

Sponsorship and Career Progression in the Consulting Industry

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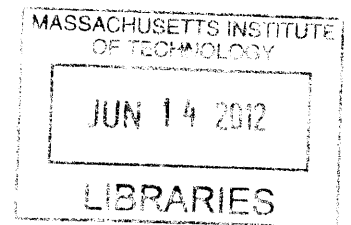
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ABSTRACT

For people of equal aptitude and accomplishment, differences in career progression to the senior ranks of a professional services firm are often attributed to the presence or absence of sponsorship from senior executives. Senior advocates play a critical role in career advancement by identifying opportunities and by giving protégés the chance to compete for those opportunities. My hypothesis is that people who desire advancement need a clear sponsor within an organization in order to plan a path forward and to bring visibility to their past accomplishments and their future potential.

The hypothesis was evaluated in the consulting industry. The basis for the research was a combination of field study interviews and an experimental survey. The field study involved interviewing Senior Executives in the consulting industry who have chosen to make a long-term career in the industry and those who have moved onto other industries. Vignettes of the interviewee's description of their career progression were developed and survey tested with mid-career executives. The survey participants rated the competency, level of sponsorship, and promotion readiness of the candidate. Varying the candidate's gender across the surveys also tested the effect of gender on promotion rating.

From the survey results, competency was the most significant predictor of promotion with female gender having a negative, but smaller, yet still statistically significant effect. Sponsorship did not have a statistically significant effect on promotion within the survey study. However, sponsorship was identified in addition to competence and opportunity as a key factor to interviewee's success. This difference in sponsorship indicates discontinuity between described practice and observed interpretation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

History of Consulting

Management Consulting began to coalesce in the first half of the twentieth century as a business enterprise in and of itself, distinct from and yet influenced by other professional services such as accounting, legal advocacy, and financial management. After the financial crisis of the 1920's, the implementation of the Glass-Steagall Banking Act and the establishment of Securities and Exchange Commission in 1933 limited the direct involvement of financial and investment services firms to consultative and reorganization services. As a result, financial firms when preparing to sell equity or debt of a company were required to perform "due diligence" to ensure the company was of sound financial management. This opened the door for outside experts or consultants to assist in providing "due diligence" services as well as creating a niche for consultants to provide external advice to companies on their organization and strategy. Similarly, during this time, accounting professional services were pushed to provide independent audits of companies' financial book keeping and be an advocate of transparency for investors. Law firms were also limited in their ability to engage directly on advice regarding the planning and execution of business in order to limit inherent conflicts of interests with their clients (McKenna 2006, 8); (Kiechel 2010, 2).

This increasing demand for advice and investigational services opened the door to young founders of consulting firms like George Armstrong, James McKinsey, and Edwin Booz. They were later followed by Bruce Henderson, the founder of the Boston Consulting Group, as well as independent practices arising within accounting firms like Arthur Andersen, Price Waterhouse, Deloitte and Touche (McKenna 2006, 26-34). Interestingly, as the demand for services grew and the major players in management consulting services emerged, the field began to organize itself much like the field of law. Each firm became a partnership with the most senior leaders having equity stake in the business and thus would benefit directly from yearly profits. This structure depended on the grooming of new talent in order to perform the research supporting the investigative

and advice services for which companies were willing to pay a premium in order to access specialized and industry informed knowledge (Kiechel 2010, 276).

Unlike law and accounting, however, management consulting resisted formalizing the profession with specific degrees and certificates (McKenna 2006, 196-197). Initially, this may have slowed the development of a reputable recognition of the field as anyone could pronounce himself or herself a management consultant. But, over time, this model has served the industry well and has made it extremely difficult for new firms to take hold. The oldest firms developed long-lasting relationships with clients, such that as the clients succeeded in the marketplace, the reputation of the management consulting firms grew. Soon competitor companies wanted advice from the same people, thus facilitating knowledge disbursement across industries. The management consulting company's brand, depth of knowledge, and industry network evolved such that no one individual represented the firm, nor could any one individual from the firm successfully recreate the practice. Yet, there have been cases when entire practices have splintered and been "re-founded", such as when Bill Bain took his quartile of the Boston Consulting Group with him when he started his new firm, Bain Consulting, in the 1970's (Keichel 2010, 79). Similarly, Accenture split off from Arthur Andersen in the 1990's. (McMurray, 2005, 196)

As of the 2000's there has been a consolidation of firms in the industry. Many historic firm names have been left behind such as A.T. Kearny which was absorbed by EDS in 2006, the consulting practice of Pricewaterhouse-Coopers which was purchased by IBM in 2002. Some of the consolidation resulted from post-Enron regulation forcing accounting firms to be independent of consulting services. Some consolidation is also the result of turmoil in the global financial marketplace. As of 2012, there are only a few leading general practice firms in the industry.

With the power of consulting being in the hands of so few firms, it begs the question of how does it all work: What attracts clients, young talent, and seasoned professionals to the industry? From a client perspective, consulting firms offer a focused effort to explore

pressing issues; they bring credibility to the recommendations they provide, and create a sense of urgency behind planning and execution of the plans they provide. Outside of the contribution of knowledge from the consulting firms, this ability to act as a catalyst and build momentum for change can be very powerful when driven by an organization's own change agent. This seems especially true when the "change agent" was trained within the consulting agency before heading the organization. Specific examples include prior McKinsey consultant and then IBM CEO, Louis Gerstner, and prior Bain Consulting executive John Donahoe who now heads eBay.

From the perspective of undergraduates entering the workforce and business school graduates seeking entry to management, the exclusivity of consulting is the industry's first attraction. The industry has an aura of elitism and a paved path to success. This seems to apply particularly to those graduates those entering business who are entrepreneurial in spirit but do not have the means or desire to take on individual risk. As put by Lemann in his popular "*Kids in the Conference Room*" New Yorker expose:

"For someone who is intensely ambitious but hasn't yet turned an ambition to do any one particular thing, a consulting job makes an ideal placeholder. It encapsulates that odd upper-meritocratic combination of love of completion, herd mentality, and aversion to risk." (Lemann 1999, 211)

Consulting provides a training ground for aspiring managers. They quickly become aware of the norms of professionalism and how culture varies vastly from one organization to the next. The work leads to the development of managerial problem solving abilities and the fostering of communication skills with an awareness of operational similarity across companies and industries. Is shipping just shipping? Or is treasury planning just treasury planning? In many cases the answer is yes; but the differences can be the secret to competitive advantage. The underlying lesson for the consultant is that all advantage is temporary and imitable given time.

For the rare professional who makes a career of consulting, the field is multi-faceted. One reason seasoned executives in consulting firms espouse is that the young talent

entering the firm each year brings a renewed intensity, curiosity, and vigor to the organization. This seems very similar to what keeps college professors young at heart by working with students. Other reasons for a consulting career include the variety of work, the ability to rapidly explore new ideas, and the significant, albeit little mentioned, financial security.

As alluded to previously, consulting does not have certification requirements or rest on specific degrees. Rather it follows an apprenticeship model of professional development. Most entering the profession are likely to eventually venture out and start a business, join the management team of previous client, or as the subject of this thesis, to climb the “up or out” ladder to partner and firm leader. One in ten do so in some firms, in others the ratio is one in thirty (Maister 2004). Matthew Stewart in *The Management Myth*, notes:

“In a sense I had joined a fraternity that handed down secrets from generation to generation” (Stewart 2009, 43)

It becomes clear early in one’s consulting career the apprenticeship can lead to different careers. If one stays in the firm, the successful are handsomely rewarded and develop a network of upper-level managers and peers to assist them in moving from project to project, opportunity to opportunity.

This model of apprenticeship and the evolution of generational knowledge is what clients are seeking to employ and newcomers to the industry seek to learn. However this coveted insular yet exclusive knowledge and elitism rests on analogous thinking. As McKenna sums it up in *The World’s Newest Profession*:

“In late 1970’s, however, consultants’ homogeneity would become a liability both because its rigidity prevented the leading firms from diversifying their largely white, male workforce and because it encouraged the elite consultancies to look inward in times of trouble, not outward. Students of strategic management are taught that the best way to identify a core competence – the quality that distinguishes you from your competitors and defines your competitive advantage – is to look for an organization’s greatest weakness over its long history. Why else would an organization tolerate this obvious flaw except that it provides tremendous

benefit? In 1960, just like today, there was no question of the core competence of the leading consulting firms, because of their distinctive corporate culture was simultaneously their greatest asset and their most glaring Achilles heel.” (McKenna 2006, 164)

In light of this strong and rigid culture, there are spots of diversity and firms claim they are striving to be “inclusive,” a place of opportunity across race, gender, and sexual orientation. The popular press has highlighted recent studies regarding the role of sponsorship in career progression. A recent article, for example, reported that the top recommendation coming out of *The Wall Street Journal's* Women in the Economy Conference was to:

“Develop more industrywide and company-specific programs for both mentorship and sponsorship. Tie sponsorship goals to pay or career advancement. Such programs should include succession planning and "co-mentoring," which allows advice to flow from junior to senior levels. Involve men and women” (Wall Street Journal, April 10, 2011).

Despite the many thoughtful opinions in all organizations, about how to increase the numbers and visibility of women in leadership positions in all organizations, serious questions remain: Where are all the women in the industry? Why hasn't the number of women CEO's and board members increased over the past two decades? This question is relevant to consulting as well. At least two leading firms, McKinsey and the Boston Consulting Group, have published points of view on women and leadership indicating their own intentions to boost the number of women in leadership positions in the firm (Barsh and Lee, 2011) (Silverstien and Sayer, 2009).

The Mystery of Sponsorship

Mentorship is defined by a relationship of a trusted advisor to a mentee. This is a key to individual success and a key to a leader's ability to properly prepare the next generation. In the past decade a more nuanced view of mentorship or "active sponsorship" has developed. This view is particularly important when considering a woman's career. "Sponsorship" as the new view is nicely described by Time Warner's Quiroz as:

"someone being planful about what you do, who you're exposed to, what development programs you go to, who you have lunch with, whether you're getting feedback or being assigned a coach." (Barsh and Lee, 2011, 10-11)

Similarly, Carter and Silva (2010) differentiate mentorship and sponsorship:

"All mentoring is not created equal, we discovered. There is a special kind of relationship--called sponsorship--in which the mentor goes beyond giving feedback and advice and uses his or her influence with senior executives to advocate for the mentee. Our interviews and surveys alike suggest that high-potential women are overmentored and undersponsored relative to their male peers--and that they are not advancing in their organizations. Furthermore, without sponsorship, women not only are less likely than men to be appointed to top roles but may also be more reluctant to go for them."

Sponsorship not only provides direction and feedback to protégées' but also offers active support in seeking and aligning opportunities for protégés. This is something that has been seen to occur "naturally" for many men. Many claim, it is easy for a man to see his younger self in another man and provide advice to his protégé as well as advocate for his protégé. But, sponsorship may be more difficult to create when the potential protégé is on the surface quite different from the sponsor. The ease of assuming "*when I was in your shoes*" doesn't fit. However, if sponsorship can be built, both firms and individuals may benefit.

To further explore the benefit of a sponsor relationship for career progression, I created the following hypothesis and tested it through an interview study and an experimental study. The remainder of this thesis presents the results of my research.

Hypothesis

For people of equal aptitude and accomplishment, differences in career progression to the senior ranks of a professional services firm are best explained by the presence or absence of sponsorship from senior executives. Senior advocates play a critical role in career advancement by identifying opportunities and by giving protégés the chance to compete for those opportunities. My hypothesis is that people who desire advancement need a clear sponsor within an organization in order to plan a path forward and to bring visibility to their past accomplishments and their future potential.

Study Design

In order to test the hypothesis, I conducted two studies: 1) a field interview study with current and prior senior executives both male and female from an individual consulting firm, and 2) an experimental study in which participants read profiles of employees to then assess the employee's competency, to attribute sponsorship, and to consider the employee for promotion. The first study asked executives describe their career progression and influence of sponsorship as they rose through the ranks of their consulting firm. Selected accounts of progression and development from the first study were then used as the foundation for generating career vignettes for testing in the second study.

Chapter 2: Study 1 – Field research with consulting executives

Method

Participants

Interviewees were selected from an individual consulting firm in order to control for the influences of culture and organization design on perceptions of competency and sponsorship. The firm has over 50,000 consulting employees and offers an array of services from strategy to management consulting. Interviews were conducted with current and prior senior executives. Interviewees were selected through two senior executives, one serving the firm's leadership council and the other a leader within the communications and high tech industry group, as well as my personal knowledge of current and former executives. There were a total of seven participants, with a mix of employment status: four were currently employed and three were previously employed; and a mix of genders: four women and three men. The individual's experience ranged from 15 to 30 years. They also had a various functional and industry concentrations: organizational strategy, technical strategy, financial services, retail, defense, communications and high tech. Table 2-1 summarizes key characteristics of the interview panel.

Table 2-1: Interviewee panel characteristics.

	Employed		Previously Employed		Practice Area	Years in Consulting
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
1	X				Financial Services	30+
2	X				Technology	25+
3		X			Organizational Strategy	20+
4		X			Retail	15+
5			X		Defense	20+
6				X	Technology	25+
7				X	Operational Finance	15+

Procedure

Interviews were conducted in a conversational question-and-answer format with a script of questions. The questions were open-ended allowing respondents flexibility in how they chose to answer each question. The conversations were initiated by requesting the interviewee to reflect upon the three to four factors that they believed contributed to their progression and success in the firm. Subsequently, the interviewee ranked the factors in order of relative effectiveness and importance. This opening dialogue was specifically designed to not reveal the hypothesis of the effect of sponsorship in career progression, but rather allow the interviewee to explain his or her own perception of “critical factors”. This also opened the possibility of revealing other important influences.

The remainder of the interview focused on sponsorship and the interviewee’s personal account. Once factors were described, the interviewee was then asked to provide an example of a particular person who influenced their progression in the firm. This allowed the interviewee to provide an overview of his or her own history and give specific accounts of sponsorship. In reflecting upon this, what did the interviewee believe led this person to invest in him or her? Next, the interviewee was asked to consider how gender influenced the alignment of this sponsor to the participant. Finally, from his or her experience in sponsoring others, what did he or she gain from the relationship and

experience. This section of the interview provided insight and material for the development of Study 2. The interview schedule appears in Appendix 2-1.

Results

Cataloging the factors and comparing relative ranking among the participants revealed that each participant identified both 'competence' and 'sponsorship'. 'Opportunity' was recognized by 6 of the 7 participants. Additional factors acknowledged by one or two of the participants included 'education', 'customer relationships', 'policy', and 'peer network'. The additional factors were rated fourth among the factors with the exception of one interviewee who rated customer relationships second.

Table 2: Factors identified by interviewees.

	Demographics				Factors				
	Employed		Previously Employed		Competence	Sponsorship	Opportunity	Other	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Rank	Rank	Rank		Rank
1	X				2	3	1	Policy	4
2	X				1	2	3	Education	4
3		X			1	2	3	Peer Network	4
4		X			1	2	3	N/A	3
5			X		1	3	N/A	Customer Relationship	2
6				X	1	2	3	N/A	3
7				X	1	3	2	Education	4
Average					1.1	2.4	2.5		3.4
Standard Deviation					0.4	0.5	0.8		0.8

Consistent with the popular hypothesis that aptitude and accomplishment are the foundations for career progression, on average, interviewees identified 'competence' as the most important factor in their relative success. 'Sponsorship' and 'opportunity,' on average, were ranked second in contributing factors. Women interviewees ranked sponsorship second, while male interviewees ranked sponsorship third and opportunity second. Seemingly, women related access to opportunity as resulting from sponsorship, while men viewed the opportunities as accessible and sponsorship as the means to

recognition for success. For example, one of the male interviewees rating opportunity over sponsorship described his progression as:

“Over time [I made] more of [my] own luck with focus and attention; [I] knew someone was pulling for me and someone was taking responsibility for enabling me to be the best I can be.”

In turn, a female interviewee described the key to opportunity came from understanding the need for ‘sponsorship’ and aligning herself appropriately:

“I needed visibility to executives and needed to play the game, she [my sponsor] compared me to other guys with bigger roles and how they got those roles. I needed to figure out who were the executives who matter and to work with them.”

This interviewee went on to describe her next opportunity and successful execution of her role with visibility to key executives as the means to her promotion to partner that year.

Another interviewee discussed the limitations of mentorship and share experience:

“[in reference to] female vs. male mentors, I believe you can gather something from everybody. I can’t tell a women what it’s like to be a mother. You need to have a collection of mentors... Mentors give you perspectives, ideas, but in the end you have to figure it out for yourself.”

He went onto discuss his own sponsor who was a prominent female senior executive in the firm grooming him to take her place as she prepared for retirement. He described her influence:

“[She] helped me a lot. She knew I was her ticket to retirement. She needed a replacement, but she was demanding. [When I started my role] the business wasn’t going well, you usually don’t bring in change when things are going great. Some people were pissed, she encouraged me to deal with it head on. I have always been able to be focused and keep my eye on the end game. I was presenting at the ELT (executive leadership team) and people were getting pissed off, after the meeting she gave me background on where different people were coming from, the back story. She helped me get to the right stuff and [talked with me about] how to do things differently... [She] helped pave my way, saying to people “give him a chance; he has our best interest at heart” she was a subtle advocate.”

Throughout this conversation, he was confident in his abilities, his vision, and that he had the right intentions and just needed help paving the way for change.

In contrast a younger female executive described her experience in navigating her promotion to partner and a subsequent downturn in business. She identified sponsorship as a key to her promotion, but then once promoted felt the relationships and attention were withdrawn:

“I had more coaching than I ever had leading up to my promotion, and then the coaching went away. It was like I was in the club and now should know how to do everything. I would get pinged to do things I hadn’t done before. I went from delivering projects to having a sales quota, you were just supposed to do it, sink or swim. The month after I made partner, the bottom dropped out of the economy and I had no one to shadow. I wrapped up my project and had a [x] million dollar quota to sell what? I wasn’t chargeable on my account, I was doing business development work and the firm was reorganizing and partners were getting laid off left and right. I felt I was deadweight on the account and knew I’d be asked to leave and there were no local roles. I thought, Can I learn how to sell? How can I do that on a [new] account where I didn’t know anyone and had no relationships? ...[my sponsor] wasn’t helping because he had his own opportunities, ...[my direct boss] was going through his own stuff, the deal which got me promoted, wasn’t going well and he would just beat people up. It became less about propping me up and became more about what have you done for me lately.”

This account appears to be almost a mirrored reflection of sponsorship as described by Ibarra and Carter and the push to get women promoted as the singular goal.

“Although our data show that formal programs can be quite effective in getting women promoted, a potential pitfall is their fixed duration. Sponsors typically declare victory and move on after their high potentials advance--just when they need help to successfully take charge in their new roles. We know of no programs designed to shore up participants past promotion and through the "first 100 days" in the new position. With that extra bit of attention, sponsors could help deliver not just promotions but strong transitions.” (Ibarra and Carter 2010).

In further discussions of sponsorship and networks, another 'alumni' of the firm thought back on his experiences:

“Reflecting after leaving the firm, I found I had a lot of associations but few friends, the network really isn't your life. [The CEO of my group] has said the onus is on you, He really looked at giving advice and helping as fulfilling an obligation. And I understand that, as I got more senior I became tired of dealing with the young people and their perceived problems.”

Finally, one of the interviewees aptly summarizes the inter-relationship between competence and sponsorship:

“Early on the key factors were establishing credibility and a skill set, making sure you can deliver. Then 8-9 years in it becomes more about who you know and the cadre of people who support you. When the firm decides you are ready, they clean up your record and it's all about sponsoring you and who has the clout to pull you up. Your track record then turns to delivery and sales, and who trusts you to make them look good.”

All in all, each executive discussed sponsorship from their own experience and found that it helped them personally during promotion periods as well as periods of change within the firm. Likewise, lack of sponsorship during periods of unrest in the firm led to questioning one's own abilities and disengagement from the work. Sponsorship is an underlying part of the consulting world providing the foundation for the apprenticeship model of career development and subsequent success. There was recognition from both male and female executives regarding the role of sponsorship, however women viewed sponsorship as opening doors and pulling them through, whereas the men saw it more as paving the way or smoothing perceptions.

This recognition of sponsorship and the interplay of how competence was communicated led me to develop the second study, which is the subject of Chapter 3. In the next study, a selection of these interviews is transformed into succinct vignettes for survey participants to review and rate perceived competency, level of sponsorship, and promotion readiness.

Chapter 3: Study 2 – Experimental assessment of competence, sponsorship, and promotion

In order to further test the hypothesis that given equal competence, sponsorship explains differences in career progression for both men and women, I developed an experimental approach to survey for recognition of ‘competence’, ‘sponsorship’ and ‘promotion assessment’. From the personal accounts collected in Study 1, I wrote vignettes of employee profiles describing the career progression of interviewees. The pool of 7 profiles was narrowed to 4 select candidates in order to provide a variety of gender and employment status, while minimizing variation. I wrote two versions of each profile, the only difference being the gendered name of the employee. Table 3-1 shows the selected candidates, demographic profile, and fictional name of portrayed genders.

Table 3-1: Interview foundation for vignette development.

	Employed		Previously Employed		Years in Consulting	Study 2 Vignette Fictional Name
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
						Female / Male
A	X				30+	Diane / David
B		X			20+	Michelle / Michael
C			X		20+	Patricia / Peter
D				X	25+	Sarah / Sam

Method

Participants

The data for were collected in two sessions. The first session was conducted at a private university in New England with students in a master’s of business administration for professionals (EMBA) program as an optional after-class exercise. There were a total of 66 students, 47 male, 17 female, and two who declined to indicate gender. The students participating in the first session had substantial work and managerial experience: on average, 17 years work experience with a standard deviation of 6 years. The second session was conducted at a professional training program taught by faculty from the same private university. There were 22 participants in the second session, 16

male and 6 female, also with substantial work experience that was, on average, 16 years with a standard deviation of 6 years.

These groups were specifically targeted for their managerial experience. All have been required to provide assessments to employees and evaluate promotion readiness in the course of their experience. While these groups are limited in numbers, which in turn, limits the number of variations and iterations possible with a larger student population, the professional experience provides a level of legitimacy and representation of management thinking. This approach was also employed by Castilla and Benard (2010).

Procedure

The same proctor requested volunteers from the groups and oversaw both sessions. The proctor gave identical instructions to the volunteers saying that the survey was optional and was in support of a master's thesis project at the MIT Sloan School of Management. Participants were asked to take 10 minutes to complete the assessment survey. Each participated received one double-sided page that included directions for completing the survey and were told that the "vignettes provided were provided by executives in the consulting industry". The participants were then asked to judge the employee's competence and promotion readiness. Participants were also asked to complete several demographic questions specifying their gender, years of professional experience, and the industry in which they worked. The instrument appears in Appendix 3-1, 3-2, 3-3 and 3-4.

Employment Status and Gender Manipulation

Each survey included two vignettes for participants to read and score. Vignettes were selected on the basis of employment status and gender. Although current employment status was not reflected in the actual vignette, my assumption was that the currently employed and the previously employed would be equal in competence as each had been promoted to the partner level during his or her tenure with the firm. The vignettes were cast as a recounting of the education, achievement, sponsorship, and career progression.

Additionally, I wanted to test the effect of gender on ratings and gauge the relative difference in assessment of competence, sponsorship and promotion. The depicted employees paired for a survey were either male or female my intention was to remove gender comparison from the survey participant’s consideration when assessing. In order to test the relative effect of depicted gender and perceived gender, a variation of the vignette was created using the employee’s actual gender in one survey and the opposite gender in another survey. The combination of employment status and gender test criteria led to development of four versions of survey. Each survey included a currently employed male or female and a previously employed male or female. Table 4 depicts the candidates selected per survey with employment status, gender, and selected gendered fictional name.

Table 3-2: Survey design for employment status and gender manipulation.

Survey	Candidate	Employed	Actual Gender	Depicted Gender	Fictional Name
1	A	Yes	Male	Male	David
	B	No	Male	Male	Peter
2	A	Yes	Male	Female	Diane
	B	No	Male	Female	Patricia
3	C	Yes	Female	Male	Michael
	D	No	Female	Male	Sam
4	C	Yes	Female	Female	Michelle
	D	No	Female	Female	Sarah

The distribution of the surveys to the participants was random but ensured equal disbursement of survey variations. There were no experimental controls for male and female participants receiving gendered vignettes.

Dependent Variables

To assess the hypothesis, participants were asked to score three questions on a 7-point Likert scale for each vignette. The first question was “How competent was <employee>?” with the scale ranging from “1-Not at all competent” to “4-Competent” to “7-Extremely Competent.” This was followed by the question, “How much of

<employee's> success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship?" with the scale ranging from "1-Completely individual performance" to "4-Equal individual performance and sponsorship" to "7-Completely Active Sponsorship." Finally, the third question: *"Would you promote <employee>?"* with the scale ranging from *"1-Would Not Promote", to "4-Consider Promotion", to "7-Definitely Promote"*. The relative scoring and variations of vignettes across the surveys allowed for analysis on the effect of competence and sponsorship on promotion as well as the comparison of scoring based on actual and depicted gender.

Results

I began the analysis of the first survey responses with standard statistical tools. I analyzed the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores for the male and female versions of each of the vignettes. Initial comparison showed apparent differences between the male and female scores for competency, sponsorship, and promotion. In order to determine if the differences were statistically significant, I performed t-tests between the male and female scores. The t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in scores of competency and promotion for vignette B, and for scores of promotion for vignettes D.

To further test this observed difference, the survey was delivered to the second set of participants. Upon integration of the additional results, the difference in competency for vignette B and promotion for vignette D were dampened. However, the difference in promotion for vignette B persisted. The male version received a significantly higher score ($\mu = 5.8$) over the female version ($\mu = 4.5$). Interestingly, the source for the vignette was a female executive with tenure of over twenty years.

Analysis of the full set of results showed that there were positive differences (but not significant) in the mean competency scores, females over males for vignettes A, C, and D. The male version of vignette B was more highly rated than the female version, but the difference was not significant as indicated by the t-test. Each vignette regardless of

gender achieved the maximum score of 7 at least once. The minimum scores were lower for the female version in vignettes C and D, the same for vignette B, and higher for vignette A. The following figure depicts the side-by-side mean score between male and female versions. The subsequent table shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score and t-test results for each vignette.

Figure 3-1: Competency ratings for male and female depictions of candidates.

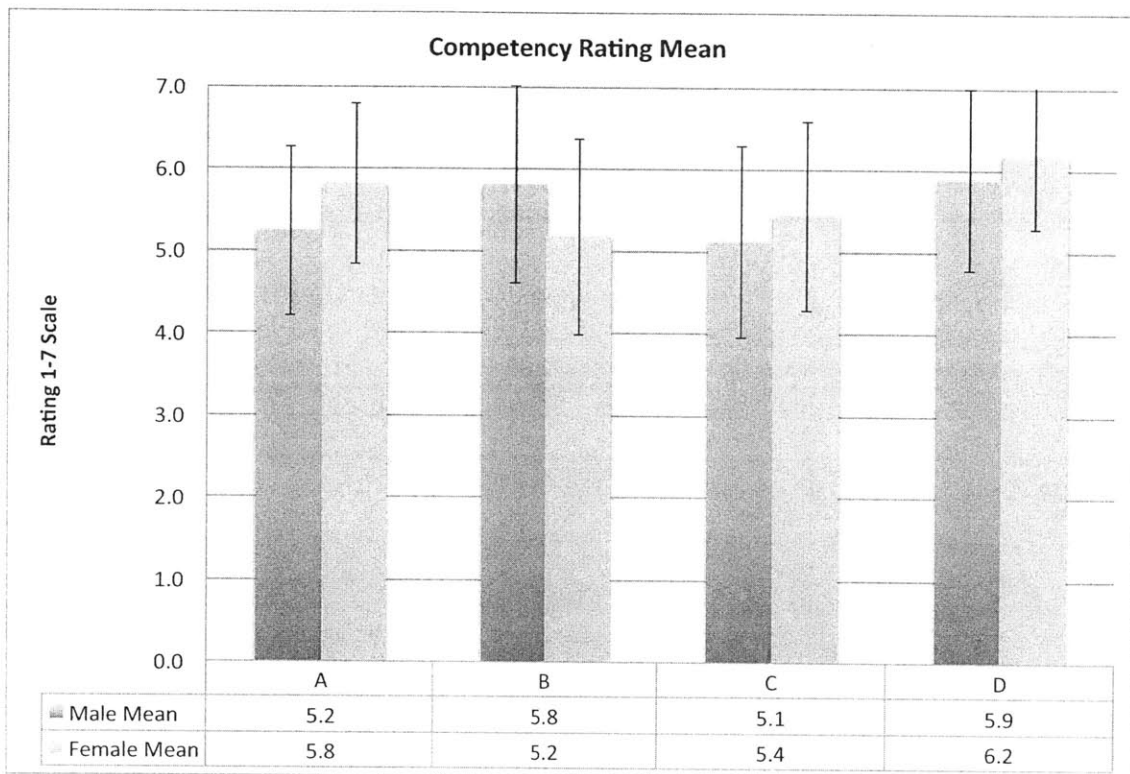


Table 3-3: Competency rating male to female comparison for candidates.

Competency	Candidate							
	A		B		C		D	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mean	5.2	5.8	5.8	5.2	5.1	5.4	5.9	6.2
Standard Deviation	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	0.9
Max	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0
Min	3.0	4.0	2.0	2.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
t-value	-1.65		1.96		0.79		-1.06	
df	31.00		52.32		30.92		47.95	
p-value	0.11		0.06		0.43		0.30	
95% Confidence Interval	-1.29 0.14		-0.01 1.29		-0.50 1.14		-0.84 0.26	

When evaluating sponsorship there were negative but not significant differences in the mean scores. Females rated below males for vignettes A, C, and D. However, the female version of vignette B was more highly rated than the male version, again the difference was not significant as showed by the t-test. The minimum and maximum scores were diverse, ranging from 5 to 7 for the maximum and 1 to 3 for the minimum. The following figure depicts the side-by-side mean score between male and female versions. The subsequent table shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score and t-test results for each vignette.

Figure 3-2: Sponsorship rating for male and female depictions of candidates.

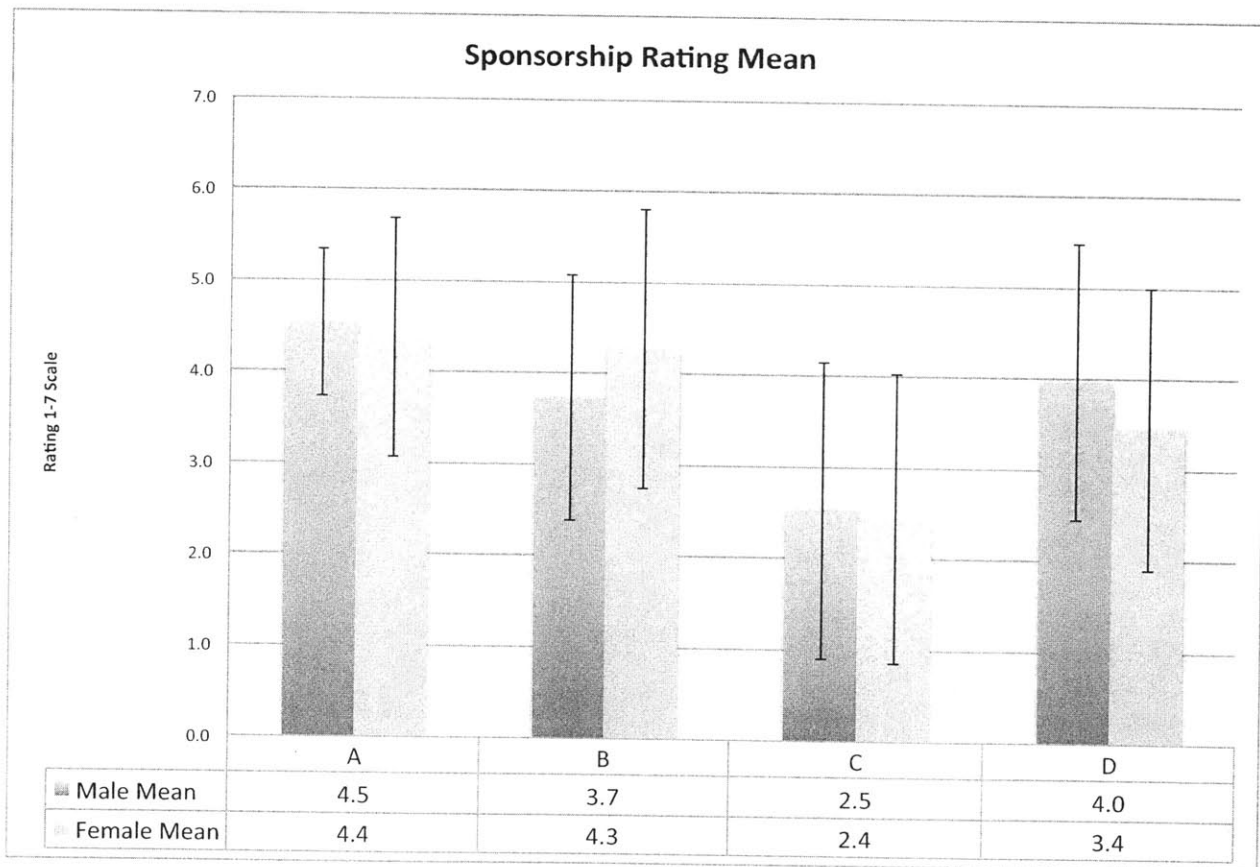


Table 3-4: Sponsorship rating male to female comparison for candidates.

Sponsorship	Candidate							
	A		B		C		D	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mean	4.5	4.4	3.7	4.3	2.5	2.4	4.0	3.4
Standard Deviation	0.8	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5
Max	6.0	7.0	6.0	7.0	6.0	5.0	7.0	6.0
Min	3.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.0
t-value	0.41		-1.41		-0.16		1.24	
df	24.54		52.98		30.95		52.62	
p-value	0.69		0.17		0.87		0.22	
95% Confidence Interval	-0.63 0.94		-1.32 0.23		-1.23 1.05		-0.31 1.34	

The following figure depicts the side-by-side mean promotion score between male and female versions. The subsequent table shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score and t-test results for each vignette.

Figure 3-3: Promotion rating for male and female depictions of candidates.

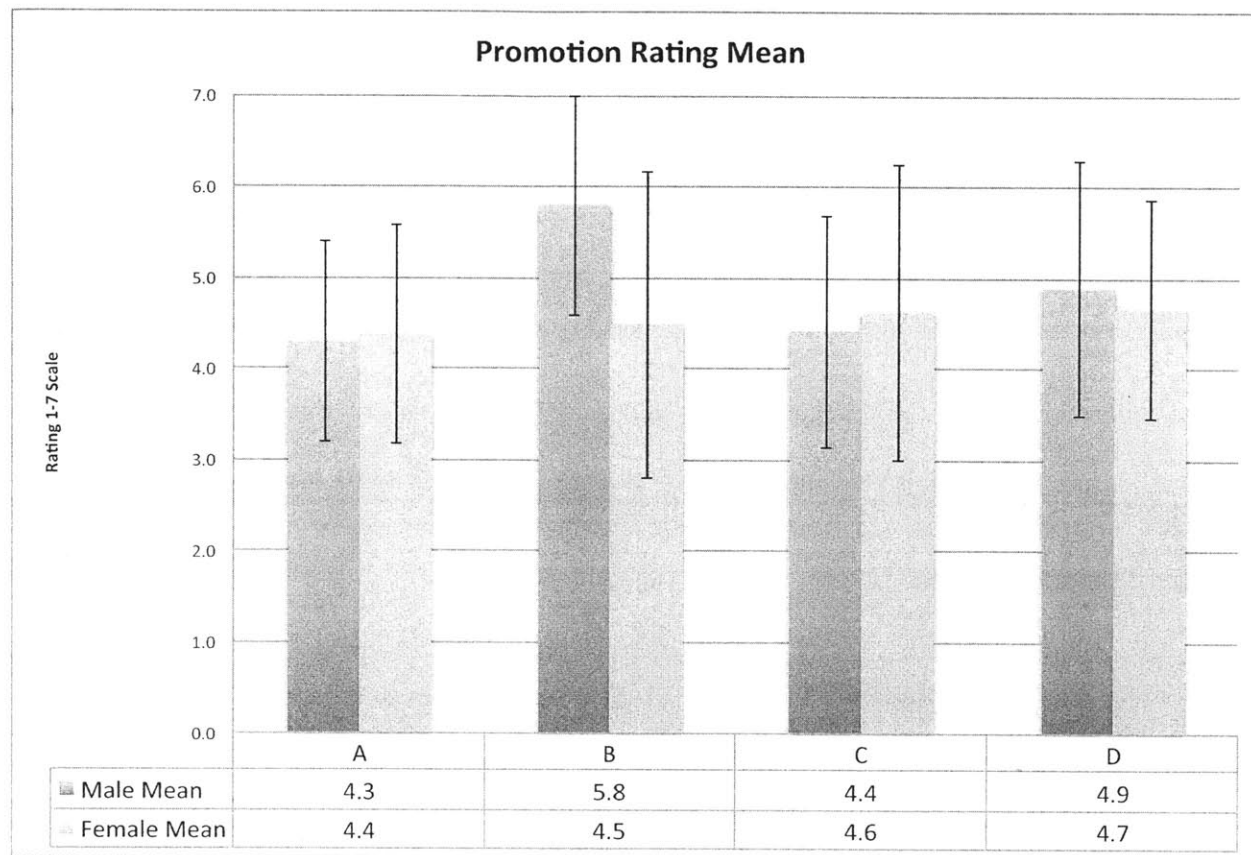


Table 3-5: Promotion rating male to female comparison.

	Candidate							
	A		B		C		D	
Promotion	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mean	4.3	4.4	5.8	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.9	4.7
Standard Deviation	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.7	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2
Max	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0
Min	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.0	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.0
t-value	-0.20		3.34		0.42		0.65	
df	30.33		50.58		28.47		49.73	
p-value	0.84		0.002*		0.68		0.52	
95% Confidence Interval	-0.90 0.74		0.52 2.09		-0.83 1.26		-0.48 0.94	

Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Finally, the promotion rating was fairly close for vignettes A, C, and D with differences in the means from 0.1 to 0.2. However, as previously mentioned the mean promotion rating for vignette B was 1.3 points higher for the male version and was shown to be significant using the t-test. Each vignette scored a maximum score of 7 in at least one response, and only female versions of A and B received the lowest score of one in at least one of the responses. All in all, the female in vignette B was rated less competent, more sponsored and less ready for promotion than the male version.

The survey results are further analyzed using correlation and regression analysis. Table 3-6 lists the variables employed for the analysis and their definitions.

Table 3-6: Variable name and definition for correlation and regression analysis.

	Variable	Definition
1	Competency	Likert rating provided by survey respondents for a vignette character's Competency.
2	Sponsorship	Likert rating provided by survey respondents for a vignette character's degree of Sponsorship.
3	Promotion	Likert rating provided by survey respondents for a vignette character's Promotion readiness.
4	Depicted as Female	If the character in the vignette is depicted as female.
5	Female Source	If the character in the vignette is based on the interview of a female executive.

The next layer of analysis I employed was to evaluate the correlation among the character's gender (variable: Depicted as Female), the gender of executive used to create the vignette (variable: Female Source), and the scores for competency, sponsorship, and promotion. The correlations depicted in Table 3-7 indicate that the strongest correlation is between competency and promotion, meaning the higher the competency score, the higher the promotion score. Interestingly, if the character was depicted as female, there was little correlation with the competency score and a slight negative correlation with the promotion score. If the source of the vignette was a female, there was a slight positive effect on both competency and promotion, leading me to think there may be either attribution or backlash effects when the character is depicted as female as opposed to be sourced from a female. Lastly, contradicting my hypothesis, sponsorship was shown to have a slight negative correlation with the score for promotion.

Table 3-7: Correlations among gender of the depicted character, gender of the vignette source, and scores for competency, sponsorship, and promotion.

Correlation	Depicted as Female	Female Source	Competency	Sponsorship	Promotion
Depicted as Female	1.000	0.041	0.033	-0.007	-0.143
Female Source	0.041	1.000	0.154	0.119	0.174
Competency	0.033	0.154	1.000	-0.126	0.488
Sponsorship	-0.007	0.119	-0.126	1.000	-0.108
Promotion	-0.143	0.174	0.488	-0.108	1.000

With the correlation results in mind I performed regression analysis to further explore the relationships between gender, competency, sponsorship and their effects on promotion. Using promotion as the dependent variable I ran a series of regressions using combinations of competency, sponsorship, character gender and source gender as independent predictive variables. Similar to the initial analysis of means and standard deviations, I found results differed slightly between the results of survey 1 and the combination of survey 1 and 2, with the combination of surveys diluting the effect of gender on promotion.

As depicted in Table 3-8, the four regression analyses show the strongest predictor of promotion is competency. In Regressions 1, 2, and 3, the competency variable is statistically significant with a p-value of much less than 0.05. In Regression 2, the variable combination of competency and sponsorship shows no residual effect. The sponsorship variable is not statically significant as the confidence interval crosses 0. Interestingly, the negative coefficient of sponsorship points to a detracting rather than enhancing effect. In Regression 3, the variable combination of competency and if the character was depicted as female is shown to be the best fit to predict promotion. It has the highest residual value, albeit a generally limited fit of $R^2 \sim 0.3$. In Regression 3 competency has significant influence while the lesser yet still statistically significant influence of the character gender has a negative effect. To explore this negative effect, I then used character gender in Regression 4, as the only independent variable to predict promotion, but found that this alone is not a relevant predictor.

Table 3-8: Regression analyses predicting promotion

Regression 1: Promotion as predicted by competency					
	Survey 1				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.000	0.519	1.927	0.056	**
Competency	0.662	0.091	7.243	3.44E-11	***
Multiple R-squared	0.288				
	Survey 1 and 2				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.341	0.471	2.846	0.005	**
Competency	0.605	0.082	7.367	6.74E-12	***
Multiple R-squared	0.238				

Regression 2: Promotion as predicted by competency and sponsorship					
Survey 1					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.065	0.618	1.724	0.087	**
Competency	0.659	0.093	7.086	8.02E-11	***
Sponsorship	-0.014	0.068	-0.198	8.43E-01	
Multiple R-squared	0.288				
Survey 1 and 2					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.543	0.549	2.807	0.006	**
Competency	0.598	0.083	7.208	1.69E-11	***
Sponsorship	-0.043	0.060	-0.716	4.75E-01	
Multiple R-squared	0.240				

Regression 3: Promotion as predicted by competency and if the character is depicted as female					
Survey 1					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.317	0.521	2.528	0.013	*
Competency	0.655	0.089	7.318	2.38E-11	***
Depicted as Female	-0.549	0.207	-2.652	9.00E-03	**
Multiple R-squared	0.324				
Survey 1 and 2					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.534	0.471	3.255	0.001	**
Competency	0.612	0.081	7.545	2.46E-12	***
Depicted as Female	-0.449	0.184	-2.433	1.60E-02	*
Multiple R-squared	0.263				

Regression 4: Promotion as predicted by if the character is depicted as female					
Survey 1					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	4.977	0.173	28.717	<2e-16	***
Depicted as Female	-0.599	0.245	-2.442	1.60E-02	*
Multiple R-squared	0.044				
Survey 1 and 2					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	4.948	0.152	32.664	<2e-16	***
Depicted as Female	-0.403	0.212	-1.904	5.86E-02	
Multiple R-squared	0.020				

Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

To further evaluate the underlying influence of gender, I analyzed the combination of character gender and competency in Regressions 5, 6, and 7 as depicted in table 3-9. In Regression 5, I included variables for competency, if the character was depicted as female and competency multiplied if the character was depicted as female. The only significant variable in this model was competency as represented by a p-value less than 0.05. The additional variables were not significant and did not enhance the R² value over Regression 3. In Regression 6, I included variables for competency, if the character was depicted as female, and if the source for the vignette was a female executive. In this model, competency and if the character was depicted as female are statistically significant with a p-value less than 0.05, however if the source of the vignette was a female executive did not have an effect. Finally in Regression 7, I used all of the independent variables, competency, sponsorship, if the character was depicted as female and if the source of the vignette was a female executive. Again only competency and if the character was depicted as female were statistically significant with p-values less than 0.05. All in all this combination only increased the R² value by 0.005.

Table 3-9: Additional variables for regression analyses to predict promotion.

Regression 5: Promotion as predicted by competency, character depicted as female, and Competency multiplied by character depicted as female.					
	Survey 1 and 2				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.348	0.651	2.070	0.040	*
Competency	0.645	0.114	5.644	0.000	***
Depicted as Female	-0.071	0.932	-0.076	0.940	
Competency * Depicted as Female	-0.067	0.163	-0.414	6.79E-01	
Multiple R-squared	0.264				

Regression 6: Promotion as predicted by competency, character depicted as female, and female vignette source					
	Survey 1 and 2				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.453	0.483	3.005	0.003	**
Competency	0.609	0.081	7.498	0.000	***
Depicted as Female	-0.441	0.185	-2.385	0.018	*
Female Source	0.148	0.191	0.773	4.41E-01	
Multiple R-squared	0.266				

Regression 7: Promotion as predicted by competency, sponsorship, character depicted as female, and female vignette source

	Survey 1 and 2				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
(Intercept)	1.663	0.556	2.992	0.003	**
Competency	0.601	0.082	7.329	0.000	***
Sponsorship	-0.046	0.059	-0.771	0.442	
Depicted as Female	-0.441	0.185	-2.382	0.018	*
Female Source	0.155	0.191	0.809	4.20E-01	
Multiple R-squared	0.268				

Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Chapter 4: Discussion and Further Research

Discussion

The interview and experimental studies had very different outcomes. The interviewees each identified some level of sponsorship as an important influence on their career progression. But when the prevalence of sponsorship was tested in tandem with competency for the effect on promotion, sponsorship appears to have little (and possibly a negative) effect on promotion. This may result from a distortion of sponsorship when the actual relationships are removed from the situation, sponsorship may be interpreted as “politicking”. This may have a negative connotation for my survey respondents. This is demonstrated through the interrelation of scores for each character. By looking back to *Figure 1: Competency rating* and *Figure 2: Sponsorship rating*, when a given gender is rated lower in competency, the character gender is then rated higher in sponsorship and ultimately lower in promotion readiness as seen in *Figure 3: Promotion rating*.

This is in sharp contrast to the observations and reflections collected from the interviews with consulting executives. Each executive identified sponsorship as a key factor in his or her career progression and promotion. Competency was the foundation for sponsorship, but they described ultimately sponsorship as the method of ‘paving the way’ for male interviewees or ‘unlocking the door’ for female interviewees. This dichotomy between sponsorship benefit recognized in practice, but disparagement in attitude as represented by the survey may be the underlying core between the path seen by men and the door perceived by women.

For three out of the four cases (A, C, and D), there was no statistical significance between the rating for male and female candidates. However, looking at the average ratings for competence as depicted in Chapter 3’s figure 3-1. Each of these cases the women had a higher mean for competency rating than the male counterpart, but yet had a lower mean rating for promotion than their male counterpart. Indicating that the bar for competence was higher for women than it was for men.

These results appear to be demonstrating a phenomenon described by Biernat and Fegen (2001):

“Stereotypes about competence lead perceivers to have low expectations for women, as evidenced in the setting of lower minimum standards. But because of these low standards, it takes more evidence to confirm a woman’s task competence.”

In my particular experiment, the evidence of competency was slightly higher for women, and yet while this was a strong correlate of promotion, ultimately, the male profile was rated higher.

Overt bias between the depicted genders was only apparent in Vignette B, the story of Michael vs. Michelle. The difference in promotion scores was shown to be statistically significant. The male character, Michael, was rated as more competent, less sponsored, and the most promotable of all the vignettes. Whereas the female version, Michelle, was one of the lowest scored vignettes for promotion. Interestingly, this vignette was sourced from a female consulting executive. The story is about opportunity, growth, and peer-to-peer networking.

In going back to the source interview for the vignette, the sponsor in this case was well regarded in the firm and quite experienced. The interviewee described her sponsor as a “guy just before his retirement, he cared about making people more capable – giving away roles to less experienced people, taking chances.” In writing the vignette, I intentionally did not indicate the gender of the sponsor thinking that would keep readers from being distracted or confused by the inter-gender manager-employee relationships.

To further explore the dichotomy of scores for Michael and Michelle, I convened a focus group of four mid-career executives approximately 3 weeks after the final survey. Two members of the group were given the Michael version of the vignette and two were given Michelle. Upon completion of the survey, I asked the group if they noted the gender of the sponsor depicted in the vignette. The members of the group assumed the sponsor was male. In light of this we further discussed the impressions they had of

Michael vs. Michelle. Michael was viewed as “a competent individual performer and someone who was successfully managing-up”. The perspective on Michelle was that “she got lucky because she glued herself to her boss and used his loyalties to advance her agenda”. When I unveiled the test aspect of the survey and asked the group to guess the underlying gender of the vignette, the vote was unanimously male. The reasons ranged from “it just didn’t seem like a feminine profile, it seemed masculine,” to “men typically get more help than women,” to “I thought he was male because he wasn’t detail oriented.”

This could also be evidence of attribution bias where the positive qualities of person-oriented skills such as leadership and networking described are viewed as determinately male traits and the weaknesses for detail and task orientation are typically viewed as a female trait. This is described in Skenzy (2003), *“The Think-Manager-Think-Male Stereotype.”* Skenzy shows that leadership is defined by a combination of characteristically male person-oriented qualities and characteristically female task-oriented skills. However when a leader is male, he is evaluated and valued on person-oriented qualities. Female leaders demonstrating these qualities are undervalued.

As discussed in the introduction, many recent publications have encouraged sponsorship in order to overcome these underlying social biases. But, in light of the contradictory results from personal accounts and assessment by unrelated parties, sponsorship may be a positive influence within a small leadership team where each member knows the other and places confidence in the known quality of assessment from his or her peers. However, when the assessments are made in larger groups where the leadership team is more distributed and interacts less frequently, sponsorship may smack of advocating in lieu of competency. This becomes doubly troublesome when the evidence for competency is apparently higher for women than it is for men. Ultimately, the answer for large organization is complicated. Clearly sponsorship programs are not a solution in and of themselves. These programs should be coupled with awareness of bias in an organization, such that leaders question and reflect upon their judgments and try to think beyond attributive language and gender when

evaluating promotion candidates and creating succession plans. One vehicle to accomplish this awareness may be as simple as conducting surveys and analysis similar to this study. An organization could use actual stories of its own executives and retrospectively test for bias. Then perhaps through explicit awareness today's leaders could transcend the stereotypes and continue to grow a diversified next generation of leaders.

Further Research

To further refine and expand upon this study, it would be useful to purposefully highlight person-oriented and task-oriented qualities in each of my vignettes to further test Skenzy's (2003), *"The Think-Manager-Think-Male Stereotype"* and the relationship of sponsorship to overcome these effects. To support the vignette development, I would expand the interviews to include a self-assessment of person-oriented and task-oriented qualities and then asking interviewees to rank these qualities in order of importance to their own accomplishments. I would expand the interview discussion to probe the effect of sponsorship beyond personal experiences and toward reaction to other's sponsorship. My intent would be to explore the differences between practice and social reaction to sponsorship in order to further explain the difference in outcomes between the interviews and survey results. Furthermore in developing the vignettes, I would collect feedback regarding attribution from focus groups prior to a large survey to understand if the person-oriented and task-oriented qualities were recognized and how they affected competency and promotion ratings.

In this study, there were too few women respondents to determine if there was statistical significance of the influence of the participant's gender to the resulting scores per vignette. However, on average women respondents were 'easy graders' in that their average ratings for competency, sponsorship, and promotion across all vignettes were higher than men's ratings. The standard deviation of both groups was similar. If the number of women respondents were increased and if I narrowed the survey to only

include one variation rather than four, I could further explore the difference in ratings between male and female respondents.

Likewise, expanding the age demographic might ascertain if the female stereotype discussed above holds for younger managers. However, This may be less telling of our times since those surveyed here are representative of managers providing performance assessments and making promotion decisions today.

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Appendix: Chapter 2

Appendix 2-1: Schedule of Interviews

The following interviews were conducted to support the initial interview study. Each interview was on average 45 minutes in length.

	Employed		Previously Employed		Practice Area	Years	Vignette	Interview Date
	Male	Female	Male	Female				
1	X				Financial Services	30+	David / Diane	1/6/2012
2	X				Technology	25+	None	2/1/2012
3		X			Organizational Strategy	20+	Michael / Michelle	1/6/2012
4		X			Retail	15+	None	1/23/2012
5			X		Defense	20+	Peter / Patricia	1/26/2012
6				X	Technology	25+	Sam / Sarah	1/30/2012
7				X	Operational Finance	15+	None	1/27/2012

Appendix 2-2: Interview Guide

Purpose of the interview guide is to outline questions in order to elicit career management and progression strategy and reveal the role of sponsorship.

- 1) Looking back over your career what are the 3-4 factors that contributed to your role?
- 2) If you were to consider the relative effect or influence of the factors how would you rank them in order of priority?

Assuming sponsorship is mentioned:

- 3) Could you give me an example where there was a particular person who influenced your progression?
- 4) What do you think it was about your relationship with this person that led to their investment in you?
- 5) How do you think gender influenced your alignment to your sponsor?
- 6) Considering sponsorship in your own career has been crucial, what is your approach in sponsoring others. Can you give a specific example.
- 7) What do you seek / find fulfillment in sponsoring others?

If sponsorship is not mentioned:

- 3b) How do you think your career progression may have changed if you had a sponsor?

Appendix: Chapter 3

The following are reproductions of the surveys used in this study as depicted in table 3-2 which is repeated below for reference.

Survey	Candidate	Employed	Actual Gender	Depicted Gender	Fictional Name
1	A	Yes	Male	Male	David
	B	No	Male	Male	Peter
2	A	Yes	Male	Female	Diane
	B	No	Male	Female	Patricia
3	C	Yes	Female	Male	Michael
	D	No	Female	Male	Sam
4	C	Yes	Female	Female	Michelle
	D	No	Female	Female	Sarah

Appendix 3-1: Survey 1 – David and Peter

The purpose of the following activity is a contribution to a Master's Thesis research project. The vignettes are of executives in the consulting industry, you will be asked to judge their competence, promotion readiness, and hire-ability. Please complete the demographic survey questions, read the two vignettes and complete the assessment questions. Thank you very much for your time.

Your Demographics:

FEMALE MALE YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: _____

WHAT INDUSTRY DO YOU WORK IN: _____

Vignette 1:

David was a Classics major in college and during his interview with the office director of a large consulting firm, he demonstrated analytic capabilities and ability to work well in teams. The director quite liked something about David; he hired David; and as the director of the Finance Practice he aligned David to finance. David had success early on in his projects with his focus on deliverables and deadlines. He worked closely with a senior manager and learned content, craft, skills, and industry acumen. The senior manager was tough and stringent, but really saw something in David and brought him to each new project and client that he had. As David progressed through the executive ranks, he continued to achieve results, meeting and exceeding his sales and delivery targets.

How competent was David? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of David's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote David? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Please turn the page over.

Vignette 2:

Peter has an undergraduate degree in computer science. He learned about consulting as a career option through a friend who had graduated a year before him and helped to line up an interview. Peter was intrigued by the project-based work and really enjoyed working with the people on his team. Peter progressed and helped to grow an account from an initial strategy project to a large Enterprise Resource Planning, ERP, project and an organizational change project. He then moved to a new client, where he again started with strategic initiatives and was responsible for growing opportunities. Peter loved the autonomy of running his own client; his revenue numbers met the minimum required even though he did not receive very much business development support from the firm. Peter won a large competitive bid project at his client, however they have been unable to come to agreement on contract terms and may have to walk away from the win.

How competent was Peter? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Peter's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote Peter? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Appendix 3-2: Survey 2 – Diane and Patricia

The purpose of the following activity is a contribution to a Master's Thesis research project. The vignettes are of executives in the consulting industry, you will be asked to judge their competence, promotion readiness, and hire-ability. Please complete the demographic survey questions, read the two vignettes and complete the assessment questions. Thank you very much for your time.

Your Demographics:

FEMALE MALE YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: _____

WHAT INDUSTRY DO YOU WORK IN: _____

Vignette 1:

Diane was a Classics major in college and during her interview with the office director of a large consulting firm, she demonstrated analytic capabilities and ability to work well in teams. The director quite liked something about Diane; he hired Diane; and as the director of the Finance Practice he aligned Diane to finance. Diane had success early on in her projects with her focus on deliverables and deadlines. She worked closely with a senior manager and learned content, craft, skills, and industry acumen. The senior manager was tough and stringent, but really saw something in Diane and brought her to each new project and client that he had. As Diane progressed through the executive ranks, she continued to achieve results, meeting and exceeding her sales and delivery targets.

How competent was Diane? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Diane's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote Diane? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Please turn the page over.

Vignette 2:

Patricia has an undergraduate degree in computer science. She learned about consulting as a career option through a friend who had graduated a year before her and helped her to line up an interview. Patricia was intrigued by the project-based work and really enjoyed working with the people on her team. Patricia progressed and helped to grow an account from an initial strategy project to a large Enterprise Resource Planning, ERP, project and an organizational change project. She then moved to a new client, where she again started with strategic initiatives and was responsible for growing opportunities. Patricia loved the autonomy of running her own client; her revenue numbers met the minimum required even though she did not receive very much business development support from the firm. Patricia won a large competitive bid project at her client, however they have been unable to come to agreement on contract terms and may have to walk away from the win.

How competent was Patricia? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Patricia's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote Patricia? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Appendix 3-3: Survey 3 – Michael and Sam

The purpose of the following activity is a contribution to a Master's Thesis research project. The vignettes are of executives in the consulting industry, you will be asked to judge their competence, promotion readiness, and hire-ability. Please complete the demographic survey questions, read the two vignettes and complete the assessment questions. Thank you very much for your time.

Your Demographics:

FEMALE MALE YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: _____

WHAT INDUSTRY DO YOU WORK IN: _____

Vignette 1:

Michael has an undergraduate degree in psychology and a Master's of Business Administration. Early in his career, Michael's manager saw something of his younger self in Michael and gave him an opportunity. The role was beyond his years, and required very complex and analytical work. Michael felt he was in over his head, but worked closely with his manager to deliver the project. His manager would point out what Michael could do better, saying "you can do 99% really well, but you need to identify your 1%, your weakness and figure out how to overcome it." Michael's weakness was attention to detail, and in his next role he sought a very detailed task oriented role and proved he could perform well in those circumstances. From then on, as Michael led and built teams, he made sure to have someone on the team who was detail focused. During the 360 review process, Michael had very high scores from his supervisors and subordinates, but scored low on "peer to peer" cooperation. Michael was concerned about this and began to reach out and provide support to his peer network by testing new ideas with his peers and offering to help where his expertise enabled him to assist in preparing his peers to present to a new client.

How competent was Michael? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Michael's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

Would you promote Michael? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Please turn the page over.

Vignette 2:

Sam has an undergraduate degree in computer science and mechanical engineering. He went into technology consulting directly after undergrad and quickly was recognized for being able to diagnose and fix very complex technical issues. Sam continued progressing through the firm for 10 years, but after starting a family, he resigned and took a position with a previous client. After a brief tenure, he had resolved the issues he was hired to address and quickly became bored. In talking with an executive whom he worked for early on in his career, he returned to the consulting firm, and took a non-consulting internal position. After a few years, he transferred back to consulting, again supported by the same executive. Then a recession hit and the firm was downsizing. Sam was new to this consulting group and was concerned for his position. The office director recognized Sam's deep technical expertise and unique skill sets. The office director kept him on the team, even though he was the newest member. The office director then worked with other partners to find a role and Sam continued to deliver projects and be a technical expert; assisting many projects when they came to technical impasse. Sam was meeting and exceeding his sales and delivery numbers until the sales credit model was changed from equal distribution to a percent allocation system. As the technical expert, Sam often received smaller percentage of sales, but was integral in selling to many different clients.

How competent was Sam? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Sam's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote Sam? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Appendix 3-4: Survey 4 – Michelle and Sarah

The purpose of the following activity is a contribution to a Master's Thesis research project. The vignettes are of executives in the consulting industry, you will be asked to judge their competence, promotion readiness, and hire-ability. Please complete the demographic survey questions, read the two vignettes and complete the assessment questions. Thank you very much for your time.

Your Demographics:

FEMALE MALE YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: _____

WHAT INDUSTRY DO YOU WORK IN: _____

Vignette 1:

Michelle has an undergraduate degree in psychology and a Master's of Business Administration. Early in her career, Michelle's manager saw something of his younger self in Michelle and gave her an opportunity. The role was beyond her years, and required very complex and analytical work. Michelle felt she was in over her head, but worked closely with her manager to deliver the project. Her manager would point out what Michelle could do better, saying "you can do 99% really well, but you need to identify your 1%, your weakness and figure out how to overcome it." Michelle's weakness was attention to detail, and in her next role she sought a very detailed task oriented role and proved she could perform well in those circumstances. From then on, as Michelle led and built teams, she made sure to have someone on the team who was detail focused. During the 360 review process, Michelle had very high scores from her supervisors and subordinates, but scored low on "peer to peer" cooperation. Michelle was concerned about this and began to reach out and provide support to her peer network by testing new ideas with her peers and offering to help where her expertise enabled her to assist in preparing her peers to present to a new client.

How competent was Michelle? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Michelle's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote Michelle? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote

Please turn the page over.

Vignette 2:

Sarah has an undergraduate degree in computer science and mechanical engineering. She went into technology consulting directly after undergrad and quickly was recognized for being able to diagnose and fix very complex technical issues. Sarah continued progressing through the firm for 10 years, but after starting a family, she resigned and took a position with a previous client. After a brief tenure, she had resolved the issues she was hired to address and quickly became bored. In talking with an executive whom she worked for early on in her career, she returned to the consulting firm, and took a non-consulting internal position. After a few years, she transferred back to consulting, again supported by the same executive. Then a recession hit and the firm was downsizing. Sarah was new to this consulting group and was concerned for her position. The office director recognized Sarah's deep technical expertise and unique skill sets. The office director kept her on the team, even though she was the newest member. The office director then worked with other partners to find a role and Sarah continued to deliver projects and be a technical expert; assisting many projects when they came to technical impasse. Sarah was meeting and exceeding her sales and delivery numbers until the sales credit model was changed from equal distribution to a percent allocation system. As the technical expert, Sarah often received smaller percentage of sales, but was integral in selling to many different clients.

How competent was Sarah? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All Competent			Competent			Extremely Competent

How much of Sarah's success can be attributed to individual performance vs. active sponsorship? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Individual Performance			Equal Individual Performance and Sponsorship			Completely Active Sponsorship

At this point, would you promote Sarah? *Please circle the degree:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Would Not Promote			Consider Promotion			Definitely Promote