Wonder Women in a Superman World: Exploring the Memorable Messages and Communicative Approaches Women Utilize When Navigating the Leader-Member Relationship

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WONDER WOMEN IN A SUPERMAN WORLD: EXPLORING THE MEMORABLE MESSAGES AND COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES WOMEN UTILIZE WHEN NAVIGATING THE LEADER-MEMBER RELATIONSHIP

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
School of Communication
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Communication scholars continue to affirm the importance of organizational members to
develop strong relational ties with those in their workgroup. This research focuses on women and
considers relationship development via the memorable messages women receive prior to their
entrance into the workplace. Further participants’ critical incidents or pivotal moments with
managers are examined to consider how those experiences shape how women navigate
workplace challenges and the leader-member relationship. Fifteen in-depth qualitative interviews
resulted in the emergence of four themes: preparatory frameworks, the perception of trust,
autonomy, and competence, adaptive communicative approaches, and socialized expectations.
These findings call to attention the importance of explicit memorable messages in preparation of
navigating the leader-member relationship, the role of communication in establishing trust and
empowerment in the workplace, and the communicative challenges women face as they progress
through their professional careers.
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INTRODUCTION

History has always been enthralled by charismatic leaders; dynamic individuals who captivated the crowds, provided the people with a dream, forged ahead, and afforded a sense of security in times of crisis (Pillai, 1995; Madera, & Smith, 2009). As Winston Churchill famously once acknowledged, “History is written by the victors,” so often has the spotlight shone on those leading the way who boldly set new precedents and overcame barriers in order to accomplish their goals. Similarly, in organizations, often it is leaders who are expected to not only produce the goals and vision for the company, but to behave and act in ways that motivate and inspire their followers to join them in their vision and give employees a sense of meaning in their day-to-day work (Carton, 2018; Madera & Smith, 2009).

Leadership scholars continue to affirm that the development of high-quality relationships between leaders and their members increase access to insider knowledge of opportunity and promotion, increase autonomy and trust, career advancements, and contribute to overall job satisfaction of the organizational member (Hall, 2011; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sheer, 2015). Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory brings attention to the importance of the communication that occurs between leaders and organizational members and how the quality of those relationships, developed through those communicative exchanges, can directly influence access to organizational resources, influence in collaborative discussions, and the negotiation of power in the relationship (Hall, 2011; Martinez, Kane, Ferris, & Brooks, 2012; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sheer, 2015). Leadership communication scholars have also continued to expand this field of study by identifying the importance and influence of strong communicative ties with peers in developing trust, support and creativity in organizational work group rather than sole reliance on leaders (Omilion-Hodges & Ackerman, 2018; Sheer, 2015). As such, scholars
continue to emphasize how the communicative exchanges between leaders, peers and organizational members, and the quality of those exchanges, influence the quality of the relational dynamics within a work group (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013; Sheer, 2015; Sherony & Green, 2002). The communicative exchanges that occur between co-workers can have a significant impact on an organizational member’s integration into a work group, access to a strong organizational network, and the establishment of trust, respect, and credibility in an organization (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Madlock & Booth-Butterfield, 2012; Sherony & Green, 2002). In this way, organizational members’ success and career advancement does not exist in a silo but is intertwined with their relationships with their managers and peers. Organizational members, no matter how high up the organizational ladder, still must engage in communication with internal stakeholders, such as supervisors and co-workers, in order to continue to advance and succeed in their careers (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013; Sheer, 2015; Sherony & Green, 2002). In order to explore one of the relationships within this complex network, this thesis considers what experiences and perspectives organizational members’ have about communicating with a leader/manager while in their professional careers.

In order to consider this holistically, scholars have identified how organizational members’ perspectives and frameworks used to navigate these relationships do not simply begin once they enter the workplace but are shaped prior to their entrance in the workplace through conversations they’ve had with others (Jablin, 1985; Levine & Hoffner, 2006). Vocational anticipatory socialization (VAS) is the communicative socialization process that begins in ages as young as five that involves the imbuing of norms, expectations, and values that often foster one’s organizational expectations, the development of one’s self-efficacy, and the impressions of
the meaningfulness of work (Jablin, 1985; Powers & Myers, 2017; Scarduzio, Real, Slone, & Henning, 2018). VAS often presents in the form of memorable messages, or explicit, verbal messages individuals receive about a specific topic, often during transitional or uncertain periods throughout their lives (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012). Research indicates that through these memorable messages, expectations and perspectives develop over time and organizational members will reflect on these earlier messages as they make sense of what it means to work (Scarduzio et al., 2018; Stohl, 1986) and rely on these messages for guidance on how they should behave in organizations (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Noland & Carmack, 2015). In this way, exploring how participants were prepared and make sense of memorable messages provides a valuable foundation to explore how their expectations influence the ways they navigate their leader-member relationship and other communicative workplace experiences.

Within the expanding sector of research exploring leader-member communication, there is a budding division of research that specifically examines the experiences of women in organizational and leadership contexts (Glass & Cook, 2016; Mcguire, 2002). In recent years, scholars have increasingly considered the perspectives of women leaders in the workplace including women’s discursive construction of the meaning of leadership (Fine, 2009) and the communicative and leadership styles women utilize to promote themselves as leaders (Williams, 2015). With the continued expansiveness of women in the workplace (United States Department of Labor, 2018), researchers have highlighted difficulties they may experience, such as a lack of workplace support, pressures to conform to masculine leadership stereotypes, and intensified scrutiny when promoted to high risk positions, especially in male-dominated fields (Glass & Cook, 2016; Mcguire, 2002; Taylor, 2010). Despite what is known about women’s experiences in the workplace, there is still a need for communication research that specifically explores the
experiences of women throughout the career life cycle. In response to this gap, this research is conducted solely from the perspective of women, focusing on how they draw from the memorable messages they received prior to their entrance in their professional careers and how those messages influence how they communicatively navigate the leader-member relationship. In order to explore these concepts, this thesis will begin with a literature review of relevant concepts and theories, detail the methods and subsequent findings of the research conducted by the researcher, and conclude with a discussion on how the findings extend current research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocational Anticipatory Socialization

Before a new organizational member has even begun their first day at a new job, vocational anticipatory socialization experiences and messages have already shaped their perspectives about work and what it means to work (Jablin, 2000; Levine & Hoffner, 2006). VAS encompasses the development of an individual’s expectations and assumptions about what it means to work from a wide variety of sources, such as parents, teachers, peers, and media (Jablin, 1985; Powers & Myers, 2017). The information they receive during this process can leave profound impressions that guide their choices and perspectives regarding whether or not they pursue a degree in higher education, their approach to overcoming difficult hurdles, and influence their decision-making processes as they navigate their career (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017; Powers & Myers, 2017).

The salience of the vocational anticipatory process to prepare individuals for successful integration into industry is becoming increasingly recognized (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Noland & Carmack, 2015). Levine and Hoffner (2006) identified different types of messages adolescents receive from various sources of socialization and the
salience of those messages in shaping their perspective of what it means to work. These conversations about work can shape how young adults, prior to their entrance into the workforce, shape the potential role they may want as well as the potential challenges they may encounter (Barge & Schlueeter, 2004, Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010; Levine and Hoffner, 2006) The integration of internships is an excellent example of this widely encouraged form of anticipatory socialization (Dailey, 2016; Woo, Putnam, & Riforgiate, 2017). Internships provide an opportunity for young adults to develop their organizational identities, communicate about their perceived organizational norms and values, and utilize sensemaking prior to their entrance in the workforce as professionals (Dailey, 2016; Woo, et al., 2017). However, despite their popularity, Dailey (2016) identified caveats with this socialization platform. Young adults who experienced a lack of support, feelings of insignificance, or received messages about the organization that conflicted with their perceived organizational identities or values were likely to reject that vocation entirely once they entered the workforce (Dailey, 2016). This occurs despite the fact that a full-time position may have allayed some of the negative perceptions the interns had, such as receiving more workplace support and meaning in their role by being an employee of the organization (Dailey, 2016; Woo, et al., 2017).

While internships and similar pre-work socialization experiences provide a hands-on opportunity for young adults to experience and develop their workplace identities and perceptions of the vocational work they want to do, VAS also commonly occurs in the day-to-day conversations, such as with parents, in the form of a memorable message (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Scarduzio, et al., 2018) In this way, these memorable messages can be a powerful influence on individuals before they enter into the workplace.
Memorable messages. In relation to vocational anticipatory socialization, individuals may also draw on their recollection of brief, salient messages they received regarding work that may be imbued with values, social expectations, or guide social behavior (Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Stohl, 1986). Memorable messages are often recalled by individuals as they are attempting to understand a confusing situation, when they need to reframe a negative or challenging experience, or when they are seeking direction in scenarios that require decision-making (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Scarduzio, et al., 2018; Stohl, 1986). Recognizing that communication is a central component of the socialization process, organizational scholars utilize memorable messages as a way to identify specific messages that individuals have received from influential sources in their lives. Kranstuber, Carr and Hosek (2012), have identified the power of memorable messages from parents regarding college student success as significant predictors of learner empowerment, motivation to succeed, and overall satisfaction with the college experience. Likewise, memorable messages can be directly related to organizational socialization and guide sensemaking, the construction of workplace values (e.g. what constitutes meaningful work), and expectations about workplace relationships and career advancement as young adults prepare for entrance into the workforce (Scarduzio, et al., 2018; Stohl, 1986).

While much of the research has been focused on matriculating young adults, (e.g., Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Omilion-Hodges, Shank, & Packard, in press; Wang, 2014), communication research is incrementally expanding to consider the experiences and messages that women receive regarding workplace socialization. For example, Bear, Cushenbery, London, and Sherman (2017) found that women receive different types of formal and informal feedback regarding their performance which contributes to their socialized understanding of their ability to compete in leadership positions in comparison to their male counterparts. Similarly, Brands and
Fernandez-Mateo (2017), explored how women received different messages than men did in relation to career advancement opportunities that influence their decisions to reapply to an organization that has rejected them in the past. Overall, women receive different types of messages than their male-counterparts which may affect how they navigate workplace experiences or challenges. The examination of how VAS and memorable messages influence what communication strategies women utilize as they navigate their relationship with their managers remains an underdeveloped section of study. Considering the importance of memorable messages in shaping individual’s perspectives and preparation prior to workplace entry, the first research question is forwarded:

**RQ1:** How have the memorable messages participants had received prior to their entrance in their careers influence how they navigate the leader-member relationship?

**Women at Work**

According to the United States Department of Labor (2018), the women’s labor force participation rate has increased from 44.5% in 1977 to 57.3% in 2018. As of 2017, there were 71.9 million employed women in the workforce (United States Department of Labor, 2018). As cited in Miller and Vagins (2018), despite the prevalence of women in the workforce in the United States, according to a report published by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), women working full-time are, on average, still paid 80 cents to every dollar a man makes. The AAUW further breaks this down by racial demographics and the results are even more abysmal with an average of 61% of comparable pay for African-American women and 53% of comparable pay for Hispanic women (Miller & Vagins, 2018). According to an analysis report done by Milli, Huang, Hartmann, and Hayes (2017), “The failure to pay women fairly results in the misallocation of human capital and contributes to women working at less
productive pursuits than they otherwise would, thus holding back economic growth.” (p. 2). If women received equal pay, the poverty rate would be cut in half among working women and the United States economy would have produced an increased income of $512.6 billion in 2016 (Milli et al., 2017).

Supporting the success of women in the workplace not only supports domestic national economic growth but would also provide support to the 2.5 million children who are in families that would be brought out of poverty if their working mothers received equal pay (Milli et al., 2017). Organizational scholars who recognize the importance of high-quality leader-member exchange and its link to success and advancement in the workplace have begun examining women’s experiences in professional contexts. For example, Glass and Cook (2016), examined women leaders in top executive positions and the challenges they faced once they broke through the glass ceiling. The specific challenges that women face in career advancement and mobility include access to workplace support, insider information, and connections with strong professional networks (Glass & Cook, 2016). In contrast to their male counterparts, women are less likely to have access to social resources such as help in times of stress or uncertainty, creating and maintaining professional credibility from their peers, and advocation of promotion to higher-ranking organizational members (McGuire, 2002). Furthermore, in male-dominated fields, the lack of inclusivity in both informal and formal workplace discussions, reduced recognition of accomplishments, and negative recruitment messages contributes to women perceiving themselves to be “outsiders” (Glass & Cook, 2016, p. 53). Further, the lack of inclusivity results in them being less likely to persist when they meet resistance or rejection regarding career advancement (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017; Taylor, 2010). Considering the unique challenges that women encounter in the workforce there is a clear opportunity for
focused support in overcoming these challenges. Leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al., 1975;) offers a theoretical framework that encourages the elaboration of a complex social dynamic and that, if comprehensively understood and applied, can be an incredibly useful perspective for women to utilize as they navigate their relationships with their leaders.

**Leader-Member Exchange and Communication**

Previous leadership perspectives focused on leaders as individuals who possessed desirable personality characteristics or viewed the primary function of leader-member communication as the exchange of information in order to accomplish either task or relational goals (Fairhurst, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975) posits that it is the communication and relationship shared between leaders and organizational members that comprise what is known as leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Sheer, 2015; Uhl-Bien, 2006). LMX research has also long described leaders as having access to resources, both social and organizational, that they selectively share with organizational members based on the quality of the relationship they share with each individual member (Dansereau, et al., 1975; Omilion-Hodges, & Baker, 2017). This selective sharing of resources is largely influenced by the quality of the interpersonal relationship a leader/manager shares with each of his or her members (Meiners & Boster, 2012; Omilion-Hodges, & Baker, 2017). Employees who engage in high-quality LMX are part of the “in-group” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 659) and have increased access to support, organizational resources and higher-level information from not only their leader, but also from other in-group members (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sherony & Green, 2002). Conversely, those who maintain a transactional communicative relationship with their leader, have low-quality LMX, and tend to congregate with other low LMX members. The association between high LMX and low LMX and peer
development is not necessarily by choice, but rather because in-group members may lack confidence in their peers who have lower LMX because the leader’s treatment of them has explicitly or implicitly suggested to do so (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sherony & Green, 2002). Considering that low LMX employees have limited access to their leader and they are engaging with peers who also have tenuous leader-member relationships, they become even more distanced from the workplace support that can be so influential in career success and overall employee well-being (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Meiners & Boster, 2012; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sherony & Green, 2002).

Diverging from perspectives that view communication as a tool for the transmission of information, current discussions of LMX have highlighted how it is the everyday conversations that drive meaning-making and co-construct the complex, dynamic and contextualized organizational roles between leaders and members (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Omilion-Hodges & Wieland, 2016; Sheer, 2015). An illustration of this is the role negotiation that occurs between leaders and organizational members as soon as an employee joins an organization. LMX has been described as having three developmental stages (Dansereau et al., 1975; Nahrgang, Morgeson & Ilies, 2009; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013). The first, role taking, involves more formal, transactional communication between leaders and organizational members and is when the leader will present occasions for the member to be involved in tasks and will evaluate their capabilities and motivation in the workplace. Based on observations and the communicative feedback and behaviors expressed by the member, the relationship could proceed to the second stage, role making, or could become relationally stagnant by the lack of quality communicative contributions (Dansereau et al., 1975; Nahrgang et al., 2009). The second stage, role making, involves the active process of role adaption, where the communicative contributions of both
leaders and members negotiate expectations and establish norms. During this stage, the development of trust and employee assimilation is critical for future relational intimacy (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). Finally, role routinization, the third stage, emerges once clear expectations, mutual trust, and understandings between the leader and organizational member stabilize (Nahrgang et al., 2009; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). The communicative exchanges between leaders and members during these stages exemplify how communication and engagement from both social actors define and co-create the nature of the relationship (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Further expanding from these concepts, the leader-member relationship is described as a “compass for inferring how to communicate, relate, and navigate within…workgroups.” (Omilion-Hodges, & Baker, 2017, p. 120) and features an important consideration when exploring work group dynamics. Recognizing the importance of workplace support and access to resources for the advancement of one’s career, in tandem with the reality that women at work experience less support and resources than their male co-workers (Glass & Cook, 2016; Mcguire, 2002), this offers a value-rich opportunity to explore how women communicatively navigate the leader-member relationship in their professional careers. The second exploratory research question is forwarded:

**RQ2:** How have participants’ experiences shaped their communicative approach to the leader-member relationship?

**METHODS**

In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen women who have at least one-year experience in their professional career, are post-college graduates, and have a direct manager or supervisor that they report to and interact with at least three times per week. After receiving IRB approval, participants were recruited through a purposive snowball sampling method. Once the
participants agreed to learn more about participating in the study, an informed consent form (see Appendix A) was sent to them. Once they reviewed the consent form and agreed to participate, participants completed a brief survey that asked them about their career experience and demographic information (see Appendix B). Participants were also sent a pre-interview reflection prompt (Appendix C) a minimum of two days before the scheduled interview.

Following the pre-interview process, interviews took place at the participant’s preferred location or over the phone. In order to maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned a number that was used in place of names and all identifying information from the interviews were hidden.

Participants

The sample of participants (see Table 1) consisted of fifteen women working full-time in their professional careers.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Demographics</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>if applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 25 years</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30 years</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 40 years</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 - 50 years</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 55 years</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 - 60 years</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+ years</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi/Multi-Racial</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino(a/x)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Completed Level of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master' s degree</td>
<td>7 (47%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher purposively recruited a stratified sample based on career experience: new hires (1-5 years of experience), mid-career (6-15 years of experience) and veteran employees (16+ years of experience). By recruiting different levels of experience, this research offers the value of different perspectives of professional women across various stages of their careers. Four general industries (see Table 2) and a variety of positions were represented within the sample including data and marketing specialists, research coordinators and technicians, directors of academic and communication departments, registered pharmacists, and educators.

### Table 2

**Participant Career Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Represented Industries</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Mean (SD) if applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Human services</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Research</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Managers Throughout Career</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Hires (2-5 years)</strong></td>
<td>5 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8 years, (SD = 1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work group size</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 members, (SD = 7.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-Career (6-15 years)</strong></td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.25 years, (SD = 3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work group size</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 members, (SD = 6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veteran (18-35 years)</strong></td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td>24 years, (SD = 7.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work group size</td>
<td></td>
<td>27 members, (SD = 19.45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**

**Career experience and demographic survey.** After the participants expressed interest in participating in the study, the researcher sent out the informed consent form that was entered into Qualtrics, an online survey distribution platform. By clicking “Next” the participants agreed
to participate in the study and were directed to a career experience and demographic survey. This survey (see Appendix B) requested information pertaining to their career experience (e.g. “What field or industry do you primarily work in?”) as well as including a few basic demographic questions (e.g., age, race, highest completed level of formal education, etc). After the informed consent had been processed and the participants filled out the survey, their interview was scheduled shortly after.

**Pre-interview reflection prompt.** Considering the personal and potentially weighty nature of the questions asked in the interview, prior to data collection, the researcher sent out a short reflection prompt to encourage thoughtful discussion during the interview. This also gave the participants time to recall memorable messages and the communicative experiences they’ve had with managers and not simply recount the first thing that came to mind, which could have potentially resulted in a polarized or distorted recollection. Examples include, “What are some experiences that you would say have defined how you communicate with a manager?” and “What role does communication play in your relationship with a manager?”

**In-depth interview.** Due to the inherently complex nature of leader-member relationships and the contemplative nature of recalling memorable messages, comprehensive interviews provided the ideal method of data collection considering the depth of information desired. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that all relevant topics were presented for discussion with the participant (see Appendix D) and also included some improvisation in the form of probing for clarification or elaboration. Some of the questions asked included, “What is a conversation or phrase that impacted how you communicate or relate to managers?” and “Since beginning your career, what are some things that have been different than you expected about communicating or building a relationship with a manager?” Interviews were recorded with an
audio device and the interviewer took hand-written notes to record non-verbal feedback and other general impressions during the interview. After the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were transcribed in preparation for data analysis.

Based on the theories and frameworks identified in the literature review, four topic sections (and a brief rapport building and conclusion section) were developed. The first section established the participant’s general view of the role of communication in the workplace. The second section inquired about the memorable messages the participant received about communication with a manager that shaped their expectations prior to their entrance in the workplace. The third section asked the participants to recount their experiences after entering the workforce and how those have diverged or aligned with their previous expectations. This section also specifically incorporates Flanagan’s (1954) critical incidents technique. Critical incidents are specific, negative or positive experiences that were especially memorable to participants within a particular context (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). In the interview, the researcher asked participants to recount and make sense of those incidents and to share how those incidents influenced their perspective regarding what it means to communicate with a manager after their entrance in the workplace. The fourth and final section asks the participants to divulge their current approach to communicating with their managers in order to navigate topics such as conflict, career advancement, or even day-to-day communication with their manager.

Data Analysis

Interviews resulted in 607 minutes of raw data and were initially transcribed using online transcription software (Trint.com, 2019) in order to provide rough transcriptions to work from. Next, the researcher conducted a thorough review of each interview by revising the transcript in concert with the original audio recording to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts and make
corrections when necessary. During this stage, the researcher also noted when the interviewee was especially forceful in her responses. The transcripts were then downloaded to a Word document that resulted in 198 single-spaced pages of transcribed data.

In order to best capture the thematic nature of the data collected, the constant comparative method was utilized as the primary method of interpretation and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While the researcher developed the interview questions grounded in theory, due to the nature of qualitative feedback, the constant comparative provided the freedom and flexibility to allow the themes to emerge inductively as shared by the participants without the researcher prescribing certain theoretical lenses to the collected data (Fram, 2013). The employment of this method granted the researcher greater insight into the internal processes and nuanced perspectives shared by the participants about the fundamentally complex, dynamic, and contextual relationship they develop with their managers by allowing the themes and categories to develop as shared by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After transcription, each of the transcripts was carefully combed through by the researcher who made notes of primary codes within and across each interview and identified consistent patterns, differences, and similarities. Primary coding of the data resulted in the initial formulation of 26 codes such as, “hard work,” “most empowering moment,” “trust,” “emotions,” “mention of fear,” and “interactions with co-workers.” The researcher then focused specifically on the categories that most clearly related to the research questions and grouped the responses accordingly. After this categorization, the codes were grouped into six broader themes that included the topics of “perspectives about manager,” and “communication preferences.” After returning to the interview data and gaining contextual perspective, four final themes emerged.
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Of the four themes that emerged in result of the data, the first theme, preparatory frameworks, forwards participants’ responses that answer the first research question and considers how the memorable messages participants had received prior to their entrance into their professional careers influence the ways they navigate the leader-member relationship. The remaining themes elucidate how participants’ workplace experiences shape their communicative approaches to the leader-member relationship and answer the second research question in three distinct ways. Theme two offers the participants’ perception of trust, autonomy, and competence when describing their most empowering and disempowering critical incidents with managers. The third theme highlights the adaptive communicative approaches participants shared having in relation to managers. Finally, the fourth theme reflects the advice the participants offered based on their workplace experiences and what they would forward to new hires about what to expect regarding the leader-member relationship in a professional career.

Theme 1: Preparatory Frameworks

Memorable messages can provide a framework for those entering into new or uncertain situations and can serve as a guide on how to behave in the face of potential challenges (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981). This theme encapsulates the frameworks that the participants expressed that answer the first research question which asks how the memorable messages participants received prior to their entrance in their careers influence how they navigate the leader-member relationship. Generally, participants expressed two main categories, professionalism and being a hard, respectful worker. However, it is of notable importance that only six (40%) participants were able to recall specific messages from before they entered into the field and began gathering workplace experience. The remaining participants struggled to recall any concrete narratives.
when asked to recant a memorable message about how to communicate with a manager. Some, such as Participant 1, a new hire, expressly stated: “…I don't know that I've ever been told how to communicate with a manager…” and later in the interview she described her frustration at her lack of confidence in approaching topics such as conflict with her managers, suggesting that: “All these skills should have been taught to me as a child. You're taught to work, do what the boss says, go home. You're not taught that this is like a functional relationship with two people.” Other participants stated they had never been told how to communicate with managers and framed their lack of preparation based on the times such as when participant 15 shared, “I started work at sixteen, there was no prep. No communication…I mean this was the mid-90s. My mom raised me to be polite to others and to respect people, but that was it.” Participant 14, a veteran employee, also shared that she didn’t recall any specific messages about how to communicate with a manager:

    I grew up in the 70s and graduated high school in '81. Women were a part of the workforce, but more out of necessity than anything. Not fully accepted, I guess. So, a conversation like that just didn't happen…the expectation that I graduate… high school and go to college, which was an odd concept even back then… I was expected to get married and have children. So, conversations like that never occurred.

    Some of the participants were very clear about the absence of conversations about communicating with managers prior to their entrance in their jobs and some expressed how they never had a conversation beyond general instructions of politeness. An example of this is when Participant 6 shared: “Honestly I don't think I had a clue about how to communicate with a manager... I didn't have an expectation [sic] of how to communicate, just a lot of respect. And please and thank you and excuse me. But no one taught me how to talk to a manager.”

    While most participants clearly acknowledged that they didn’t receive any messages about how to communicate with managers prior to their entrance into the workplace, others were
able to articulate two types of memorable messages pertaining to how they were prepared for future work that involved communicating with their managers.

The first memorable message that some participants expressed involved the importance of working hard and being respectful in their future work. Participant 8 is mid-career and shared how the conversations she had with her parents were formative in how she approaches work and her manager:

I think growing up my parents both worked really hard and they always instilled a really strong work ethic in my siblings and myself. So, I do remember…talking a lot about the importance of respect when you're working with your bosses. And not just…verbal respect but showing up on time and doing going the extra mile, you know, doing everything that they ask, when they ask it. Even if you don't want to or you don't like them. So, I think there was a lot of that messaging growing up in my household where you knew that, it's kind of the line you had to tow…when it comes to bosses…just being a hard, respectful worker.

Participant 10, a new-hire, shared a similar message that she received from her father to: “Work hard, keep your head low, and good things will happen.” Later in the interview, she disclosed her frustration about how that message wasn’t helpful when encountering conversations such as when asking for a promotion:

Oh, I did not feel prepared. Like I said…I've been used to doing what my dad said…I proved myself. I worked hard. I kept my head low. I made sure that I was doing something constantly. And with all the communication...realizing you got [sic] to ask for a raise, that just blew my mind. I'm like why can't I just prove and work hard and build relationships and respect…but that's because that's the way I was raised.

The second type of memorable message shared by some participants was the importance of being professional and maintaining a degree of distance from managers. For example, Participant 3 shared that she received her memorable messages about how to communicate with a manager from her mother. She shared a story where her mother was venting about managerial problems or stressors at work and would say, “obviously I didn't say that to my manager, I was very polite and eloquent." Participant 3 then reflected:
And so, I know that that is the way I should interact with bosses. I shouldn't get heated and I should, I don't know, if I got upset talk about it at home… I think it's almost like the like the restrictions you put on yourself when you're customer-facing. Like you're polite, you don't go into your personal life. I think I do the same thing when I talk to my manager. I don't tell her exactly what's on my mind. It's just business.

Participant 11 also shared that she would pick up how to talk to her boss from listening to conversations from when her mother would come home from work. Her most memorable message was when her mother said, “You just have to know how to talk to [managers]…find a way to say what you want to say that doesn't make them feel like their ego is busted or that you…tell them how to do their job,” Participant 11 said, “I think that was the biggest takeaway…when you're communicating with your bosses, you don't want your boss to feel like you are being their boss.”

Participant 2 shared her memorable message by sharing that one thing she picked up on is how critical professionalism is in the workplace, exemplified how she, “never burns professional bridges” and that, “you would never find anybody that would ever say that I've ever publicly said anything negative about a colleague despite my internal feelings,” speaking of the value she places on maintaining professional communication with others in the work group.

Participant 12 said that her father instilled the significance of recognizing the leader-member power dynamic when communicating with managers before her entrance into the workforce, “So with my dad, he told me that there was that power dynamic and to be respectful – to see that power dynamic and that there was a subordinate relationship.” Interestingly, Participant 12 later discussed that her actual work experiences did not reflect such a hierarchical relationship and those messages just made her, “really reserved,” initially when communicating with her managers. She contrasted that to the relationship she built with her current manager where she has, “really open conversations with him.”
As a conclusion to this theme, there was one participant who shared a memorable message that did not fit in the above categories but one that she expressed she’s held onto through the years and she still shares with interns or incoming new employees when they arrive in her organization. Participant 7, a veteran participant, shared this memorable message that she received very soon after getting her degree in higher education:

…I remember one particular manager telling me, and it was the best thing ever, is that you're not alone. There's always someone that you can call. There's always someone you can go to if you have a question or a problem and it's something that I still reiterate to a lot of the new grads that come through. Like they think they're there and they have to make all the decisions. But if they're not sure and they're not comfortable, there's always...someone that's been working for several years that can give you some advice…it's nice to know that you have a community, your brothers and sisters, that you can count on for council.

This perspective was noteworthy because it was the only memorable message that expressed the feeling and importance of relying on, communicating with, and developing strong interpersonal relationships with others in the workgroup instead of the majority of participants who recognized the importance of creating close bonds only after they entered the workplace.

Theme 2: The Perception of Trust, Autonomy, and Competence

Within this theme, participants expressed how trust, autonomy, and competence influenced the most positive and negative experiences they have had with managers while in their professional careers. These three key concepts were described across interviews and demonstrate how the perception of trust, autonomy and competence in workplace experiences shape how participants communicatively approach their managers, which answers in part, research question two that inquires how participant experiences shape how they approach communication with managers. First, the most empowering experiences are shared, followed by the most disempowering or discouraging experiences.
Empowering experiences with managers. Of participants, 80% (n = 12) suggested they felt most empowered when their manager gave them a grand responsibility or opportunity outside their normal role that they were able to excel at. These responsibilities often had a high level of autonomy or prestige and participants described their feelings of pride and empowerment that their manager. For example, when Participant 1 was describing a manager with whom she felt most empowered from, she said:

She was always very excited about my work. When I came to her with some fresh results, she always had this way of interpreting them in a way that I didn't consider before that would just get her so excited. And that got me excited because now here I am making my manager excited…and it's just like this big ball of energy and it's great. She once got so excited about my results she said, “You should come with us…this year and present this at a conference.” And so, she showed me how to apply…for this really competitive thing. I applied. I won it. So…that was [an] awesome, very empowering experience.

Other participants described how it was the messages of trust and autonomy received from their managers that really gave them such strong, positive feelings. Participant 8 shared a specific example of why being given autonomy by her manager was so important to her:

That autonomy aspect of it. My manager knows that when it comes to the writing and the editing of our pieces. I'm the expert. That's my wheelhouse. That's my baby essentially. And he completely trusts me with that. He lets me just take leadership over that aspect of things. And I…just a lot of autonomy and responsibility and just he leaves me alone and lets me get my job done…so that's very empowering.

Participant 14 shared similar feelings of empowerment when she felt her manager trusted her to do her job well: “They trusted me…and [I] felt empowered to treat [the patients] the way I knew how to treat them...even if I had to go work on the weekend being in there alone.”

Participant 9 said that she appreciated times her manager would give her projects and say, “Okay, this is what I need. Go ahead and do whatever you want with it.” She reflected that she appreciated the challenge and the opportunity to “be creative and problem solve.”
Participant 2 shared a particularly empowering experience when her manager gave her the assignment to co-lead on a “huge project…that had to be done in a very short period of time.” When asked why that was so empowering to her, she shared, “They [her managers] said that they believed that it could be accomplished…just very supportive and you felt the belief that you could do it. And they gave you the opportunity to do it without micromanaging.”

Some participants detailed hesitancy or even some fear when being entrusted with such a grand task, but ultimately still found the experience to be empowering. Participant 14 shared her experience:

And I had no clue why he assigned me to that job, I had no experience in that. I never talked about it. Nothing…and so when I started that job, I was kind of terrified…and then I figured out that I was really good at it and I really enjoyed it…it was really surprising that he saw that in me I never saw in myself.

As a final inclusionary note to this theme, some participants did not solely refer to the communicative one-on-one experiences with managers when they would share their most memorable empowering experience but would contextualize that experience by describing how their managers related to their co-workers in relation to them. In this way, a few of the participants identified that when their manager would show their support for them publicly in regard to their co-workers, they would feel personally supported and empowered as well. For example, Participant 4 shared an experience she had during some organizational changes where other members in her work group were “ganging up” on her while she was the manager of that branch. She described her experience of communicating her predicament to her managers and their response to her after hearing the situation: “They said, well you’re the manager, we trust in your decision, so go ahead and deal with it…so they [managers] gave me power and didn’t take it away.”
Throughout the interviews, there was a high degree of consistency in the description of the communication with managers who were empowering as being “warm,” “open,” “friendly,” and “without fear,” of harsh criticism. Participant 2 shared the communication with her most empowering manager as being:

Very professional but very friendly. You felt like you could talk to him about anything like there is no fear of being able to speak the truth or speak your mind. Very confidential. Unfortunately, in all these years of working he's probably the only supervisor I've had that I have felt that way with. I would say he was safe. And prior to that and after that I've never had that since.

Participant 10 also described the communication she had with the manager with whom she had her most empowering relationship with to have a high level of vulnerability:

Comfortable. Trusting. I trusted her pretty much with a lot of things. It was easy to talk to her. I cried in front of her. I came steaming full blown and to her and she always took my side. Which I value a lot because I'm not going to come to a person unless it's something is really wrong. Especially your manager or boss.”

Overall, the most empowering experiences participants recalled with their managers were characterized by a high level of trust, both that the participant have in their manager and their belief that their manager had in them. The following section categorizes the most disempowering critical incidents participants recalled with managers in their professional careers.

**Disempowering experiences with managers.** Participants framed the most disempowering or discouraging experiences with a manager in three different ways; favoritism, micromanaging or experiencing anxiety or fear due to unclear expectations.

When asked if she experienced any barriers in her career, Participant 2 said, “I think big barriers can be favoritism…there's always…the golden boy or golden girl. Sometimes those people can be very manipulative, and supervisors can't see through that. So those are huge. Those have been barriers through the years.” Participant 15, also a veteran, echoed how some
can be manipulative of management in a slightly different context by explaining how favoritism regarding gender influenced the dynamics in her workgroup:

Male managers are so hard because it's the good old boys club. You're not taken seriously. I feel like it goes in one ear and out the other. It's like, oh you're being a girl, you're just being whiny. That's how it feels. And then there are male managers that women can easily manipulate…to get what they want.

She further elaborated on the struggles she experienced that despite her industry being primarily female-dominant, her previous manager didn’t “want to communicate” or listen to issues that she or her female coworkers brought to his attention: “[He] didn't want to fix issues, but when one of the guys came up and voiced concerns, he listened to them...like I said it's good old boys club.”

Participant 10 shared a similar experience of not being taken seriously when she spoke up about being “heckled by another co-worker” who, “thought he was top dog. He wasn't…he thought so being a family member of the owners.” When she brought up this issue to both her managers, she shared that despite her female manager being on her side, her male manager dismissed her concerns and said to, “let it calm down. He's [the co-worker] got a lot of stress on him.” When asked how that situation was resolved, Participant 10 said of her male manager:

He just never understood. He was just a naive man…It did calm down a little bit, but I just wish that, you know, he took me seriously. This is an issue…it seem[ed] like he was too scared to cross toes due to…the power of this individual. In a sense who really didn't have much power at all.

This explicit reference to power was also mentioned by Participant 4, who shared that her most discouraging experience with a manager was because of the drama he created in the workgroup she was managing and the lack of trust she had in him:

It was terrible. So even communicating with him he would just make things worse. Like if I'm having an issue with the staff. He would go and tell the staff. It was really bad. It's
like giving you the power and then taking it back. So basically, you had no say in anything even though I was managing the location.

In response to this experience with that manager, Participant 4 said she pulled back from her involvement in the company and limited her communication with him while he was her manager: “I was not fired up to fix things like I used to…because I didn't want to ruin my relationship with everyone else.”

Another way the participants felt disempowered by their managers was that they perceived their managers didn’t trust them to be competent to do their jobs which resulted in micromanaging and a lack of autonomy. Participant 14 understood her manager micromanaging as a lack of trust and said, “That's what micromanaging is, you don't trust the people to do their job. And so, you figure you'll have to watch everything they do.” Participant 9 described her least desirable relationship with a manager and said, “She was…a micromanager…it's really hard to understand why somebody would be a micromanager…I don't understand that you don’t have trust in your employees to do what they're asked to do.” Participant 12 labeled micromanaging as a hindrance to her ability to perform her job optimally:

With that specific manager…the trust was broken. I felt very micromanaged. And so, I felt like I was always looking over my shoulder and not operating in that that zone. I was worried about not doing it right. Instead of feeling confident about my abilities and moving forward, I was second guessing myself.

Uncertainty characterized the third way some participants shared some of their most discouraging experiences with managers. These participants communicated having feelings of fear or anxiety because they were unsure of what they needed to do to “please” their managers. Participant 6 shared, “Failure to ‘please’ the manager made me feel…like I was always doing something wrong. Despite trying, I couldn't get it right. So, lots of anxiety.”
Participant 13, now mid-career, shared how she was very nervous and uncomfortable with a manager when she first entered the corporate world who would be very passive aggressive and engage in “mean girl drama.” She recalled feeling, “…why can't you just communicate this to me or tell me what you need fixed, or coach me a little bit. More of, hey these are my expectations…but instead it would get passive aggressive.”

Participant 1 shared how the inconsistent and changing expectations from her manager created an environment where she was unsure of what she needed to do to succeed. “The culture here is very, very tough. Leadership rules by fear and intimidation…every day is very stressful; you never know what’s…going to happen.” Participant 4 shared that she had fear when going to communicate with her manager because, “He wouldn’t communicate with me on things that he wanted to change and then he would expect it to be changed…and his expectations were high, even though he didn’t communicate those expectations to me.”

Overall, the second theme covered how the presence or lack of perceived trust, autonomy, and competence made the participants feel empowered or disempowered in the leader-member relationship. The following theme details how the participants described their communicative approach to navigating the leader-member relationship based on their experience.

**Theme 3: Adaptive Communicative Approaches**

The second research question asks how, based on the experiences described in the previous theme, participants shape their approach to communicating with managers. This theme encompasses the different ways participants described adapting their approach to leader-member communication based on their experiences. This theme begins by highlighting how some participants expressed the importance of initially observing their manager in order to learn about
them. Secondly, how participants communicatively approach their manager founded on their desired leader archetypes, and finally, a third approach is described that illustrates how some participants explicitly acknowledge and engage communicatively with their managers based on the reciprocal nature of the leader-member relationship.

Some participants expressed how their very first step in approaching communication with managers is to observe and learn “their quirks” and “how they prefer to communicate” according to Participant 8, who was describing her initial approach to managers. She continues, “For the most part I've been able to kind of just adjust and adapt to whatever needs to be done to make our working relationship work.” Participant 9 also framed the initial stages of developing a relationship with a manager as, “There was a lot of observation and then a lot of initial attempts at conversation. And then it pretty soon evolved usually into a good relationship.”

Other participants approached the leader-member relationship with tentative reserve, such as when Participant 14 said, “…I'm not an open book, I don't just pour myself to them to get to know them. I observe and I watch. So, in asking questions, I'm observing…and learning from their responses to kind of assess where they are.” Participant 2 also framed her initial observation period as a way to learn: “the big thing too is watching…and just, not that you become someone else, but you learn different techniques on how to deal with people.”

Participant 11 described her approach of holding back a bit initially as she engaged in her process of learning about how to communicate with her managers:

Every single person you encounter will be different. They're going to manage people differently. They're going to manage a business differently. They're all going to have their own communication styles and backgrounds that they come from. So, you know, you just have to kind of keep your head down, do your job for the first couple of months until you get comfortable enough to you know maybe express your ideas or ask more questions outside of your learning your new role and job. Just gotta go with the flow and you kind of learn your manager’s style and how they deal with people.”
Along with those who shared their approach of observing first, many of the participants acknowledged that they related to their managers according to their different preferences, personalities, or communication styles. An example is Participant 9 who shared that she tailors her communication to her manager’s personality:

So, I think it's just kind of learning that person's behavior and...how they work. And I will fine tune the way the messages that I give them based on that. So, it's kind of trying to get to know the personality too.

Participant 5 described how she didn’t always have that perspective and how “overall awareness would have encouraged better ways of communicating with supervisors and being aware of their personalities so that I could have engaged more appropriately with them,” would have been helpful to her towards the beginning of her career.

It was interesting to note that some participants specifically drew comparisons from managers to different types of leader archetypes based on desired managerial behavior such as mentors, teachers, or friends (Omilion-Hodges, Shank, & Packard, in press). The most common reference was that of manager as mentors. Six of the participants mentioned how they would frame or relate to their managers as mentors. The participants would describe the communication with these managers to be open, warm, and rooted in a high level of trust. This was well exemplified by Participant 1:

We communicated every day. It was daily communication in person. Very open. And we didn’t always communicate about just work. She cared about me as a person and she cared about my life and would check in, and she would learn about me. And so... she was my mentor. So, it was very easy to talk with her. And yeah, I wasn’t afraid to ask questions...there was no stupid question with her.

Something noteworthy was how Participant 5 acknowledged the value and her desire to communicate with managers as mentors, however only to discover that, “[she had] male leaders that were touted as really good mentor people and good at investing in other people [that] really...
didn’t do that with a female understudy…but I witnessed that taking place with my male counterparts.” She further referenced this experience by conveying how mentorship worked in that organization:

The difference because I was female and they were male and they [supervisors] were just culturally more drawn to building up other men. It became more clear that it was part of the norm of the culture that I was in that men might be given different roles than women.

Participants would also compare their communicative approach to managers similar to that of a professor or teacher. Participant 13 reflected, “I probably approach communicating with a manager the way I approach communicating my professor…which is I have respect for you and I want to please you.” Participant 11 described the personalized relationship she develops with her managers akin to professors:

It's kind of like in school. Each professor is different and he'll teach you [in] a couple of weeks to learn their style their teaching style, their grading style, how they prefer their students to write. So yeah, it's the same in my workplace…. I have three supervisors that I could go to any day of the week and they all have different expectations.

Participant 9 in particular, referenced how her approach to managers mirrored the interpersonal relationship she would expect from a friend: “I've always had some really good managers who've become very good friends actually…I think that's part of the interpersonal-personal relationship that I like to have with managers too. So, I mean I really appreciate that.”

Finally, some of the mid-career and veteran participants emphasized the importance of not only observing and developing their communicative approach based on how they conceptualize the manager’s role, but to also knowing their own preferences, what they need from their managers in order to do their best work, and to make a point to clearly communicate those needs and expectations to their managers.

**The reciprocal relationship.** Participants recognized this connection between knowing what they needed to operate at their best and emphasized the importance of receiving what they
needed from managers. For example, Participant 8 shared that she expects a high amount of autonomy and that she communicates that to her managers. She discusses how, by having that autonomy, she is more effective in her job performance and highlights how her communicative approach recognizes the reciprocal nature of the relationship:

I expect…a lot autonomy from my managers. I think I have been able to communicate pretty well like what my own expectations are in my role. I work really well independently. I feel like I’m a very responsible person [and] I’m going to get the work done, I don’t let things fall to the wayside. I take a lot of pride in my job and I think it’s really important to have goals for yourself and be self-motivated and all of those things.

But in return I kind of expect to be left alone to some regard…it’s just that this is what I need as an employee. This is how you can help me and in return I’m going to do everything to get the job done well and to work well together and I think we make a good team because of these components fitting together…it’s just kind of showing each other, you know what your expectations are.

Participant 6, who would often share how she related to her managers the way she would professors, shared a story of a time when a professor in college was being very harsh in his critiques of her performance in his class. After an upfront conversation with him, she connected how he had expressed to her he was only trying to motivate her by giving her harsh critiques. After sharing that experience, she stated that it was this experience that taught her to communicate what she needs from managers. She connected this experience as one of the reasons why she makes an effort to communicate what works best for her to her managers:

And after we had that conversation he stopped trying to, you know, dangle a carrot…that doesn't motivate me. What motivates me is telling me that what I'm doing right. Moving forward when I think about the conversations that I've had with managers, I'm okay knowing what I'm not doing well. But I also need to know what I'm doing well…I can take a balanced report…so, I try to let my managers know what I need from them as well as what they might need for me.

Later in the interview, she describes an experience with a previous manager and how now she can recognize that she was still looking for that positive encouragement, and wasn’t quite sure how to ask earlier in her career:
…I wasn't really getting any feedback. She was actually not a good type of manager for my personality because she was very flat and didn't have a lot of personality. So, in my attempt to engage her, it was annoying for her. I can see that now, but [back then] I was looking for feedback.

Participant 5, a mid-career, directly stated the importance of knowing oneself and communicating that to managers when asked if she had any advice for women entering into the workplace: “I would encourage them to figure out what they need in their own communication style - how they are best communicated with and how they best communicate so that they can also offer help to that conversation.” And as a final representative of this theme, Participant 12 shared her experience with her manager and contextualized how the importance of purposefully speaking up about her needs was so important in the leader-member relationship.

He doesn't know what it's like to be in my shoes. I think he's empathetic…[but] if I need something from him, I have to specifically say it. He's not searching for what's the next thing for me or how he [can] help me grow…so I have to be very vocal and clear about what I need. Which was not something that I feel like we are taught growing up…. we have to know what we need and ask for it.

This quote connects the fourth and final theme in result from the interview data by exploring how, based on their experiences, participants described two salient types of advice for women entering into the workplace and what to expect regarding leader-member relationships.

**Theme 4: Socialized Expectations**

As a final theme, there were two central types of advice that emerged surrounding the participants’ communicative approach to the leader-member relationship. This theme answers research question two because it embodied how participants described their approach to communicating with managers based on their own workplace socialization and framed it as advice, giving insight to what they perceived women could expect to be prepared for in their professional careers. First, participants’ perspective regarding emotion in the workplace is discussed and second, their advice to not be afraid to speak up for themselves.
Regulation of emotion. The topic of emotion was identified across ten (67%) participant interviews, who shared their perspective of the importance of regulating emotion in the workplace. They framed this advice by noting their own workplace experiences or based it directly on how they perceived to be most communicatively effective when approaching difficult conversations with their managers. For most participants, they shared phrases similar to Participant 7’s advice, “[Do] not let emotion get into the situation. Just the facts.” Or when Participant 12 shared her perspective that her position was stronger if she removed her emotional investment from difficult conversations:

I think that especially difficult topics, emotion gets involved, and... so what I always do is I usually have talking points about the facts. You know because if I go in and say, I want a promotion and I don't have anything to back that up, and he says no. Then I feel personally let down... You have to take the emotion out of it and have your facts ready because they're never easy conversations.

Participant 2’s example went deeper than sticking to facts when applying for a promotion, but her decision to conceal her emotions when communicating with her manager was connected to her refusing to give up her power. She was sharing an especially difficult conversation she was having with her manager and a co-worker with whom she was having conflict. After revealing that, “these two people are like really close and I was just basically like humiliated and screamed at - well not screamed at, but just completely, completely humiliated.” She recounted:

I was not going to show any emotions whatsoever. Like I wasn't gonna get - I thought that person was acting very inappropriately, very unprofessionally. And I was not, in any way shape or form, going to give them the power. I wasn't gonna give that power away. I was not going to show any emotion, I was not going to grovel or, you know - I said what I had to say – [I] said my piece.

When asked if she would have done anything differently in that situation, she reflected:

I think that there's a part of me that regrets not just standing up. I don't know that sitting there stoically was the best thing either. But I felt that if I were to blast the person back, it
would have been a no-win situation. You know you don't forget ever being treated like that again either.

Participant 1 explained how her perceived inability to regulate her emotions sufficiently could potentially hinder her from her future career success:

…I think that this is stopping me as a professional because not only do I dislike conflict but there's a lot of like negative emotional charge behind it. And then here I am like a grown ass woman getting emotional because I'm asking for a promotion or because there's conflict. This is preventing me; I think or at least will prevent me from achieving what I could achieve.

So, while most participants shared a negative connotation to being emotional with a manager in the workplace, Participant 12 had a slightly different perspective. After sharing her perspective that it wouldn’t be possible to take emotions out completely, she recommended:

[Do] not let your emotions run the show when it comes to a personal topic. But on the other hand, that happens. I mean I've cried in front of my boss before and I hate when I do that. But I finally learned. Like if I'm to that point where I cry, something's not right. And I don't need to be ashamed, but I really do think that you know when you're having those really hard conversations because they will inherently be emotional and feel emotional and hard and painful. So, if you can have those facts that really helps. You just kind of ground yourself in those.

In this way, Participant 12 acknowledged the benefit to having the facts and to regulate emotion in the workplace to an extent, but then also recognized that getting to the point of crying is a signal that there is more to be done rather than simply suppress those emotions.

**Don’t be afraid.** This final section is the amalgamation of similar messages that the participant’s shared surrounding this concept of overcoming some specific barriers and to not be afraid to speak up in the face of adversity.

In order to contextualize the advice participants shared, some participants discussed the barriers they experience in the workplace and how their approach to communicating with managers reflects that. For example, Participant 2 highlighted how women in the workplace may still be overcoming stereotypes and the importance of being prepared to speak up:
I mean I'm gonna be very frank here...there are certain stereotypes made about you that you have to get past. And you know when I started working there was that glass ceiling and there was an old boys club. And you...had to prove yourself. You know like just because I'm a woman, I am capable of doing this job. Especially...once you get into middle management and executive management which predominantly has always been very male dominated.

As a woman entering the workforce...with your supervisor, demand at least being treated with respect and with integrity. But it's not an easy road and it's not an easy road for men either, but for professional women I think that there's still more obstacles to overcome to be thought up as equal to a man. I absolutely believe that.

Participant 12 discussed the need for more female role models in the workplace and how she feels like, “I've had a lot of really good informal mentors but you know we need more of that because I think men ...are [in] more situations where they can foster that.” Similarly, Participant 5 shared her perspective regarding opportunities for growth for women in the workplace:

I read a lot to further grow my leadership. And some of that I feel a particular drive to because I think it's harder for women to succeed and to move forward. And so, you have to have more - you have to be better. I won't place this on you, but I feel I have to be even stronger in my leadership skills in order to be given similar opportunities as my male counterparts.

Participant 10 shared her struggles of getting a promotion in a male-dominated field and disclosed her experience and how it changed her communicative approach:

They liked me where I was at and I was good where I was at. And I was reliable, and I busted my butt. So that's kind of what happened. I got stuck...I learned that if I want something done, I have to go up and physically say it. Like you gotta kind of fight for it in that sense.

Later in the interview, she stated her advice to women entering the workforce: “Just to be outspoken about your goals and demands. Like say this is where I want to be. This is my goal. This is how I want to get there and what can I do...” She said, “You can't make everybody happy and you got to stand up for yourself...stand your ground. Don't be afraid of conflict.”

Participant 14 also acknowledged some of the struggles of promotion and career advancement when she forwarded the advice she received from her husband, “The only person
[who] is going to look out for your career is yourself,” after which she remarked, “you have to be your own advocate and support other women. But you know support yourself too that's important.” With that acknowledgment, she expounded, “You gotta know when to listen and then when to speak up for yourself. Doing it the first time is the toughest. But once you do it then you figure out that you can.” Participant 7 also gave her advice to women entering the working world, by saying “don’t be afraid to say things…and to stay true to yourself and how you feel. So, I think that's probably the most important thing.”

As a way to summarize this final theme, Participant 8’s advice echoed the perspectives described across interviews. She recommended:

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to stand up for what you want or what you need as an employee. Know your worth and feel empowered to ask for what you want. I think that it's tough being - it's tough being a woman in the working world. It still is even after everything that's happened in the last, even year or so.

I think it's really easy to kind of just fall back and default to like those gender roles where your being too apologetic or not assertive enough. At least that's been my experience. It's been really hard for me to remember to do those things. It's just we're taught to be a certain way growing up and it's really hard to break from that mold once you are working, especially 10 years in. So yeah just knowing your worth and being unafraid to ask for what you need or what you want.

In conclusion, this theme provides recommendations from women to women about some of the barriers they may face as they enter professional environments based on their socialized experiences and offers suggestions on what to expect in order to navigate through those communicative barriers. Themes are connected to extant literature in the discussion section below.

DISCUSSION

This research explores how women were prepared prior to their entrance in the workplace as well as how their experiences within their organizations shape how they communicate with their managers. The following sections detail how the results of this study contribute to extant
literature regarding the memorable messages the participants received, the impact of their communicative experiences in regards to how they relate to their managers and co-workers, and finally, how the advice they gave based on their experiences illuminate how their approach to the leader-member relationship reflect the communicative challenges they’ve experienced.

The Lack of Specific Memorable Messages

In response to the first research question that inquires how the memorable messages participants received influence how they navigate the leader-member relationship, this research found that while six of the participants were able to articulate memorable messages about communicating with managers, the majority of participants struggled to articulate any clear memorable messages or could only recall messages surrounding what it means to work. Further, of the six participants that could recall memorable messages about communicating with managers, only two recalled messages that involved building a relationship with managers beyond simply being respectful or professional. Messages about what it means to work provide a rudimentary foundation from which some participants could rely on their strong work ethic or character to build credibility in their organizations. However, some participants expressly stated that they felt underprepared to navigate some of the more difficult conversations with managers or recognized the importance of developing a communicatively rich relationship with others in their work group that they didn’t learn until later in their careers. Memorable messages about a broad or general concept lack the specificity needed to serve as a guide for individuals who are navigating uncertain situations and are also less likely to be effective in empowering individuals to act on those messages in a helpful way or may even hinder healthy socialization into a new group (Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Noland & Carmack, 2015). Further, in order to serve as a guide behavior, memorable messages have to be concrete and specific, as was demonstrated in the
study done by Noland and Carmack (2015), who found that nursing students who received non-specific or conflicting memorable messages about when and to whom they should report medical mistakes lead to inconsistent decision making across nursing students. They highlight the influence memorable messages have during the assimilation process and the complexities involved in “unlearning” (p. 1242) unhelpful or even detrimental skills and perspectives developed during that stage (Noland & Carmack, 2015). Considering this, it is problematic that participants, especially new hires, expressed frustration at feeling unprepared to navigate topics such as dealing with a manager who was unclear in their expectations or how to discuss promotions with their managers when their initial expectations were that simply working hard would be enough to advance their career forward. While memorable messages are being increasingly studied across organizational contexts (e.g., Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Noland & Carmack, 2015; Powers & Myers, 2017), the findings of this research forwards that women may not be receiving the clear, specific types of memorable messages needed in order to confidently navigate the leader-member relationship upon entrance in their professional careers. Thus, although some of the more experienced participants shared how they learned to navigate the leader-member relationship after time through observation and experience in their careers, the importance and need of specific, clear memorable messages for women was brought to attention by the frustrated accounts of some of the younger, less experienced participants.

A final consideration worth noting regarding memorable messages is that although the majority of participants struggled to recall specific messages about communicating with a manager or lacked the context needed to interpret those messages in meaningful ways, it would appear that many were provided generalized messages such as the importance of being
respectful, polite, or professional. While these are insufficient for preparing women for navigating the complexities of the leader-member relationship, they do still provide a form of socialization about their role in future organizations that may have unintended consequences regarding how they relate to or communicate with future managers. An example of this is how in the context of being respectful to managers whether or not they agreed with them, participants shared the perspective that they had been socialized to accept that it was their “line to tow” (Participant 8) or that there was a “power dynamic and...a subordinate relationship” (Participant 12). In light of these findings, future research should further explore what kinds of memorable messages would be most helpful for women who are entering into their professional careers and how the current socialization that is occurring is contextualizing the messages they receive that influence how they are interpreting and applying those frameworks.

**Role of LMX Developmental Stages**

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants described the importance of observation when first learning how to best approach communication with a manager. This first step is reflected in first LMX developmental stage: role taking (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Characterized by more transactional and formal communication (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Ilies, 2009), most participants reflected engaging in this stage in their relationships with their managers. For some participants, their communication with managers who were notably involved in disempowering critical incidents didn’t relationally progress and instead became stagnant. Participants who shared their reactions to those especially negative critical incidents discussed how they would communicatively retreat and disengage from interacting further with managers who had lost their trust or had been especially discouraging to them. This aligns with research done by Farmer and Aguinis (2005) who found that those in hierarchically subordinate
positions react to displays of power and the intentions they perceive supervisors to have regarding the distribution of resources, which can cause marked reactions in organizational members including the apathy and withdrawal expressed by participants. The participants from the current study expressed how the breaking of their trust, often through micromanaging or unclear expectations resulted in critical incidents that determined their motivation for engaging further with those managers.

The presence of trust was not solely noted in the negative critical incidents recounted by participants but by most of the participants when describing their most empowering experience with a manager as well. Participants explicitly shared that it was the manager’s trust in them that made the positive critical incident so salient in their minds. While some of these empowering situations were grandiose, a number of participants recalled these incidents simply because managers communicatively expressed their trust in the participant and gave them the freedom to be creative and solve organizational problems on their own (Omilion-Hodges & Ackerman, 2018). In this way, our findings extend LMX literature by demonstrating the significance of the organizational member’s perception of trust, both in the manager and how it is communicatively expressed from the manager, as a moderating effect on the leader-member relationship (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sheer, 2015). In this way, these findings answer research question two that explores how leader-member experiences shape how participants communicatively approach the leader-member relationship.

The second developmental stage, role making, was articulated by some participants who noted not only the presence of mutual trust, but also how both manager and member negotiated expectations. Markedly, it was the mid-career and veteran participants who discussed the importance of knowing what they need in order to be optimally successful in their organizational role, engaging in the negotiation
process of expressing what they need, and requesting what is expected from their managers as well. The participants shared that they wanted to feel safe, heard and respected, but it was some of the more mature participants who clearly expressed the importance of also actively communicating their desire for specific communicative behaviors, such as positive reinforcement and autonomy, to their managers. This was in sharp contrast to the younger participants who shared their impression that managers were to be communicated with on a more transactional or strictly polite or professional basis. It would appear that the importance of communication about negotiating expectations is one that is developed through experience, but not necessarily communicated to women before their entrance into their professional careers. Transcending beyond the transactional or “polite” levels of communication is imperative to developing strong leader-member relationships, resource acquisition, and career advancements (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Omilion-Hodges & Wieland, 2016; Sheer, 2015) and from the research findings, it appears that many participants are still struggling to move beyond this perspective. Further, the majority of participants also quite uniformly expressed the importance of getting to know their manager’s personality or communication style as a communicative approach. LMX research however, has rejected this previously adhered to idea that a leader has a style that they enact uniformly, but that the relationship between the leader-member dyad is developed by co-creating a personalized and communicatively rich relationship that moves beyond a transactional method of exchanging information or accomplishing tasks (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013). Taken together, the findings of this research highlight the importance of continuing conversations with both current professionals and those who have yet to enter into the workforce about viewing the leader-member relationship as a relationship built on the co-constructed communicative exchanges based both on the leader and the organizational member’s influence and input. Practical implications for managers would be to recommend emphasizing the importance of not only communicating trust and support to
organizational members but also to encourage them to voice their expectations and desires in a safe and communicatively open context.

**Influence of the Co-Worker in the Leader-Member Relationship**

An interesting finding that emerged from the interviews was the frequent mention of the influence that the co-workers had on the development of the leader-member relationship. In both the positive and negative critical incidents, participants would share that part of the reason why an experience was so salient in their minds was because of the dynamic created by their co-workers’ involvement. In some cases, this was seen negatively, such as the occurrence of favoritism, however, in the positive experiences, it was the fact that the manager was expressly placing their trust and publicly showing their support in front of the other organizational members that lead to the experience being perceived as empowering. Recent leadership scholarship has continued to expand on how the leader-member experience is not isolated within the dyad but extends to how co-workers relate to and interact with each other as well (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Omilion-Hodges & Ackerman, 2018; Sherony & Green, 2002). As discussed briefly in the introduction, co-worker support, especially when absent, can have numerous implications regarding career advancement, promotion, employee effectiveness, job satisfaction, creativity, and other employee outcomes (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Glass & Cook, 2016; Omilion-Hodges & Ackerman, 2018). Upon further analysis of the complex social dynamics that comprise a work environment, Sherony and Green (2002), found that co-worker exchange (CWX) quality was predicted by the organizational members’ LMX scores and that organizational members who engaged in high-quality communication with their leaders, also engaged in similar, high-quality communication with their in-group co-workers. Those who develop a high-quality exchange relationship with their leader, are also likely to engage in collaborative, reciprocal, and trusting relationship with their co-workers, potentially having a multiplying effect on the amount and quality of their workplace
support and resources (Sherony & Green, 2002). Thus, those who engage in frequent, open, and mutually-trusting communicative exchanges with their leaders also reap the benefits of increased co-worker support and trust, greater influence during strategic organizational discussions, and greater opportunities to be involved in negotiations than those who do not (Martinez, et al., 2012; Meiners & Boster, 2012; Omilion-Hodges, & Baker, 2017). Leader-member relationships have a wide-reaching influence in the workplace and the communicative exchanges that occur between leaders and their members have a powerful influence in the negotiation of those relationships. Building on that, this current research also extends how within those leader-member relationships, the influence of the co-worker, even in something as non-material such as the communicatively expressed support and backing of the leader can empower organizational members and strengthen their relationship.

**Communicative Challenges in the Workplace**

Organizational scholars have identified the importance of workplace support and access to resources for the advancement of one’s career and have also acknowledged the reality that women at work experience less support, both in compensation and relational accolades, than their male co-workers, particularly in male-dominated fields (Glass & Cook, 2016; McGuire, 2002). In the fourth theme, participant’s responses answered the second research question by sharing how their experiences have shaped their approach to communicating with managers, exemplified by the type of advice they would give women who are entering into their professional careers. Overall the advice referred to overcoming two specific types of communicative challenges encountered in the workplace.

One type of communicative challenge emphasized by participants is the importance of knowing what they want in their careers and not being afraid to “speak up,” “fight,” or “demand respect,” in order to advocate for themselves in organizations. Participants also expressed the existence of negative female stereotypes or not being taken as seriously by their male counter-parts by their managers. One notable
addition to this theme were the participants who shared that although they were in female-dominated fields or workgroups, when their male manager took the side or listened more intently to the male organizational members, this is presented a formidable challenge in the workplace for the participants. This calls to question the emphasis that has been placed on female discrimination occurring in primarily male-dominated fields and illuminates the opportunity for future research to specifically consider the particular workplace dynamics that could embolden discrimination regardless of the majority.

The second type of advice surrounded the regulation of emotion for women in the workplace. This concept emerged as a result of the advice they would give other women in order to be successful in their careers or the socialized expectations they forwarded regarding what it would take to be considered credible when having difficult conversations with managers. Gender, emotion, and power generate a complex relationship that scholars Ragins and Winkel (2011) detail as they identify the profound and intertwining effects of gender and influence in the workplace. Referencing the work of Eagly and Carli (2007), they forward their thoughts:

It is not simply glass ceilings that keep women from developing power in organizations, but rather a complex labyrinth of daily interpersonal challenges that women face at all levels of the organization (p. 377)

The authors recognize the reality that women still face unique challenges that their male counterparts may not experience in the working world today, and this research highlights that women must adapt and utilize communicative approaches that empower them to overcome those challenges.

Limitations and Future Research

Like all research, this study is not without its limitations. While this research fulfilled the exploratory goal of investigating what types of memorable messages women received about the leader-member relationship, in order to draw more specific conclusions, future research may narrow the focus to more specific demographics. This may include racial demographics, socio-economic status, or level
of completed education as a way to further consider how participant background influences the types of memorable messages given and interpreted surrounding the leader-member relationship. Based on the results of this study, future research may also consider more specifically what kinds of socialized expectations that women develop beyond the memorable messages they receive prior to their entrance into their careers. Practically, future research could also consider which concrete memorable messages are more beneficial in encouraging women to communicatively build strong relationships with managers and how to advocate and speak up for themselves in light of the specific workplace challenges.

CONCLUSION

By examining the leader-member relationship, this research considers the experiences of women in the workplace and how they were prepared through the messages they received prior to their entrance into their careers. This research has highlighted the role of trust, co-workers, and communication in the construction of these workplace relationships and has emphasized the importance of communication in the development of these critical roles. Through purposeful communication with their managers, organizational members can actively engage in the co-creation of the leader-member relationship that can be instrumental in the successful progression of their professional careers. This research also forwards opportunities for future research by calling into question the depth and types of memorable messages women receive about how to navigate the leader-member relationship before they enter into the workplace. By considering the experiences and perspectives of women who are currently in their professional careers, the insights gained from this research shed light on the unique challenges they face, but also how they were most encouraged and supported. This research offers a unique contribution that can serve to benefit not only the wonder women of today, but also to prepare and empower the wonder women of tomorrow.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Participants
Western Michigan University, School of Communication

**Principle Investigator:** Dr. Leah Omilion-Hodges, Associate Professor of Communication, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, 269.387.3149

**Student Investigator:** Christine M. Packard, Master’s Graduate Student, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, 269.491.3384

**Title of Study:** Wonder Women in a Superman World: Exploring the Communicative Strategies Women Utilize in Navigating the Leader-Member Exchange Relationship

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Wonder Women in a Superman World: Exploring the Communicative Strategies Women Utilize in Navigating the Leader-Member Exchange Relationship”. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully.

**What am I trying to find out in this study?**
We are seeking to understand how women have been prepared prior to their entrance into their professional field as well as their current experiences regarding communication and relationships with managers.

**Who can participate in this study?**
For the purposes of this study, we are specifically considering the experiences of women who have at least one-year experience in their professional career, are post-graduation or have completed a professional certification/practice, and must have a direct manager/supervisor that they report to and interact with at least three times per week.

**Where will this study take place?**
Should you wish to participate, you may continue with this online demographic survey. After the survey, we will either meet at a public location of your choosing to conduct the interview or schedule the interview to be held over a phone or video conference, whichever channel (face to face, phone, or video conference) is most convenient for you.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**
The demographic survey will take approximately 3 to 5 minutes to complete. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**
You will be asked to respond to a series of questions regarding conversations and experiences about communication and relationships with current or previous managers.

**What information is being measured during the study?**
The frequency and topics of conversation about communication and experiences with managers will be analyzed. You may choose to not answer any question and simply skip the answer. If you
choose to not participate in this study, you may terminate your computer survey session at any time or stop the interview at any time. Submitting a completed survey indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**
There are no known risks to participating.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
Participants may benefit from insights gained about themselves through the process of completing the interview. Findings may help organizational communication scholars theorize to help women bridge the gap between expectations/preparation and actual encounters of working with managers.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
There are no costs associated with participation.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no monetary compensation for participation.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
Only the researchers will have access to the information collected during this study.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You may choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. A code will be assigned to your responses so that your name and organization will never be attached to the data. I will ask you to use pseudonyms for your organization and any organizational members you would like to reference. At no point will I ask you to reveal the true identities of organizational members or your organization.

This consent has been approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) on January 15, 2019. Do not participate after January 15, 2020.

If you have any questions, you may contact the primary investigator, Leah Omilion-Hodges, PhD at 387-3149, the student investigator, Christine Packard at (269) 491-3384, the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or the vice president for research (269-387-8298).

By clicking “next,” this indicates your consent to participate in this study.
Appendix B

Quantitative Career Experience and Demographic Survey
Career Experience

1. What field or industry do you primarily work in? ____________
2. What is your current job title? ____________
3. How long have you worked in your profession? ____________
4. How long have you worked in your current organization? ____________
5. What is the approximate size of your work group (including yourself and your manager)? ____________
6. How many direct managers have you had throughout in your professional career? ____________
7. Consider the manager you have worked with the longest. How long did you work for them?
   1–3 years  4-6 years  7-10 years  10+ years
8. If you had to rate your intention to stay with this current organization, how likely is this the organization the one you will remain with long-term?
   1- Not at all likely
   2- Not likely
   3- Likely
   4- Very likely
   5- Extremely likely

Demographic Questions

What is your age?

   20 - 25 years  26 - 30 years  31- 35 years  36 - 40 years  41- 45 years
   46 - 50 years  51- 55 years  56 - 60 years  61+ years

What is your race?

   a. White
   b. Hispanic or Latino(a/x)
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native American or American Indian
e. Asian / Pacific Islander
f. Bi-/Multi-Racial
g. Other
h. Prefer not to disclose

What is your highest completed level of formal education?

a. Highschool or GED
b. Certification
c. Associate degree
d. Bachelor’s degree
e. Some college
f. Master’s degree
g. Doctorate degree
h. Prefer not to disclose

What was your degree or certification in? ______________

Debriefing Statement (will appear on the last page of the survey) Thank you for participating in this study. We know your time is valuable and appreciate your sharing some of it with us.
Appendix C

Pre-Interview Reflection Prompt
Hi [name of participant],

In preparation for our interview, I have included a short reflection prompt that will mirror the nature of the topics we will be discussing.

At this point, I want to encourage you to think about the following questions – I will look forward to learning from your detailed responses at a later date. You don’t need anything in preparation for the interview, these are offered to you so that you have time to consider these questions and reflect on your experience.

1. Before you began your professional career, did you have a conversation or hear an explicit message from someone in your life that really influenced how you view communicating or how you would relate to a manager?
   • Who did you hear the message from?
   • When did you hear this message?
   • How has it impacted you?

2. What are some experiences that you would say have defined how you communicate with a manager?

3. Since beginning your professional career, what are some things you learned about communicating with a manager?

4. What role does communication play in your relationship with a manager?

Thank you!
Appendix D

Interview Schedule
Intro: My name is Christine, a researcher from Western Michigan University. The purpose of this interview is to learn from your experience as a professional and your perspective on communication with a manager. I’m going to ask a few general questions about your role in your organization and then some specific questions surrounding communication, your relationship with your manager, and the experiences you’ve had throughout your career.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. A pseudonym will be assigned to your responses so that your name and organization will never be attached to the data. I will ask you to use pseudonyms for your organization and any organizational members you would like to reference. At no point will I ask you to reveal the true identities of organizational members or your organization. Additionally, you may omit any question or end the interview at any time without consequence or prejudice. I’ll give you an opportunity to review the informed consent sheet again and offer you a chance to ask any questions.

[Researcher gives participant time to review the informed consent sheet and answers any questions.]

I will now turn on my recorder so that we may begin. Do you consent to participate in this study? Please keep in mind that all these questions are geared toward the experiences you’ve had in your professional career.

Rapport building

1. Briefly, can you share a little about your position in your organization and your career path up to this point?

2. What aspects of your current job do you really enjoy?

3. What aspects of your current job do you find stressful or otherwise less enjoyable?

Topic 1 – Memorable Messages

Often, before we enter into a new field or begin our careers, our expectations about work are shaped by the messages or conversations we’ve had with others. These can be perceived as being very influential and can serve as a guide when we are navigating uncertain or new situations.

For the next few questions, I will ask you to reflect on your experience and consider if you can recall a conversation or phrase that has really impacted you regarding how you communicate with managers.

1. What is a conversation or phrase that impacted how you communicate or relate to managers? Can you share what it was?

2. Who gave you the message? (mentor, parent, peer, etc)
   a. Describe your relationship with that person (e.g., higher/lower status? benevolent or malevolent?)
3. When you heard this message, how did it influence your perspective on communicating with managers?
   a. Can you give me a specific example of that influence in action?

**Topic 2 – Workplace Experiences and LMX**

1. Since beginning your career, what are some things that have been different than you expected about communicating or building a relationship with a manager?
   a. Did you feel prepared to handle these differences?
   b. What are some things that have aligned or been consistent with your expectations?
   c. What are some things you wish you would have known?

2. Reflect on a manager who you feel you have had the best or strongest relationship with. How would you describe the communication with that manager?

3. Reflect on a manager who you feel you have had least desirable relationship with. How would you describe the communication with that manager?

4. Can you share with me an example of a really positive experience or a time you felt really empowered by a manager?

5. Can you share with me an example of a really negative experience or a time you felt really discouraged by a manager?
   a. What did you do in reaction to that experience?
   b. If you could go back, would you have done anything differently?

6. If you had to talk to your manager about topics like conflict with a co-worker, promotion, or addressing work-life balance, would you feel well prepared to approach that conversation?

**Closing**

1. Have there been major barriers you have or are currently overcoming as you progress in your career?
   a. How did you overcome them?
   b. Do you feel/did you feel supported by your manager in overcoming these barriers or challenges?

2. If you could share some advice to a woman who was about to enter the workforce regarding communication with a manager, what would you say?
Appendix E

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: January 15, 2019

To: Leah Omilion-Hodges, Principal Investigator  
   Christine Packard, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 18-12-39

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Wonder Women in a Superman World: Exploring the Communicative Strategies Women Utilize in Navigating the Leader-Member Exchange Relationship” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., you must request a post-approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 14, 2020