stressed the importance for leaders to strive to create both *high belonging* and *high value in uniqueness* inside their organizations (see Figure 3). The authors encouraged inclusive leaders to use equity, not equality, to drive their actions by treating team members according to their needs to accomplish inclusion.

The participants in my study discussed the importance of inclusive leadership; the participants wanted to “know that leadership cares and especially to see the male leadership as allies.” Eliminating gender inequity will require advocacy from male leadership, willing to speak up, take risks, challenge power relations, and make necessary changes (Bierema, 2017).

One interview participant, Mary, warned of the results if male leadership is not taking responsibility for leading diversity initiatives:

I see some of those diversity initiatives failing when you put all of that burden on the one person of color or the one woman, or the person who's both of those things, to see something through because they're already bearing all of that emotional exhaustion just of being present every day.

Eliminating gender inequity also requires an expansion of consciousness for women leaders to be aware of the psychological underpinnings of tokenism, to recognize their own bias, and be prepared for discomfort in order to disrupt a cycle of which they are an integral player.

### **Conclusion**

As stated in the introduction, I met the criteria to have been a participant in my study and I am driven to explore the ways my own organization can improve gender equity. I did not go into my research intending to use Token Theory. I originally planned to use the concept of “gendered organizations” which argues that organizations are not gender-neutral and that organizational initiatives are the way forward to enact change (Acker, 1990, 1992, 2006, 2011). However, after review of my data, in which participants reported that their organizations are attempting initiatives focused on structural change, it became clear that Laws’ (1975) Psychology of Tokenism provided the more appropriate lens, although it also provided much opportunity for discomfort. Because I qualify as a token woman that has successfully reached a level of status in a male-dominated industry, I understand the pressure of the implied agreement between Token and Sponsor. I understand the pressure to not rock the boat or cause disruption inside an organization that has provided me with opportunity. I was not prepared to find that I was a part of the problem. However, as I drafted this conclusion, I referred to my reflexivity scratchpad and found these notes that I jotted during the study:

As I am collecting data, I am reflecting on the experience of being a token. How much has this become a part of my own identity? I have become used to being the only woman, I have enjoyed being the only woman, I even enjoy the hardships that come along with it. Do I try to protect that part of my identity? By protecting it, am I resisting giving it up and thus holding back other women?

Once I accepted this discomfort, Laws' (1975) Psychology of Tokenism organized my findings to conclude that the dynamic between Token and Sponsor, and the underlying social system, worked together to perpetuate and maintain the status quo in the organizations represented in my study. As a Ray of Hope, study participants observed an awakening of consciousness in themselves and male leadership, which Laws posits is necessary for disruption.

The current focus on social justice in the Twin City's community provides a potential external stimulus to disrupt tokenism and thus disrupt one method of social inequity that has proved to be durable against decades of attempts towards equality. It is my hope that organizations do not waste this opportunity and instead gain awareness and implement inclusive leadership as tools to propel both Tokens and Sponsors to be motivated to disrupt the cycle of tokenism.

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- Zimmer, L. (1988). Tokenism and women in the workplace: The limits of gender-neutral theory. *Social problems*, 35(1), 64-77.

## **Appendix A**

### **Evolution of Tokenism Theory**

Tokenism Theory, which is often credited to Kanter (1977a, 1977b), actually predates Kanter. Specifically, the stated theoretical framework for Kanter's work is Simmel's (1950) analysis of the "significance of numbers in social life", which relies heavily on proportional rarity to explain differences in social interactions and ignores the influence of gender or sexism (Kanter, 1977b; Simmel, 1950). Kanter also cites Laws' "The Psychology of Tokenism: An Analysis" which provides the framework for this study. Kanter's Tokenism Theory has been critiqued, developed and evolved since its introduction.

Kanter (1977a, 1977b) provided a framework to describe the negative experiences of the "tokens" through interactions with "dominants." Kanter's position is that the negative experience of women working in a token environment is caused primarily by the structural limitations caused by their relatively low population and low power roles (1977a, 1977b). As described in the literature review, in Kanter's tokenism theory, tokens experience phenomena as result of a "skewed" workplace, one with at least 85% proportion of dominants compared to tokens. Kanter's framework of tokenism theory allows for study of the workplace experience of any group in a minority position, although much of her work was focused on women in male-dominated environments.

Many scholars have criticized Kanter's tokenism theory for remaining gender-neutral and ignoring the impacts of sexism. Yoder (1991) agrees that Kanter's framework of negative experiences for the token applies to women in male-dominated environments, but also argues that Kanter's tokenism theory falls short of describing the complete experience of gender discrimination. Yoder (1991) studies token women as experiencing additional negative workplace discrimination that is not explained by numerical representation alone. In Yoder's

study, women in a male-dominated environments also experience “gender status, occupational inappropriateness, and intrusiveness” (1991, p. 180).

Yoder (1991) elaborates on gender status, occupational inappropriateness, and intrusiveness as “confounding factors” that interact with numeric imbalance. Yoder (1991) compares token men to token women and summarizes that token men do not experience the negative effects of tokenism in female-dominated environments. Thus, in Yoder’s view, being a numeric minority does not create the barriers of tokenism without the additional impact of the token having a lower social status than the majority. Kanter’s research was completed in an occupation that was considered at the time to be inappropriate for women. Yoder studies the experience of men in occupations that are considered inappropriate for men, and once again finds that token men in gender-inappropriate occupations do not face social isolation or role encapsulation to the degree experienced by token women. Finally, Yoder (1991) studies the phenomenon of intrusiveness, as the quantity of women increases from a token few to a number that feels intimidating to the majority group, the obstacles experienced by women begins to increase.

Zimmer (1988) also expands on tokenism theory in relationship to women in a male-dominated workplace by challenging the argument that simply increasing the number of women in a workplace will fully improve the women’s experience. Zimmer summarizes the work by a variety of research teams that have also challenged the gender-neutral assumption of Kanter’s token theory. One area of focus in Zimmer’s work is providing examples where token men in female-dominated environments do not face the same challenges and obstacles (such as gender barriers, obstacles to advancement, and less pay). Zimmer summarizes by agreeing with Kanter that organizational structures must be changed to overcome the problems created by tokenism.

Zimmer challenges Kanter's position that simply adding more women will resolve tokenism. Zimmer argues that updating organizational structures inside a sexist context will not resolve the problem.

Very recently, Lee (2020) used Laws' framework of tokenism to illustrate a tokenized experience by exploring the organization social system that exists in a skewed workplace. Lee (2020) shares the experience of being a Black professor in academia that dared to break the understood agreement between Token and Spoken, presented against the backdrop of Laws' tenets of tokenism. Lee's analysis reinforces that Laws' underlying psychological analysis of tokenism is a richer and more relevant framework than the proportional, numbers based theory that was made popular by Kanter's work (Lee, 2020).

## Appendix B



ST. CATHERINE  
UNIVERSITY

### ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY REQUEST FOR APPROVAL FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPLICATION IRB APPLICATION DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

The items listed below are the application, forms and supporting documents to be uploaded to Mentor IRB for your protocol/application submission. Consent forms and additional supporting documents may be uploaded separately; directions for Mentor IRB can be found on [www.stkate.edu/irb](http://www.stkate.edu/irb) or <https://stkate.box.com/s/7rt8t0x2sieqfsj9gkzcrossf5fr5uwcf>.

- IRB Application
- PI Documentation/CITI Training for Investigator(s)\*
- PI Documentation/CITI Training for Faculty Adviser (if applicable)\*
- Informed consent form
- Child assent form (if applicable)
- Recruiting materials (phone script, fliers, ads, etc)
- Survey/questionnaire(s), focus group or interview questions (if applicable)
- Conflict of interest/financial interest disclosure (if applicable)
- Letter(s) of support (if you are conducting research at another agency, school, etc).
- Data management plans meets Data Management Policy (policy below)

**\*PI Documentation/CITI Training is the completion report received for fulfilling the required Human Subjects Research education requirements in CITI Program. Each person will need to upload their PI Documentation to their individual Mentor IRB account. Directions are located in Mentor IRB.**

**IRB RELATED POLICIES:**

Listed below as well as throughout the application are St. Catherine policies related to human Subjects research

- IRB Policy: <https://stkate.box.com/s/4vxto2w6azt1k9jclim5gc1bqktoe3uv>
- Intellectual Property Policy:  
<https://stkate.box.com/s/51my44r6a5no8nurqydhcxpij1rwzkm>
- Research Misconduct Policy:  
<https://stkate.box.com/s/qzx5oev241s3uw1btpd5fwgickgfzjvx>
- Research Data Management Policy:  
<https://stkate.box.com/s/0m4yf9cumy12f2yq5kwo4wlhm9qf86c8>



ST. CATHERINE  
UNIVERSITY

**ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY REQUEST FOR APPROVAL  
FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPLICATION**

Complete the following application in its entirety. You may excerpt material from your thesis or grant proposal, but your application should be relatively concise. Consent forms and additional supporting documents may be uploaded to Mentor IRB separately. For questions, contact the IRB Coordinator at 651-690-6204 or [irb@stkate.edu](mailto:irb@stkate.edu).

**Date of  
application:**

March 31, 2021

**Investigator name(s) and credentials (e.g., PhD, RN, etc.):** *(List all co-investigators)*

Beth Duyvejonck, MAOL student

Prof. Amy Ihlan, PhD, MAOL

Note: Eskender Yousuf, Adjunct Faculty in MAOL will serve as the advisor for this project in the Mentor System, per agreement with the IRB

**Project  
Title:**

Women leaders in male-dominated environments: Experiences with gender, corporate culture and diversity initiatives

**Department:**

MAOL

**Level of Review:**

*In the Mentor IRB system, you must select the Review Type; selecting Exempt and Expedited will prompt additional questions for you to fill out. For more information on the levels of review, go to the Mentor IRB Info page: Determine [the Level of Review](#).*

**Exempt**     **Expedited**     **Full**     **Quality Improvement**     **Not Research**

**Will another IRB review this research application?**

**No**     **Yes – First reviewed by an External IRB**     **Yes – First reviewed by St. Kate's IRB**

*If YES – First reviewed by an External IRB, you may not need to complete a St Kates IRB application and can instead use your external IRB application. Please include a copy of the*

*approved external IRB application and the letter of approval from the external IRB with your Mentor IRB submission.*

*If YES – First reviewed by St. Kate’s IRB, please indicate your plans for review and identify the external IRB:*

**Note:** *Cooperative Research occurs when a research protocol requires approval from outside institutions (e.g., a hospital IRB or other college/university) as well as St. Catherine University. Sometimes it is possible for an IRB to accept an external IRB’s review to reduce duplication of review effort. If you have questions about cooperative research and how to determine when only one IRB will need to review your IRB application, contact the IRB coordinator at [IRB@stkate.edu](mailto:IRB@stkate.edu) or reference the [Cooperative Research Policy Addendum](#).*

**1. RESEARCH SUMMARY:** *Complete each section in clear, easy to read language that can be understood by a person unfamiliar with your research and your field.*

**a. Purpose of the research:** *Provide a clear, concise statement of your purpose.*

The purpose of my research is to examine how women leaders in male dominated environments experience gender and corporate culture before, during, and after formal or informal diversity initiatives.

**b. Background:** *Provide a concise summary in 1 - 2 brief paragraphs to explain the importance of the research and how it fits with previous research.*

The percentage of women in corporate leadership has been on a slow rise over the previous decades. However, the Covid-19 pandemic threatens the first female recession in 50 years (Economist, March 3, 2021) at the same time that the United States appears poised for a long-awaited focus on social justice. It is time to explore even further the dichotomy between the media perception that women are poised for a leadership advantage and the actual experience of women leaders inside the corporate environment. Corporate culture remains highly gendered with both obvious and subtle barriers to the advancement of women leaders, even following diversity initiatives. As more and more organizations prioritize Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, it is important to understand how these initiatives affect the populations they intend to advance.

Previous research details that gender norms and practices entrenched in corporate culture present unseen barriers for women leaders. Women leaders in male-dominated environments often need to overcome “tokenism” (being a significant

minority), including navigating heightened visibility, increased scrutiny, isolation, and gender role incongruence (Kanter, 1977; Madsen, 2017; Yoder, 2001). As a result of gender bias, women leaders often change their style to conform or work around gender barriers; however, women leaders' self-change by itself is not an effective or sustainable solution (Annabi & Lobovitz, 2018; Madsen, 2017). Many studies argue that changes in organization culture to become gender-neutral/gender-equal are necessary for sustainable change and will positively impact women leaders (Lyness & Thompson, 2018; Madsen, 2017). Studies also posit that gender-neutral/gender-equal corporate culture benefits women, men and the overall organization. This study will contribute to the understanding of women leader's experiences with gender and corporate culture in male-dominated environments with a specific focus on how organizational diversity initiatives affect the working experience of woman leaders.

- c. **Research Methods and Questions:** *Give a general description of the study design and specific methods you will use in your investigation. Specify all of your research questions and/or hypotheses. Reviewers will consider whether the information you are gathering is necessary to answer your research question(s), so this should be clear in your application.*

The research question for my study is "How do women leaders in male-dominated environments experience gender and corporate culture before, during, and after formal or informal diversity initiatives?"

Once potential women leaders have been identified from my personal and professional network, I will pre-screen participants using a short pre-survey to ensure that criteria for interviews are met. The criteria for the study include women leaders having experienced the influence of corporate culture in for-profit, male-dominated industries, or male-dominated environments. A leader will be defined as holding (or have held) at least an upper management position (generally, Vice President and above), including C-suite and board of director positions. A higher level of responsibility is required to offer insight into organization impact. Male-dominated industries or environments will be defined as those comprised of 25% or fewer women (Catalyst, 2020c). Women leaders who participate will be required to have experienced either formal or informal initiatives inside their organizations intended to improve the work environment for women.

Then, I will conduct approximately 3-6 interviews. All will be one-on-one, informal, and semi-structured, approximately 60 minutes in length. Questions will focus on experiences with entrenched gender practices and tokenism, personal development/ leadership style changes, and experiences with organizational changes towards gender-improved environments.

- d. **Expectations of Participants:** *Give a step by step description of all procedures that you will have participants do. Attach any surveys, tests, instruments, interview questions, data collection forms, etc. that you will use with participants.*

Participants will complete a short pre-survey to ensure that criteria for interviews are met. The criteria for the study include women leaders having experienced the influence of corporate culture in for-profit, male-dominated industries, or male-dominated environments. A leader will be defined as holding (or have held) at least an upper management position (generally, Vice President and above), including C-suite and board of director positions. A higher level of responsibility is required to offer insight into organization impact. Male-dominated industries or environments will be defined as those comprised of 25% or fewer women (Catalyst, 2020c). Women leaders who participate will be required to have experienced either formal or informal initiatives inside their organizations intended to improve the work environment for women.

Then, for participants that meet the criteria, they will be interviewed. All interviews will be one-on-one, informal, and semi-structured, approximately 60 minutes in length. Questions will focus on experiences with entrenched gender practices and tokenism, personal development/ leadership style changes, and experiences with organizational changes towards gender-improved environments.

**e. Estimated Time Commitment for Participants:**

2 (pre-screen + interview)	<b>Number of sessions for each participant</b>
<u>20 mins +60 mins</u>	<b>Time commitment per session for each participant</b>
<u>80 minutes</u>	<b>Total time commitment for each participant</b>

**f. Access to Existing Data:** *If you are analyzing existing data, records, or specimens, explain the source and type, means of access, and permission(s) to use them. If not accessing existing data, indicate "NA"*

NA

**2. SUBJECTS:** *Provide your best estimates below.*

**a. Age Range of Subjects  
Included:**

25-70

**b. Number:**

*(Indicate a range, or maximum, if exceeded, you will need to submit an amendment)*

3-8 Total  Not Gender Specific  Female only  Male only

**c. Target Population:** Describe your target population (the group you will be studying; e.g. seniors, children ages 9-12, healthy adults 18 or over, etc.)

I plan to study women leaders in for-profit business inside a male-dominated industry or environment.

- d. **Specific Exclusions:** *If women and/or minorities are to be excluded from the study, a clear rationale should be provided in section “f” below.*

N/A

- e. **Special Populations Included:** *Select any special population that will be the focus of your research.*

NOTE: *These groups require special consideration by federal regulatory agencies and by the IRB.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Minors (under 18)</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>HIV/AIDS patients</b>                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>St. Catherine Employees</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>People in prison</b>                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Students</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Hospital patients or outpatients</b>           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Elderly/aged persons</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>People who are educationally disadvantaged</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Individuals with impaired decision-making capacity</b>                            | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>People who are economically disadvantaged</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Minority group(s) and/or non-English speakers (<i>please specify</i>)</b>         | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other Special Characteristics and Special Populations (<i>please specify</i>)</b> | _____  |

- f. **Provide reasons for targeting or excluding any special populations listed above.**

N/A

- g. **Do you have any conflict of interest (financial, personal, employment, dual-role) that could affect human subject participation or protection?** *Dual-role examples: faculty–student (does not apply to action research projects for education students), medical practitioner–patients, supervisor–direct reports, etc.*

Yes       No

*If Yes, please indicate the steps you will take to minimize any undue influence in your research, recruitment and consent process. You can also reference the university Financial Conflict of Interest policy:*

<https://stkate.box.com/s/ymgyislnxtvn3887om50bzdtu7ezaulu>

I have a dual-role of researcher and a high-level woman leader inside my organization. I will minimize undue influence by avoiding recruiting interview participants that are reports, co-workers or direct colleagues in my workplace.

### 3. RECRUITMENT: LOCATION OF SUBJECTS *(Select all that apply)* :

- St. Catherine University students**
- School setting (PreK – 12)**
- Hospital or clinic**
- Other Institution (Specify):** \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above (Describe location of subjects):**  
 I will recruit my data sources from my personal and professional network.

**NOTE:** *If participants are recruited or research is conducted through an agency or institution other than St. Catherine University, submit either written or electronic documentation of approval and/or cooperation. An electronic version should be sent from the email system of that particular institution. The document should include the name of the PI, Title of the approved study, as well as the name and title of the appropriate administrator sending the approval. You should include an abstract/synopsis of your study when asking for approval from an external institution.*

- a. **Recruitment Method:** *Describe how you will recruit your subjects? Attach a copy of any advertisement, flyer, letter, or statement that you will use for recruitment purposes.*

I will use phone calls and emails to tap my personal and professional network. If I already know the woman leader, I will reach out directly. I will also request introductions from friends and colleagues that know leaders with potential interest. See “Invitation Email” in the appendix.

- b. **Incentives:** *Will the subjects be offered inducements for participation? If yes, explain. Note: Please contact the SPREE office about the use of incentives within your research, as there are important university policies that fall outside of the protection of human subject, [SPREE@stkate.edu](mailto:SPREE@stkate.edu) or x8811*

*Incentive policy link: <https://stkate.box.com/s/sg18t87402as14xdtc0pppy2rt5w7swp>*

No

#### 4. RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

- a. **Select all that apply. Does the research involve:**

- Use of private records (medical or educational records)**
- Possible invasion of privacy of the subjects and/or their family**
- Manipulation of psychological or social variables**

- Probing for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews
- Use of deception
- Presentation of materials which subjects might consider offensive, threatening or degrading
- Risk of physical injury to subjects
- Other risks:

- b. **Risks:** *Briefly describe the risks of participation in your study, if any. Describe the precautions taken to minimize these risks. Please use “no foreseeable risk” rather than no risks.*

There is minimal risk to participants. The slight risk arises from the fear of exposing harmful elements of the corporate culture at past or current employers. I will mitigate risk of exposure by maintaining the confidentiality of participants and workplaces. Participants will not be required to answer any question that makes them uncomfortable.

- c. **Benefits:** *List any anticipated direct benefits to your subjects. If none, state that here and in the consent form.*

1. **Direct Benefits:** *List any anticipated direct benefits to your subjects. If none, state that here and in the consent form.*

Participants will benefit from sharing their experiences and reflecting on the ways gender influences organizations.

2. **Other Benefits:** *List any potential benefits of this research to society, including your field of Study.*

Participants will contribute to the understanding of women leader’s experiences with gender and corporate culture with an ultimate goal to improve the organizational context in male-dominated environments.

- d. **Risk/Benefit Ratio:** *Justify the statement that the potential benefits (including direct and other benefits) of this research study outweigh any probable risks.*

The potential benefits of the study listed above outweigh the risks.

- e. **Deception:** *The use of deception in research poses particular risks and should only be used if necessary to accomplish the research, and when risks are minimized as much as possible. The researcher should not use deception when it would affect the*

subject's willingness to participate in the study (e.g, physical risks, unpleasant emotional or physical experiences, etc).

**Will you be using deception in your research?**

Yes  No

*If yes, justify why the deceptive techniques are necessary in terms of study's scientific, educational or applied value. Explain what other alternatives were considered that do not use deception and why they would not meet the researcher's objective. Attach a copy of a debriefing statement explaining the deception to participants.*

## 5. CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

**a. Will your data be anonymous?**

Yes  No

*(Anonymous data means that the researcher cannot identify subjects from their data, while confidential data means that the researcher can identify a subject's response, but promises not to do so publicly.)*

**b. How will you maintain anonymity/confidentiality of the information obtained from your subjects?**

*Interview Example: I will assign pseudonyms to each interview participant. I will de-identify the data, and store the key separate from the recordings and transcripts. I will have the transcriptionist sign a confidentiality statement*

I will ensure confidentiality by using pseudonyms, by not identifying participants or organizations, and by coding my data. I will use an on-line transcription service and will store the coding key separate from the recordings and transcripts.

**c. Data Storage: The IRB expects you to review the Research Data Management Policy (linked at the top of the application) and to make sure your data storage plans meet the St. Kate's policy requirements. For additional guidance see the Research Data Management Guidance document:**

<https://stkate.box.com/s/p73h5om7knkhbcmk84cuanidx4ukhi0b>

**Select your Data Level and describe your data storage plans:**

[Public](#)  [Confidential](#)  [Protected-disclosure could cause harm](#)  [Restricted-full review only](#)

*Where will the data be kept, and who will have access to it during that time?*

*Examples: I will store audio files and electronic files on a password protected computer or cloud (indicate which; please avoid using flash drives as they are one of the hardest 'tools' to protect and one of the easiest to exploit or lose, it is suggested to encrypt data on the cloud such as using a file password). I will store all paper files in*

*a secure location (a locked filing cabinet) that is accessible only to myself and my advisor.*

I will store audio files and electronic files on a password-protected computer. I will use Microsoft Teams for recording interviews and transcription services. Microsoft Teams offers a password-protected cloud where data will be stored during the transcription process. I will store all paper files in a secure location (a locked filing cabinet) that is accessible only to myself and my advisor.

- d. Data Destruction:** *How long will it be kept? What is the date when original data will be destroyed? (All studies must specify a date when original data that could be linked back to a subject's identity will be destroyed. Data that is stripped of all identifiers may be kept indefinitely). Example: I will destroy all records from the study within six months of the conclusion of the study but no later than June 2017.*

I will destroy all records from the study within one year of the conclusion of the study but no later than December 2022.

- e. Data Transmission/Sharing/Access:** *Will data identifying subjects be made available to anyone other than you or your advisor? If yes, please explain who will receive the data, how it will be transferred/shared and justify the need. Example: The data will only be available to me and my advisor.*

The data will only be available to me and my advisor.

- f. Official Records:** *Will the data become a part of the medical or school record? If yes, explain.*

No.

## 6. INFORMED CONSENT

- a. How will you gain consent?** *State what you will say to the subjects to explain your research.*

I will email participants as detailed in the "Invitation Email" in the Research Instruments Appendix. Interested participants will receive a pre-screen survey; qualified interview participants will then be required to review and sign an electronic copy of the consent form.

- b. Consent Document:** *Attach the consent or assent form or text of oral statement. A template is available in Mentor IRB. Example: "See attached"*

See attached.

- c. **Timing of Consent Process:** *Note: In studies with significant risk or volunteer burden, the IRB may require that subjects be given an interim period of 24 hours or more before agreeing to participate in a study*

I will email the Consent to Participate approximately one week prior to the interview. I will answer questions regarding the consent form by email and before starting the interview. I will collect a signed copy electronically, either before or during the interview, and will request verbal consent to begin the actual interview.

- d. **Assurance of Participant Understanding:** *How you will assess that the subject understands what they have been asked to do (Note: It is not sufficient to simply ask a yes/no question, such as “do you understand what you are being asked to do?”)*

I will review the consent form prior to beginning the interview to ensure participants’ understanding of the process. I will also require the interview participants to summarize the details of the consent form prior to beginning the interview.

7. **CITI TRAINING** – Work with your faculty advisor or contact [IRB@stkates.edu](mailto:IRB@stkates.edu) if you have any questions about whether you should complete additional training modules within CITI. *You can also reference the Mandatory Research Education Policy – Human Subject Research:* <https://stkate.box.com/s/z3995tyh88e68ap8mmjr07esm9fsqbm2>

- c. **Select all the CITI training courses/modules you completed:**

**REQUIRED COURSE:**

**Human Subject Research Training Course – only one course is required**

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>Human Subject Research - Social &amp; Behavioral Research Investigators</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>Human Subject Research - Education Action Research Program</b>              |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>Human Subject Research - Biomedical Research Investigators</b>              |

**OPTIONAL MODULES:**

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Financial Conflict of Interest Course (suggested if you answered YES to Section 2 part g) |
|--------------------------|---|

- Avoiding Group Harms - U.S. Research Perspectives (suggested if you checked any special populations in Section 2 part e)
- International Research (suggested for PIs doing research outside of the US that is NOT federally funded)**
- International Studies (suggested for PIs doing research outside of the US that IS federally funded)**
- Cultural Competence in Research (suggested when study related to a marginalized or minoritized population)**
- Internet Based Research (suggested for PIs using internet resources during their research (outside of recruitment) – Skype, survey tools, internet activity monitoring, etc)**
- Other (prisoners, pregnant women, children):**

## 8. ASSURANCES

By submitting this application, the researcher certifies that:

- **The information furnished concerning the procedures to be taken for the protection of human subjects is correct.**
- **The investigator has read the IRB policies and to the best of his/her knowledge, is complying with Federal regulations and St. Catherine University IRB Policy governing human subjects in research.**
- **The investigator will seek and obtain prior written approval from the IRB for any substantive modification in the proposal, including, but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators, procedures and subject population.**
- **The investigator will promptly report in writing to the IRB any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events that occur in the course of the study.**
- **The investigator will promptly report in writing to the IRB and to the subjects any significant findings which develop during the course of the study which may affect the risks and benefits to the subjects who participate in the study.**
- **The research will not be initiated until the IRB provides written approval.**
- **The term of approval will be for one year. To extend the study beyond that term, a new application must be submitted.**
- **The research, once approved, is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB.**
- **The researcher will comply with all requests from the IRB to report on the status of the study and will maintain records of the research according to IRB guidelines.**
- **If these conditions are not met, approval of this research may be suspended.**

03/31/2021

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study titled **Women leaders in male-dominated environments: Experiences with gender, corporate culture and diversity initiatives.**

I am a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Prof. Amy Ihlan, PhD, a faculty member in the Department of Organizational Leadership (MAOL). I am completing this study as a part of my program in MAOL.

In order to make sure that this research is both ethical and credible, it is important that each participant be fully informed of the risks and benefits of the study, as well as of their rights as a participant. Please read the attached Informed Consent Form for this important information. Please sign and return a signed electronic copy. I will also review this information with you at the beginning of our interview.

If you have any questions about the form or the study please do not hesitate to discuss them with me.

Thank you for your support of my study,

Beth Duyvejonck  
44 Center St.  
Excelsior, MN 55331  
952-484-4596

## ST CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

### Informed Consent for a Research Study

#### **Study Title: Women leaders in male-dominated environments: Experiences with gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives**

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is called *Women leaders in male-dominated environments: Experiences with gender, corporate culture and diversity initiatives*. The study is being done by Beth Duyvejonck, a Masters' candidate at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. The faculty advisor for this study is Amy Ihlan, PhD, Organizational Leadership (MAOL) at St. Catherine University. Below, you will find answers to the most commonly asked questions about participating in a research study. Please read this entire document and ask questions you have before you agree to be in the study.

#### **Why are the researchers doing this study?**

The purpose of this study is to examine how women leaders in male dominated environments experience gender and corporate culture before, during, and after formal or informal diversity initiatives. This study is important because participants will contribute to the understanding of women leader's experiences with gender and corporate culture in male-dominated environments. Approximately six people are expected to participate in this research.

#### **Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You are asked to be in this study as a women leader having experienced the influence of corporate culture in for-profit, male-dominated industries, or male-dominated environments. A leader will be defined as holding (or have held) at least an upper management position (generally, Vice President and above), including C-suite and board of director positions. A higher level of responsibility is required to offer insight into organization impact. Male-dominated industries or environments will be defined as those comprised of 25% or fewer women (Catalyst, 2020c). Women leaders who participate will be required to have experienced either formal or informal initiatives inside their organizations intended to improve the work environment for women.

#### **If I decide to participate, what will I be asked to do?**

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participants will be pre-screened using a short pre-survey to ensure that criteria for interviews are met
- Then, participants will be interviewed. All interviews will be one-on-one, informal, and semi-structured, approximately 60 minutes in length.

In total, this study will take approximately 80 minutes over two sessions.

#### **What if I decide I don't want to be in this study?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide you do not want to participate in this study, please feel free to say so, and do not sign this form. If you decide to participate in this study, but later change your mind and want to withdraw, simply notify me and you will be removed immediately. You may withdraw until the data from your interview is de-identified during my analysis, after which time withdrawal will no longer be possible. Your decision of

whether or not to participate will have no negative or positive impact on your relationship with St. Catherine University, nor with any of the students or faculty involved in the research.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

There is minimal risk to participants. The slight risk arises from the fear of exposing harmful elements of the corporate culture at past or current employers. I will mitigate risk of exposure by maintaining the confidentiality of participants and workplaces. Participants will not be required to answer any question that makes them uncomfortable.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?**

Participants will benefit from sharing their experiences and reflecting on the ways gender influences organizations.

Participants will also contribute to the understanding of women leader's experiences with gender and corporate culture with an ultimate goal to improve the organizational context in male-dominated environments.

**Will I receive any compensation for participating in this study?**

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**What will you do with the information you get from me and how will you protect my privacy?**

The information that you provide in this study will be recorded during a Microsoft Teams virtual interview. I will use the transcription service offered by Microsoft Teams. The data will be saved to a password-protected cloud during the transcription process. I will then code the interview transcripts into themes and remove person's names from the data. The researcher will keep the research results in on a password-protected laptop and only the researcher and their advisor will have access to the records while they work on this project. The researcher will finish analyzing the data by December 2021 and will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Reports and recordings will be available only to researcher and their advisor and all data will be destroyed by December 2022.

Any information that you provide will be kept confidential, which means that you will not be identified or identifiable in the any written reports or publications. If it becomes useful to disclose any of your information, the researcher will seek your permission and tell you the persons or agencies to whom the information will be furnished, the nature of the information to be furnished, and the purpose of the disclosure; you will have the right to grant or deny permission for this to happen. If you do not grant permission, the information will remain confidential and will not be released.

**Could my information be used for future research?**

No, your data will not be used or distributed for future research even if de-identified without gaining further consent from you.

**Are there possible changes to the study once it gets started?**

If during the course of this research study the researcher team learns about new findings that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, they will inform you of these findings

**How can I get more information?**

If you have any questions, you can ask them before you sign this form. You can also feel free to contact me at 952-484-4596. If you have any additional questions later and would like to talk to the faculty advisor, please contact Amy Ihlan at [ajihlan@stkate.edu](mailto:ajihlan@stkate.edu). If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or [jsschmitt@stkate.edu](mailto:jsschmitt@stkate.edu).

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I consent to participate in the study and agree to be videotaped.

My signature indicates that I have read this information, my questions have been answered and I am at least 18 years of age.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

## Appendix C

### Research Instrument Forms

#### Invitation Email

Dear XX,

In case this email reaches you before we can be introduced, my name is Beth Duyvejonck. I am a Masters' candidate in Organizational Leadership (MAOL) at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. I am also a registered professional engineer with a twenty-three-year career in the Twin Cities' commercial construction industry.

My outreach today is to invite you to participate in a research study. My study is titled *Women leaders in male-dominated environments: Experiences with gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives*.

I will be interviewing approximately six women leaders that meet the following criteria:

- A leader will be defined as holding (or have held) at least an upper management position (generally, Vice President and above), including C-suite and board of director positions. A higher level of responsibility is required to offer insight into organization impact.
- Male-dominated industries or environments will be defined as those comprised of 25% or fewer women (Catalyst, 2020c).
- Experience is required to be in a for-profit business.
- Women leaders who participate will be required to have experienced either formal or informal initiatives inside their organizations intended to improve the work environment for women.

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participants will be pre-screened using a short pre-survey to ensure that the criteria for interviews are met.
- Then, participants will be interviewed. All interviews will be one-on-one, informal, and semi-structured, approximately 60 minutes in length. Interviews will be confidential; neither participants or organizations will be identified in my research.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at the phone number or email included below. I am happy to answer questions or provide additional information as needed for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Beth Duyvejonck  
[baduyvejonck848@stkate.edu](mailto:baduyvejonck848@stkate.edu)  
952-484-4596

## Pre-screen Questions

Dear XX,

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my research study. The study is titled *Women leaders in male-dominated environments: Experiences with gender, corporate culture, and diversity initiatives*.

I will be interviewing approximately six women leaders that meet the following criteria:

- A leader will be defined as holding (or have held) at least an upper management position (generally, Vice President and above), including C-suite and board of director positions. A higher level of responsibility is required to offer insight into organization impact.
- Male-dominated industries or environments will be defined as those comprised of 25% or fewer women (Catalyst, 2020c).
- Experience is required to be in a for-profit business.
- Women leaders who participate will be required to have experienced either formal or informal initiatives inside their organizations intended to improve the work environment for women.

To ensure you meet the criteria, please complete the questions below and return your response to me via email. Participants that meet the criteria will be asked to sign the attached consent form and invited to an interview. All interviews will be one-on-one, informal, and semi-structured, approximately 60 minutes in length. Interviews will be confidential; neither participants or organizations will be identified in my research.

I am happy to answer questions or provide additional information as needed for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth Duyvejonck

Candidate, Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership (MAOL)

St. Catherine University

[baduyvejonck848@stkate.edu](mailto:baduyvejonck848@stkate.edu)

952-484-4596

1. Please list your current title and/or past leadership positions and briefly describe your role/s
2. What is/was the approximate percentage of women in your organization?
  - a. Entire workforce:
  - b. In leadership positions:
3. How would you rate the corporate culture in your organization/s?
  - a. Ten = masculine/patriarchal
  - b. Five = gender-balanced or gender neutral
  - c. One = feminine/matriarchal
4. Have you experienced organizational initiatives centered on inclusivity and/or gender?  
Yes or No
5. How would you describe the diversity initiative/s? Formal or Informal

6. Approximately when did the diversity initiative/s take place? (ie: 2002 or “about two years ago” are acceptable responses.)

## **Interview Protocol**

### Basic Information

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Recording/storing information about interview:

### Introduction

Introduce myself.

The purpose of this research is to examine how women leaders in male-dominated environments experience gender and corporate culture before, during, and after formal or informal diversity initiatives.

Restate informed consent and confirm receipt of signed copy over email.

Ask if there are any questions before we begin.

Share that I will begin recording.

We're meeting today based on your self-identification as a woman leader in a male-dominated environment. You've also identified that your organization has undergone initiatives focused on gender.

My first series of questions will focus on your experiences of gender inside corporate culture. If possible, I'd like you to answer this first series of questions with the lens of "before diversity initiatives." My second series of questions will ask about "after the initiatives."

The questions are designed to be open-ended to allow for the expression of your experiences. I have specific prompts that I'll use if you don't have an immediate experience that comes to mind.

Again, use the lens of "before diversity initiatives" for these questions:

### Questions

1. I'd like to hear about any times where you experienced a difference in treatment that may have been related to your gender or at least couldn't be explained by other job-related factors.
  - a. Prompts: Can you think of anything related to hiring, promoting, negotiation, mentoring, networking, or benefits (perks)?

- b. Prompts: Do you ever feel isolated or left out from other male team members? Please describe.
  - c. Prompts: Were you evaluated with more scrutiny? Please describe.
2. In your organization, describe for me the perception of an "ideal employee" or "ideal leader"?
  - a. Prompt: Are there any assumed gender characteristics or qualities?
3. Tell me about any time you found it challenging to fit this model of an "ideal" employee? (Madsen, p. 290)
  - a. Prompt: Tell me about any time you felt like you needed to choose between your gender and your professional identity?
  - b. Prompts: How did this make you feel? Did you blame yourself or experience a lack of confidence?
  - c. Prompts: (Social role theory) – Have you ever felt like you were expected or rewarded for "feminine behavior," such as being communal?
4. In what ways has gender influenced the development of your leadership style? Specifically, how have you adapted to conform or work around gender stereotypes?
  - a. Prompts: Think about the popular book "Lean In," which encouraged women to "dismantle the hurdles in ourselves today"?
  - b. Prompts: For example - How have you attempted to adapt to masculine corporate culture through more assertive behaviors? (ties to role incongruity and "double-bind dilemma, Madsen, p. 294)
  - c. Prompts if yes: What did you do? How did it make you feel?
  - d. Prompts if no: Why not, do you think?
  - e. Prompt: Tell me about your experiences with male leaders acting as an advocate.
5. If you changed your style, how was this received and/or evaluated?
  - a. Prompt: Did it have any lasting consequences to how you were perceived?
  - b. Prompt: In what ways was it effective or not-effective?
  - c. Prompt: Did it feel sustainable? Could you keep it up long-term?
6. Now let's talk about organizational diversity initiatives in more detail. How would you describe the actions taken by your organization to be more inclusive?
  - a. Prompt: Was there a senior woman leader championing these initiatives?
  - b. Prompts of the following specific examples, if needed (Madsen, p. 298)
  - c. Increase people's awareness of unconscious bias
  - d. Avoid sexually charged remarks or innuendos/ challenged gendered language
  - e. Celebrate women's performance and give women credit
  - f. Encourage women to apply for promotions
  - g. Provide access to women's network events
  - h. Make sure women are given a voice in meetings
  - i. Reduce subjectivity of performance evaluation
  - j. Use open recruiting tools rather than informal social networks
  - k. Establish family-friendly HR practices
  - l. Avoid having a sole female member on any team
7. How were the diversity initiatives presented to the organization?

- a. Prompt: as positive/opportunity-focused or problem-focused? Please explain.
8. Describe how the initiatives were received by both men and women?
9. Describe how the diversity initiatives impacted your effectiveness as a leader?
  - a. Prompts: Did you experience gender any differently? Result in organizational change or just compliance? Were the changes sustainable?
10. Describe any organizational changes that you observed as a result of diversity initiatives?
  - a. Prompt: for women, for men, for families, for profitability, for engagement, for organizational commitment
11. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the topic?
12. Would you like updates on my thesis progress or a copy of the final paper?

### Closing

Thank participant and stop recording

## Appendix D

### Thesis Timeline for Completion for December Completion/Graduation

Researcher: Beth Duyvejonck

Research Advisor: Sharon Radd

### Project Management Plan

Date to be Completed	Task	Indicate Completion
June 1	Begin Participant Recruitment	X
June 15 - August 1	Data Collection Period; conduct interviews	X
July 15	Begin coding transcript data	X
August 15	Complete coding transcript data	X
August 25	Complete data analysis and begin to outline research findings	X
September 1	Submit outline of research findings to advisor prior to meeting	X
September 4	Schedule meeting with advisor to occur before Sept 30. Discuss progress and prelim findings; confirm a presentation dated based on MAOL offerings	X
September 19	Submit polished draft of thesis to advisor for approval; schedule defense for one week prior to presentation	X
October 4	Verification of Progress Due (Advisor submits to MAOL office)	X
October 18	Submit project title and description to MAOL office; confirm presentation time and location with MAOL office	X
October 25	Make revisions to thesis based on advisor feedback; route polished version to readers	X

Oct 25 – Nov 15	Submit presentation outline and slides to advisor for approval	X
Wk of Nov 15	Thesis defense with committee	X
Wk of Nov 29	Thesis presentation; complete final edits	X
December 10	Final paper due to Advisor	X
December 15	Approved Thesis due to MAOL office; complete/submit IRB paperwork indicating study is complete	X
December 17	Graduation (Commencement in May)	