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Exploring Factors Perpetuating the Underrepresentation of Women CAOs in Local Government

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Abstract

Despite women's progress in various professional domains, a persistent gender disparity remains evident in local government's most senior non-elected leadership roles. The underrepresentation of women in municipal city management continues, even though women comprise 47.4% of the Canadian labour force (Catalyst, 2020). This research paper aims to understand the underrepresentation of women in municipal Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) roles by examining theoretical perspectives and drawing from recent qualitative research into the gender imbalance in public sector leadership by DeHart-Davis et al. (2020). This research paper aims to shed light on the need for substantive change by unravelling the complexities surrounding the pervasive underrepresentation of women in municipal CAO roles. Secondary data collected on 110 municipalities in Ontario's *Greater Golden Horseshoe* region is analyzed and compared with other research findings to assess the gender balance among CAOs.

The research findings contribute significantly to the scholarship on gender equality in Canadian local government leadership. This research paper offers insight for students, practitioners, and municipal leaders seeking to understand and promote equality in senior administrative positions. This research aims to contribute to existing research on systemic inequality in local government and understand the importance of a more inclusive and diverse leadership landscape.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In today's progressive society, where women have shattered barriers and ascended to influential positions across various sectors, it remains disheartening to observe a persistent disparity in local government's most senior administrative leadership positions. Despite remarkable strides made by women in many professional arenas, the representation of women in the respected municipal Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) position remains disproportionately low, suggesting systemic inequities remain. A range of theories can help to explain the gender imbalance; however, no single theory can fully address the pervasive problem; the *whys* remain elusive (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020). Moreover, the need for more available data and scholarship, especially in the Canadian non-elected public administration, further challenges our understanding of *why* women remain underrepresented as municipal CAOs.

> Despite progress and momentum towards gender equality, women have not achieved equality in Canada. Whether measuring women's equality or women's equity, women's well-being or specific outcomes in employment, health, and education, some women in Canada continue to face significant challenges and systemic inequality (canadianwomen.org).

Systemic discrimination is described as recurring behaviours within the social and administrative framework of the workplace, which results in the continuous disadvantage of certain groups and the privilege of others based on their group identity (Agocs, 2002). In the context of this paper, systemic discrimination refers to the behaviour of actors in the local government arena. Recognizing the persistence of systemic inequalities facing women in local government administration is a crucial step towards promoting social justice, empowering women, identifying and addressing its root causes, and ensuring accountability for creating a more equitable society for today and future women aspiring to careers as municipal leaders.

Nationally and provincially, women accounted for 51% of the total population aged 15 and older in private households as of the Census 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Data collected for this research paper indicates that in 2023, only 37 percent of CAOs in Ontario's *Greater Golden Horseshoe* (GGH) region are women, compared with 33 percent in 2010. Among 28 GGH municipalities with populations over 100,000, only eight have women serving as CAOs. While this presents some progress, it is far from balanced and not even close to parity achieved at the federal level.

This research paper aims to assess the dynamics of the underrepresentation of women in municipal CAO roles to understand the factors perpetuating the issue. By examining the complex interplay of societal, organizational, and structural barriers, this paper emphasizes that women in local government leadership face a complex puzzle of gendered career experiences and circumstances. It underlines that women possess various intersecting identities, including race, religion, class, ability, sexual orientation, language, income and more, which exposes them to multiple forms of discrimination and heightened inequality.

Research Approach

The research investigates the representation of women in CAO roles in municipalities located in Ontario's *Greater Golden Horseshoe* region, explicitly looking at publicly available demographics of CAO incumbents in 2010 and 2023. A mixed-methods approach combines desk/secondary research and quantitative data analysis. The research findings from O'Flynn and Mau (2014) and De-Hart Davis et al. (2020) contribute to analyzing secondary data collected on municipal CAOs. The initial step involves extensive desk research to gather relevant literature, reports, and studies related to CAOs in local government. This desk research provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge and identifies research gaps.

Government websites and other reputable sources provide secondary research. Data for 2010 and 2023 is available from various sources, including Statistics Canada, the Province of Ontario, and municipal websites. The quantitative data will be subjected to comparative analysis to identify patterns. This comparison contributes to understanding the overall trends and critical factors influencing the gender imbalance of CAOs in Ontario municipalities.

The findings of this research will contribute to existing discourse, potentially guide future scholarship, and assist municipal leaders and practitioners. The primary source of the CAO data collected for this research paper was obtained directly from municipal websites. The Ontario government's growth plan for the *Greater Golden Horseshoe* region informed the selection of municipalities for this research paper, including population estimates. Personal LinkedIn profiles or news articles, such as appointment media releases, contributed to the demographic data used in this research. The Ontario government's annual public sector salary disclosure ("sunshine list") confirms the names of municipal CAOs for a particular reporting year (Ontario, 2023).

The Role of the Municipal CAO

In Canadian municipal governments, the CAO is pivotal in overseeing day-to-day operations, managing administrative functions, and providing leadership (Siegel, 2015).

In their 2016 CAO Survey, StrategyCorp Inc. stated, "The CAO is the essential lynchpin between the elected council and the professional public service" (p. 3). According to Fenn & Siegel (2017), the CAO is accountable for overall municipal administration, including coordinating and implementing council policies, ensuring efficient municipal services, and providing strategic advice. The CAO role can be challenging as it requires loyalty to the council while offering independent, honest advice (Fenn & Siegel, 2017).

The CAO holds a unique "trifurcated leadership role" that extends to council, staff, and external stakeholders (Siegel, 2015, p. 34). This role is crucial for maintaining administrative continuity, fostering transparency, and promoting accountability. The CAO advises the elected council, providing policy development and implementation expertise. They oversee diverse activities, from municipal administration and infrastructure projects to social services, and represent the municipality in intergovernmental and community forums.

Although "Chief Administrative Officer" is used in this paper, it also encompasses alternative titles such as City Manager and Town Manager. Understanding the CAO's role and responsibilities contributes to understanding the necessary skills required for success. However, research recognizes that women have different experiences, are socialized differently, are mentored differently, and develop confidence differently than their male counterparts (Fox & Schuhmann, 2000; Gipson et al., 2017).

Organization of the Report

This report includes several sections, each serving a specific purpose and contributing to the overall understanding of the research topic. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 examines theories to help understand leadership gender imbalance. However, theories do not provide a comprehensive understanding of why gender imbalance continues to exist. Chapter 3 delves into understanding the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in municipal CAO roles by drawing on results and observations from a 2020 study conducted by a research team with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The following chapter presents the findings from data collected for this research paper. It assesses a profile of CAOs in the GGH in a similar context used by O'Flynn and Mau (2014) to draw similarities and support

the research presented. Finally, the paper concludes with implications for local government and potential considerations for future research.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Background

There is a range of theories to help elucidate the underrepresentation of women at the municipal CAO level. However, as Leisha DeHart-Davis et al. (2020) explain in their study *Gender Imbalance in Public Sector Leadership,* no single theory can completely account for this pervasive issue. Although theories provide some insights into the "gender-imbalanced public sector leadership," they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-standing gender imbalance in this domain (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020, p.2).

Research into the underrepresentation of women at senior leadership levels has gained some traction in the past few decades; however, research at the local government level, such as the municipal CAO/City Manager, still needs to be enhanced compared to private sector studies. Often, public administration scholars focus on examining issues of representative bureaucracy, gender dynamics, and the effects of diversity management within organizations (DeHart-Davis et al., 2018, as cited in Dehart-Davis et al., 2020). While these issues are essential scholarship, understanding *why* the gender imbalance remains is critically important (ICMA, 2020; DeHart-Davis et al., 2020).

Role Congruity Theory

Proposed by Eagly and Karau (2002), role congruity theory (RCT) is grounded in social role theory's treatment of the content of gender roles and their importance in promoting sex differences in behaviour. A crucial aspect of social role theory includes two types of expectations, or norms, within roles (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 2016). Roles encompass expectations about what members of a group *typically do* (descriptive norms) and expectations about what the group *should do* (injunctive norms) (Cialdini & Trost, 1998, as cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002). While descriptive norms align with the conventional definition of stereotypes regarding group

members, injunctive norms introduce a prescriptive element not traditionally associated with the stereotype concept. Consequently, the term "gender role" encompasses both descriptive and injunctive expectations associated with women and men (e.g., Eagly,1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

However, RCT reaches beyond social role theory to consider the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially in leadership, and to specify key factors and processes influencing congruity perceptions and their consequences for prejudicial behaviours (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that prejudice against women in leadership positions manifests in two forms of bias. First, prejudice stems from the descriptive aspect of the female gender role, where there is a perception that women possess lesser leadership abilities than men. Second, prejudice arises from the injunctive aspect of the female gender role, where behaviour that aligns with leadership expectations (thus violating traditional female gender norms) receives less favourable evaluation when displayed by a woman than a man (pp. 574, 588).

When social actors hold preconceived notions about women in leadership positions that do not align with the qualities typically associated with those leadership roles, it leads to the belief that women, compared to equivalent men, have less agency and a greater focus on communal traits. Consequently, the perception is that women are less qualified than men for leadership positions, especially in executive roles (e.g., Heilman, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Steffen, 1984). When a member of a stereotyped group, like a woman, assumes a role perceived as incongruent, such as becoming a municipal Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), prejudice can arise. Prejudice occurs because society's expectations of desirable female behaviour clash with the role's traditional norms. Consequently, decision-makers may perceive

women in such positions as lacking the desirable characteristics associated with leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Through their extensive research, Eagly and Karau (2002) provide compelling evidence to support the consequences of these findings: (a) less favourable attitudes towards female leaders compared to male leaders, (b) more significant challenges for women in obtaining leadership roles, and (c) more significant difficulties for women in being recognized as effective in these roles (p. 589).

Status Theory

Gender is not just an individual trait but a complex system of social practices deeply ingrained in our institutions (Ridgeway, 2001). This system is closely tied to social hierarchy and leadership, perpetuating stereotypes favouring men with higher perceived status and competence than women. According to Ridgeway (2001), these beliefs about gender status create a network of "constraining expectations and interpersonal reactions," contributing significantly to the existence of the glass ceiling (p. 637).

In situations involving both genders, these status beliefs impact how assertive men and women are perceived, thus evaluating their abilities, influence level, and likelihood of emerging as leaders. Furthermore, these gender status beliefs trigger legitimacy reactions. Consequently, when women act assertively and defy expected gender norms, they often face penalties and resistance, hindering their ability to effectively lead and gain support (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 637).

Status theory highlights that men typically hold higher-status positions in organizations than women, a trend influenced by historical and cultural factors. The unequal distribution of authority, influence, and social standing between genders leads to disparities in their representation and opportunities for leadership roles. As a result, women frequently encounter

obstacles when trying to break through these profoundly entrenched power dynamics and structures, resulting in their underrepresentation in top-level management positions (Ridgeway, 2001).

Gender Stereotype Theory

In 2001, Heilman conducted a study highlighting the lasting impact of gender stereotypes on women's advancement in corporate hierarchies. She identified two types of stereotypes: descriptive stereotypes, which describe how groups of people currently behave, and prescriptive stereotypes, which prescribe how they should behave (Heilman, 2001, p. 658). According to Heilman, women are expected to embody "social- and service-oriented traits," like kindness, helpfulness, sympathy, and concern for others (2001, p. 658). In contrast, "achievement-oriented traits," such as aggression, assertiveness, independence, and decisiveness, are typically associated with men (Heilman, 2001, p. 658). Additionally, these conceptions of men and women are opposites, with each gender lacking what is perceived as most prevalent in the other (Heilman, 2001, p. 658).

When women assume leadership roles, they challenge societal norms and expectations of feminine behaviour, leading to disapproval, negative evaluations, marginalization of their achievements, reduced cooperation, and unfavourable employee attitudes, sometimes even derogatory treatment (Heilman, 2001).

Heilman (2001) concluded that the descriptive aspect of gender stereotypes contributes to gender bias by creating an expectation that women will be unable to perform upper-level managerial jobs due to the perceived discrepancy between women's stereotyped characteristics and the requirements of such positions. Consequently, devaluing women's competence or

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successful performance may be attributed to factors other than their skills and abilities, leading to a biased view of their capabilities (Heilman, 2001, p. 670).

The prescriptive aspect of gender stereotypes also reinforces gender bias by defining how women should behave. When women exhibit competence and succeed in roles traditionally associated with men, they challenge normative expectations, resulting in disapproval and penalties. Consequently, they often face different treatment compared to men displaying the same behaviours. These penalties manifest as negative social consequences, such as personal criticism and dislike, which hinder the progress of competent women (Heilman, 2001).

All these theories aim to explain the gender imbalance in organizational leadership, albeit from slightly different perspectives. These theories consider factors like societal limitations imposed on women, their lower social status, and prevailing beliefs about how women do and ought to behave. All these factors collectively hinder women's ability to assume leadership roles (DeHart-Davis, 2020).

Chapter 3 – Understanding Gender Imbalance of Municipal CAOs

> In 1908, with the advent of the local government management profession, there were no female managers. Today, "women run some of the largest cities and counties … (yet) despite … apparent gains, women occupy a mere 17 percent of the top management positions in local governments … the percentages for women of colour are even smaller: 1.39 percent estimated by the 2012 ICMA State of the Profession Survey. These proportions raise the question of why there are so few women – both white women and women of colour – serving as local government managers when they constitute half of the population" (ICMA, 2020, p. 7).

Gender Awareness in Local Government

Awareness of the gender imbalance in local government dates back to the 1970s, according to the ICMA (2020). In a 1973 special edition of the *Public Management* magazine, an article called attention to the fact that "women comprised only one percent of ICMA membership" (ICMA, 2020, p.7), and yet fifty years later, we are asking the same questions: "Why aren't there more women in local government management?" (ICMA, 2020, p.7). An article by Claire Rubin in the 1973 edition found that "of 2,534 professionally run municipalities only 15 were managed by women (and) none of the municipalities with female managers had populations above 13,000; more than 50 percent of female-led municipalities had populations under 2,000" (ICMA, 2020, p.7).

During the 1970s and 1980s, research on workplace discrimination progressed by recognizing that discriminatory practices, such as unequal treatment, might not be isolated occurrences (Agocs, 2002). Lee Sigelman, an American political scientist, observed in 1976 that although women were well-represented in the public sector workforce in all states, they disproportionately held lower-level positions (ICMA, 2020). Agocs (2002) argues that a historical and ongoing pattern of women concentrated in low-paying clerical and administrative roles, with limited career advancement opportunities and no union protections, is sustained by

mutually reinforcing behaviours that uphold traditional power structures and hinder outsiders from accessing decision-making positions.

Sigelman and political scientist Joseph Cayer conducted a new study on the effect of equal employment opportunities on women's representation in government (ICMA, 2020). According to the ICMA (2020) article, their research revealed that between 1973 and 1975, women and minorities saw an increase in their proportion within the government workforce, with women rising from 34 percent to 38 percent. Despite these gains, women remained "woefully underrepresented" in management positions. (p. 7).

In 1987, political scientist James Slack investigated the influence of equal employment opportunities and affirmative action on city managers' attitudes toward the recruitment of women (ICMA, 2020). Women remained significantly underrepresented despite the number of female city managers rising from 15 in 1972 to over 100 in 1986. Slack's (as cited in DeHart-Davis et al., 2020) survey indicated that although city managers expressed theoretical support for affirmative action, they were less inclined to implement it practically, particularly in actively recruiting diverse candidates. The study also highlighted that younger managers with more progressive ideological perspectives supported affirmative action implementation (ICMA, 2020).

As Agocs (2002) explains, workplace practices and policies are designed to "fit the traditionally dominant group in the labour market—white, able-bodied males of European cultural heritage in the North American context" (p.5). Baron's argument, cited in Agocs (2002), indicates that integrating race and gender-based privileges and penalties into hiring, job assignment, pay, and promotion structures persist unless significant pressure exists for change (p.5).

In her 1993 article "*Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Backward*," Guy emphasizes the value of women's strengths in the workplace, which should not be disregarded or wasted (ICMA, 2020). However, as the ICMA (2020) article explains, Guy notes that male leadership still predominates in government administration, and her analysis of gender patterns in the public sector shows intermittent progress for women, with periods of advancement followed by "periods of redefinition" (p.8). Guy concludes that women still face obstacles, including limited access to female mentors, sex role stereotypes, and structural barriers (ICMA, 2020, p. 8).

Despite three decades since Guy's article, little progress has occurred in increasing women's representation in municipal CAO positions (ICMA, 2020). ICMA (2020) reports a steady rise in the percentage of women CAOs since their efforts began promoting women in the profession. As of June 2021, women constituted 34 percent of professional ICMA members, with 677 female CAO members and 2,956 male CAO members (ICMA, 2022). Globally, Catalyst (2022) reports an incremental increase in the share of women in senior management. In 2021, globally, the share of women in senior management increased to 31%, "the highest number ever recorded" (Catalyst, 2022).

However, in North America, women face barriers to advancing in management roles long before they reach the glass ceiling (Catalyst, 2022). For every 100 men promoted to management positions, only 86 women receive similar promotions, resulting in a smaller pool of women available for future promotions (Catalyst, 2022). In Canada, women accounted for 35.6 percent of all managers and 30.9 percent of senior managers in 2021 (Catalyst, 2022). However, women held only 20.5 percent of C-suite positions in 2021, with Chief Financial Officer (CFO) being the most common among female C-suite executive officers (Catalyst, 2022). For the first

time, women of colour were promoted to manager at the same rate as all women in 2021 (Catalyst, 2022).

To Be or Not Be a CAO

"One anecdotal explanation" for the underrepresentation of women is that "a disproportionate number" choose not to pursue the CAO role (ICMA, 2020, p.10). For this to be a valid explanation, it is critical to identify the factors that would "encourage or discourage women … from joining the talent pool" (ICMA, 2020, p.10). The ICMA (2020) research study revealed factors that "transcend gender," such as political stability, relative harmony among council members and fiscal management of financially stable and fiscally sound budgets; however, the study chose to focus on the factors with the most relevance for women: "diversity and inclusion" and "work/life balance" (p.10).

   Diversity and Inclusion in Local Government. Signs of diversity and inclusion within the community and the municipal organization can influence women's decisions to apply for CAO roles. In the ICMA (2020) research study (37 participants, including one from Canada), participants identified three critical indicators of an inclusive municipal environment: the diversity of the community, the diversity among administrative and elected leaders, and the inclusive (or exclusive) behaviour of the council (p.10). Participants also noted that they consider the diversity of elected and appointed leadership as a significant factor when evaluating a municipality. For instance, one deputy county administrator participant remarked, "*Where (I see) women in leadership positions … I know there's a path that's already been cut*" (ICMA, 2020, p.10).

   The *Global Gender Gap Report* 2022 reported that Canada is among several countries "particularly committed to establishing a more gender-diverse workforce" (WEF, 2022, p. 57).

However, the existence of DEI programs alone is not enough to make meaningful progress. How a governing body demonstrates inclusivity serves as a signal for the prospective experiences of women. For example, one ICMA survey participant recalled feeling uneasy during an interview held "in a basement somewhere" with all men, expressing concern that they were "going to dominate (her) or try to be more difficult" (ICMA, 2020, p.10). This experience highlights the role of subtle cues, such as body language and group composition, in shaping "perceptions of perceived inclusion of a local government setting" (ICMA, 2020, p.11).

Work/Life Balance and Family Responsibilities

Work/life balance presents a significant challenge for both men and women, but it disproportionately affects women's advancement to senior leadership roles (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020; Pettigrew, 2022). Not surprisingly, the ICMA survey raised work/life balance as a significant factor that guided women's "professional pursuits" (ICMA, 2020, p.11).

A female city manager participant in the ICMA (2020) study summarized how time-consuming the work can be:

> "Today, I'm exhausted. I'm in the thick of my life, and nothing seems more appealing than just being able to wake up in the morning, drink my coffee, and have nothing to do. I laugh because a retirement representative came and did some counselling with us. And he looked at my husband and said, 'Just get used to the fact that city managers never retire. She'll be working until the day she dies" (ICMA, 2020, p.11).

Family responsibilities, such as caregiving and household duties, only compound the intensity of the workload for women, whom Lee and Tang (2015) explain, on average, have greater caregiving responsibilities (as cited in DeHart-Davis et al., 2020, p.24). Further, society expects that women bear the primary responsibility for childcare and domestic chores (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020). An ICMA (2020) survey participant noted that evening commitments like

council meetings or community engagement events are demanding for women with children and caregiving responsibilities (ICMA, 2020, p.11).

The career demands of a municipal CAO are seen as incompatible with family responsibilities and relationships (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020). Investing time and energy in advancing their careers is difficult; potentially, women miss opportunities to develop skills and networks. This pressure to prioritize family over professional growth leads to slower career progression than their male counterparts (Feeney & Stritch, 2019; Pettigrew, 2022). As a result, some women choose not to pursue advancing their careers because family is their priority: "*I (turned) down jobs that, if I had been married, if there were a spouse to help, if I hadn't had a child, I probably would have taken, but being a mom was my number-one responsibility*" (ICMA, 2020, p.11). Turning down jobs because being a mom is the number one priority, choosing municipal roles that provide balance for family responsibilities while still serving the community, or waiting until after kids are grown to pursue leadership roles lend credence to arguments that "women cannot have it all" (Slaughter, 2012, as cited in DeHart-Davis et al., 2020, pp. 24, 25).

Despite efforts to promote work/life balance through flexible arrangements and family work policies (FWP), gender disparities in career advancement persist (Pettigrew, 2022). Women often encounter subtle discrimination, such as being perceived as less committed or ambitious when seeking work/life balance, which contributes to the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020).

Workplace culture frequently reinforces gender biases and expectations, making it difficult for women to progress in their careers. Assumptions about availability and commitment

can result in subtle discrimination, such as overlooking women for promotions or assigning them fewer challenging tasks (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020).

While family-friendly policies have good intentions, they can perpetuate bias and hinder women from reaching senior leadership positions (Kubu, 2018; Feeney & Stritch, 2019; Brown, 2010). For example, maternity leave policies may unintentionally interrupt women's career growth and reduce their chances of obtaining leadership positions (Brown, 2010).

The unequal distribution of, or participation in, parental leave leads to more prolonged work disruptions for women than men and contributes to workplace bias against women (Pettigrew, 2022). This disparity in parental leave results in disruptions in job progress, missed income, promotions, and benefits and can have long-term effects on earning potential, leading to a wage penalty and postponed or cancelled promotions after using parental leave (Pettigrew, 2022).

City leadership positions are particularly challenging due to the extensive responsibilities entrusted to local governments (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020). Leadership demands significant commitment, but women frequently encounter unique challenges in balancing work and personal life (Bishu et al., 2021; Bishu & Heckler, 2020). The *Global Gender Gap Report* 2022 reported stagnant gender parity for Canada, with a score of 62.9 percent in 2022, the lowest since the index was first compiled (WEF, 2022, p.33). However, a year later, Canada registered a 0.2 percentage-point decline in overall parity; at the current rate of progress, it will take North America 95 years to close the gender gap (WEF, 2023, p.6). Women experience more significant work-family conflict, significantly hindering their career advancement (WEF, 2022, pp.33,35).

Deep-rooted stereotypes and biases regarding women's ability to manage families and careers create the perception that they lack necessary leadership qualities, limiting their access to leadership opportunities and hindering their full potential in local government.

Career Advancement in Local Government

DeHart-Davis et al. (2020) highlights that career advancement is a "gendered aspect" of local government leadership (p.24). The ICMA (2020) study participants emphasized the importance of geographic mobility, mentors, sponsors, professional development, and networking for achieving management positions and advancing their careers (p.11).

Mobility. Geographic mobility plays a crucial role in shaping the career path of women CAOs, as highlighted in the ICMA (2020) survey. One city manager stated that being a senior municipal leader requires a willingness to relocate geographically (ICMA, 2020, p.11). It is well-known that the role of municipal CAO often experiences high turnover, which can present opportunities for younger women if they are open to relocating (ICMA, 2020). For women aspiring to reach the CAO level, being willing and able to relocate can be a pathway for advancement. However, this decision hinges on family support, as relocation is deemed a "necessary condition" (ICMA, 2020, p.12).

Nevertheless, DeHart-Davis et al. (2020) points out that relocation may be less feasible for dual-career families, especially when the working spouse faces limited employment opportunities (p.26). Consequently, if mobility is a typical requirement to advance in municipal senior leadership, individuals who cannot or are unwilling to relocate may find it more challenging to pursue and attain senior leadership positions.

In a 2012 Municipal World online article, Slegtenhorst proposed that being a CAO in Canada is "the position closest to the door," suggesting that high turnover is expected in this

position, further emphasizing the significance of geographic mobility as a career factor for women CAOs (municipalworld.com).

Mentorship. Scholars suggest that mentoring and networking programs could be crucial in increasing women's representation in CAO roles (Holman, 2001). Representative bureaucracy relies on greater female participation in administrative power (Fox & Schuhmann, 1999). Fox and Schuhmann (1999) emphasize that access to high-quality mentoring experiences is a significant factor in women's journey into public administration.

Interview participants in the ICMA (2020) study cited mentors as vital to their career development (DeHart-Davis, 2020). Many participants had several key individuals who mentored them throughout their careers. These mentors "opened professional doors, provided insights … and advocated for their advancement" (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020, p.26). Having a collection of mentors is where professionals develop a relationship "constellation" or a developmental network (DeHart-Davis, 2020, p.26).

Women encounter significant challenges in accessing mentoring opportunities. Firstly, they often struggle to find mentors, especially senior-level women mentors, depriving them of crucial guidance, support, and sponsorship necessary for career advancement (Hale, 1995). Secondly, gender-based interpersonal and organizational barriers can impede women from establishing connections with potential mentors (Ragins & Cotton, 1991).

In the ICMA (2020) study, some women participants noted that "most or all of their mentors" were men. This lack of demographic diversity in leadership positions creates a barrier for women to access the social networks essential for career growth (ICMA, 2020, p.12). Additionally, the study highlights that the scarcity of female role models in municipal CAO roles

makes it challenging for other women to envision themselves in such positions—a municipal CAO is not seen as a feasible "possible self" (ICMA, 2020, p.12).

Mentors take a risk by investing in you and can act as sponsors, providing opportunities and allowing you to explore various professional identities while shaping your own. Survey participants believe mentors lead by example and encourage stepping beyond comfort zones. Research indicates that men tend to receive more promotions compared to women. While alternative reasons might exist, one potential explanation is that men often have mentors who actively "sponsor" them, advocating for their advancement. On the other hand, women typically receive traditional mentoring, which involves professional guidance and advice but lacks the same level of active advocacy from their mentors (ICMA, 2020, p.12).

Networks. Networking is crucial for career advancement, providing access to opportunities, information, and influential connections. However, women often encounter barriers, including exclusion from informal networks, gender biases, and work-life balance challenges, which hinder their ability to build professional relationships and access vital information (Ibarra, 1993).

Career mobility is vital for networking and advancement in the relatively small field of municipal CAOs. Although networks are essential for professional growth, they can also be influenced by gender (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020). Research by DeHart-Davis et al. (2020) revealed that some managers experienced exclusion from critical networking opportunities throughout their careers, such as outings with commissioners that included other male senior organizational leaders but excluded them. This finding aligns with the 2014 ICMA Task Force Report, in which 31 percent of women reported exclusion from significant networking opportunities due to gender. For instance, golf emerged as one event that excluded women from

networking opportunities, according to ICMA (2020). A city manager pointed out that municipalities often foster "camaraderie" through golf but excluded women on the leadership team. These findings echo previous research suggesting that women's networks may be less influential, limiting their career prospects (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020; Kanter, 1977). While networking is vital for professional development and advancement, women in the municipal CAO profession may face challenges related to gender bias and exclusion from influential networking opportunities.

Examining the Factors Perpetuating Gender Imbalance of Municipal CAOs

Despite progress toward gender equality, women still face significant barriers to senior leadership positions. Societal, organizational, and individual factors influence their underrepresentation in these roles. To address these challenges, societal attitudes and gender norms must evolve to support women as successful leaders who can balance personal and professional lives. Encouraging young women to pursue leadership roles and challenging stereotypes early is crucial for nurturing the next generation of women leaders.

By dismantling these barriers, society can unlock women's full potential, benefiting organizations and society. Achieving gender parity in senior leadership requires concerted efforts to address systemic, cultural, and personal challenges women face.

Stereotypes, Perceptions, and Expectations

Gender stereotypes, perceptions, and societal expectations intertwine to create a complex web of challenges women face in local government. These interrelated factors collectively influence how women are perceived, treated, and given opportunities within local government and broader society. Understanding the impact of societal expectations is critical for dismantling barriers and

fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women pursuing senior leadership

roles in local government.

Gender stereotypes originate from societal perceptions of the characteristics and

behaviours of men and women in different social roles, effectively defining and limiting those

roles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Schein, 2001). These biases stem from gendered

expectations and assumptions about leadership, leading to the perception that women are less

competent or suitable for such positions, hampering women's progress and undermining equal

opportunities within the profession.

"Think manager-think male" (Heilman, 2001) is a prevalent gender bias and stereotype

that associates leadership and managerial positions with men. This ingrained societal belief

assumes that men possess the qualities and characteristics required for effective leadership, such

as assertiveness and decisiveness. At the same time, they perceive women as lacking in these

essential traits. One ICMA study female city manager, who is also a woman of colour, explained

what this bias looks like:

> Other times, they believe you are someone other than the city manager. "I've been
> through disaster recovery issues, where my assistant city manager is a white male,
> about 6'3', and all the outside authorities would go to him thinking he was the city
> manager, and he would point to me … people don't always identify you as being
> the person in charge or being the leader in the room" (ICMA, 2020, p.14).

This stereotype has far-reaching consequences, perpetuating the underrepresentation of

women in leadership roles across various industries and sectors. Due to these gender stereotypes,

women are often seen as communal, exhibiting selflessness and concern for others.

On the other hand, men are perceived as agentic, displaying assertiveness and

competitiveness. These perceptions further reinforce societal expectations and restrict women's

access to positions of power and authority (Heilman, 2001). Challenging the "think manager-

think male" stereotype is essential for promoting gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity in

leadership positions. It allows for a more balanced and dynamic workforce where individuals are evaluated based on their merits and capabilities, irrespective of gender.

Disapproval and penalization for violations of gender-stereotypic prescriptions come from many directions. Societal expectations often revolve around traditional gender roles, prescribing specific behaviours and responsibilities based on gender. Women who do not display "womanly" attributes are "judged less psychologically healthy and evaluated less favourably than those who do (Heilman, 2001, p. 661). Adverse reactions also occur when women display behaviours typically reserved for men (Heilman, 2001). Women's career progress relies not only on their competence but also on social acceptance and approval. However, when women excel in areas that are traditionally considered off-limits, the adverse reactions they face can be highly detrimental to their advancement prospects (Heilman, 2001).

Societal expectations can influence how leadership qualities are perceived based on gender. Attributes traditionally associated with masculine traits, such as assertiveness and competitiveness, may be valued more highly in leadership roles. On the other hand, qualities stereotypically considered feminine, such as empathy and collaboration, may be undervalued despite their importance in effective leadership. These perceptions can impact how women are evaluated and selected for senior positions in local government administration. Societal expectations and stereotypes surrounding gender roles shape judgments and evaluations of women as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2022). Consequently, women are viewed as less competent and less suitable for leadership positions, facing a double bind expected to demonstrate leadership competence and adhere to traditional feminine traits (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Gender bias in work settings influences evaluations that "being competent does not assure

that a woman will advance to the same organizational levels as an equivalently performing man" (Heilman, 2001, p. 657).

Societal expectations can also narrow the career choices available to women within local government administration. Considering specific roles or departments as more suitable or acceptable for women leads to limited opportunities for them to explore and pursue different career paths. This limitation hinders the potential for personal and professional growth and deprives local government administration of diverse perspectives and innovative ideas. In positions such as CAO, traditionally held by men, people associate agentic traits and leadership styles with this role. This explicit gender bias creates obstacles for women seeking and holding local administrative positions (Holman, 2001; DeHart-Davis et al., 2020). Given that women constitute a significant portion of the population, they must have equal representation and influence in the decision-making processes of their communities.

Gender stereotypes, perceptions, and societal expectations contribute to the underrepresentation of women in city management. Traditional gender power dynamics perpetuate these stereotypes. Societal norms and power structures reinforce the belief that men are more competent and authoritative while expecting women to embody nurturing and communal qualities. These deeply ingrained stereotypes create barriers for women aspiring to leadership positions, fueling skepticism and doubt regarding their leadership capabilities.

Second-Generation Bias and Discriminatory Hiring Practices

Many local government organizations exhibit a male-dominated work culture that perpetuates gender biases and obstructs women's progress. Studies have revealed the existence of "old boys' networks" and informal social circles that exclude women from crucial decision-making processes and advancement opportunities. The underrepresentation of women in

municipal CAO positions is a persistent problem beyond overt discrimination and gender stereotypes.

Second-generation bias. Refers to subtle, deeply ingrained attitudes and stereotypes that shape our perceptions and decisions without conscious awareness. Within local government, these biases influence hiring practices, resulting in gender imbalances in leadership roles. Unconscious biases can lead to preferential treatment of male candidates, regardless of qualifications, and the unintentional overlooking of highly competent female candidates. These automatic biases often involve stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs about certain groups, including gender biases, which can influence decision-making processes and perpetuate gender inequalities in the workplace.

In local government, second-generation bias often revolves around gendered notions of leadership traits. Traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and assertive communication styles are traditionally considered "masculine," while traits like empathy, collaboration, and consensus-building are perceived as "feminine." These biases unconsciously influence the perception of women's leadership potential, leading to stereotyping and hindering women's progression into senior leadership positions.

Hiring and promotion practices. Job descriptions significantly influence applicant perceptions. Unconscious bias can seep into these descriptions, discouraging women from applying for leadership roles. Language emphasizing assertiveness or male-oriented terminology may deter qualified female candidates with different but equally valuable leadership qualities. Discriminatory hiring and promotion practices rooted in unconscious biases can limit women's opportunities for advancement, as biased evaluations of candidates' qualifications and leadership abilities may overlook competent female candidates.

Homophily and decision-making. The tendency to interact and favour individuals who share similar opinions and behaviours to oneself, known as homophily, can explain why "old boys' clubs" and "old boys' networks" are so common, like "birds of a feather flock together" (Smith et al., 2012, p.439). Male-dominated hiring panels may subconsciously favour male candidates based on shared experiences or social connections, exacerbating the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Lack of gender diversity in decision-making panels can reinforce existing biases and hinder fair consideration for female candidates.

Gender bias in evaluations. Gender bias in evaluations is fueled by the perception that top management and executive-level jobs are inherently male in sex type, requiring traditionally masculine traits (Heilman, 2001). This view of leadership creates a bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions (Schein, 2001, p. 676) (Heilman, 2001). Lack of Fit theory suggests biased judgments based on gender stereotypes and assumptions about job fit influence personnel decisions. As a result, women may face negative expectations and perceived incompetence in roles considered more masculine.

However, with few exceptions, empirical evidence supports the assertion that "upper-level managerial positions appear to be characterized in masculine terms" (Heilman, 2001, p.659). Thus, the "good manager" is described predominantly in masculine attributes and is the basis for the "think manager-think male" phenomenon (Heilman, 2001; Schein, 2001). The good manager "fosters a bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion and training decisions" (Schein, 2001, p. 676).

Lack of fit. Suggests that biased judgments based on gender influence personnel decisions. According to this model, stereotypes and assumptions drive expectations about a person's success in a job. The perceived fit between an individual's attributes and the job

requirement determines performance expectations. However, gender biases often influence expectations, where the skills and characteristics associated with male sex-typed roles are considered more suitable. At the same time, they are viewing those related to women as a group as less compatible. When stereotypes are more pronounced or the more masculine sex-type of job, the perceived fit between women and the job tends to be poorer, leading to more pessimistic expectations. As a result, a noticeable bias views women as lacking the necessary competence to perform the job effectively (Heilman, 2001). However, when women are successful at "men's work," their success is seen as a "violation of the prescriptive norms associated with gender stereotypes" (Heilman, 2001, p. 661).

Summary

The representation of women in municipal CAO roles has been a topic of increasing significance, with several key points highlighting the gender awareness required for fostering progress in this domain. Firstly, deciding whether to become a CAO presents a unique consideration for women, as they often face distinct obstacles and expectations compared to their male counterparts. Diversity and inclusion within local government are crucial for women's empowerment, as they allow diverse perspectives and experiences to shape policies and decisions. However, women continue to grapple with the complexities of balancing work responsibilities with family life, which can hinder career advancement. Mentorship programs and solid professional networks are crucial for supporting and guiding women in local government. Examining the factors contributing to gender imbalance among municipal CAOs reveals that stereotypes, biased perceptions, and discriminatory hiring practices perpetuate this disparity. Addressing these issues is essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive environment promoting the involvement and advancement of women in local government.

Chapter 4 – Exploring Gender Representation of Municipal CAOs in the GGH

This paper examines the factors perpetuating the ongoing underrepresentation of women in municipal CAO roles. Chapter 2 explores the issue of gender imbalance in executive leadership through various theories and scholarly perspectives. Chapter 3 further investigated the prevalence of this imbalance within local governments and highlighted the persistent underrepresentation of women in municipal management positions over the past five decades. While theories have shed light on gender-imbalanced leadership, they fall short of explaining the enduring underrepresentation of women in public sector leadership (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020).

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) plays a pivotal role in supporting local government professionals in the United States and Canada, boasting a membership from 30 countries, including Canada. Despite the close collaboration between ICMA and the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA), there is a need for more Canadian-specific data and research to be available. Notably, the most relevant Canadian data dates back to 2010, when O'Flynn and Mau (2014) studied the demographic and career profiles of municipal CAOs in Canada.

The underrepresentation of women in municipal CAO roles is a complex issue that demands a comprehensive examination of the underlying factors. Although existing theories shed some light on gender-imbalanced leadership, they do not entirely account for the enduring disparity in public sector leadership. With the support of organizations like ICMA and a focus on gathering Canadian-specific data, we can pave the way for meaningful progress in promoting gender diversity in executive leadership positions within local governments.

The Data Context

Canadian-specific data are scarce. This project gathered information on CAOs from municipalities within Ontario's *Greater Golden Horseshoe* (GGH) region. The GGH is the urban region centred around the City of Toronto, located at the western end of Lake Ontario, stretching north to Georgian Bay, south to Lake Erie, west to Wellington County and Waterloo Region, and east to the counties of Peterborough and Northumberland (Ontario.ca).

Data on municipal CAOs and population figures were collected during the spring and summer of 2023. Some turnover occurred during this time, and as of the submission of this paper, all of the known changes are reflected. Because Census division geographical areas can differ from municipal areas, population figures were adjusted (where applicable) to exclude separated/independent cities and First Nation reserves, which are not part of the local municipal jurisdiction but are included in the population for the appropriate census division. For example, the cities of Barrie and Orillia and the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, Christian Island 30, and Christian Island 30A reserves are independent of the municipality of Simcoe County but included in the Simcoe County Census Division.

The municipalities included in this research paper are based on Ontario's provincial growth plan for the *Greater Golden Horseshoe*, as illustrated by the map shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan Area (Hemson Consulting, 2012, p.19)

Demographic data, including the name of the CAO, professional and educational background, and length of time in the role and the municipal sector, was collected from multiple sources, with municipal websites and LinkedIn being the primary sources. Where the identity of the CAO could not be found on the municipal website or from municipal documents, I conducted a Google search for news and media postings or the Ontario public sector salary disclosure reports, also known as "the sunshine list" (Ontario, 2023). For this research, selecting gender was determined using CAO incumbents' names. Photographs, LinkedIn profiles, and reports or articles referencing pronouns also identify or confirm gender.[1].

Determining each CAO incumbent's years of service and professional and educational backgrounds was obtained primarily from LinkedIn profiles; occasionally, these details were available in appointment announcements or biographical articles. Not all incumbents had

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[1] The author acknowledges that gender is a socially constructed term and can change over time. For this research paper, "gender" refers to categorizing individuals as either men or women and does not represent how an individual self-identifies.

LinkedIn profiles, and not all profiles provided full details on career paths and education. Therefore, the analysis of this research is limited. It is important to note that the accuracy of the data collected for this research was verified only within the sources noted. Thus, data validity is limited to the scope of this research project. To improve the confidence of my analysis, I referenced and compared my data with findings reported by O'Flynn and Mau (2014) and from the ICMA (2021) membership survey data. Regarding gender representation, the data is consistent with other research findings.

A Comparison of Data

O'Flynn and Mau (2014) studied responses from 219 CAOs from municipalities across Canada, including 47 responses from Ontario. Their survey covered age, gender, education, professional experience, and elements of the responsibilities associated with the CAO role (O'Flynn & Mau, 2014, p. 156). Additionally, they conducted follow-up telephone interviews with 15 survey respondents to gain deeper insights into their roles as CAOs and the qualifications and experience required for success in this position (p. 156).

The findings of O'Flynn and Mau (2014) revealed that while there has been some progress in increasing the representation of women in municipal CAO roles, only a quarter (55 of 219) survey respondents were women, suggesting that the profession still exhibits characteristics of an "old boys club" (p. 159). Their research also noted that municipalities lagged the efforts made by the federal public service in promoting diversity among executive ranks, where 46.1 percent of core public administration executives were women in 2014 (O'Flynn & Mau, 2014, p. 157)[2].

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[2] The *Employment Equity Act* is a legislated workplace equity program that seeks to correct conditions of disadvantaged employment and special measures to accommodate differences for four designated groups: women,

While O'Flynn and Mau (2014) collected data from across Canada, analysis in this research paper will focus mainly on their survey results from Ontario respondents. Considering that their research was based on data obtained in 2010, gender representation of CAOs as of 2010 in the GGH municipalities was also collected. Table 1 summarizes the gender representation of municipal CAOs, comparing findings from O'Flynn and Mau and findings of the data collected for this research.

Table 1: Comparison of gender representation of municipal CAOs in the Greater Golden Horseshoe in 2010 and 2023 with 2010 representation reported by O'Flynn and Mau (2014)

	O'Flynn & Mau 2010 Survey Canada	O'Flynn & Mau 2010 Survey ONTARIO	Greater Golden Horseshoe 2010	Greater Golden Horseshoe 2023
Men	164	35	72	69
Women	55	12	36	41
% women	25%	25%	33%	37%
n/a			2	
Total	**219**	**47**	**110**	**110**

As shown in Table 1, O'Flynn and Mau (2014) demonstrate that Ontario's representation of women in CAO positions was consistent with the Canada-wide results, where women held approximately one-quarter of all CAO positions (2014). In comparison, the GGH data collected for this research paper shows a slightly higher representation in 2010, with women occupying about one-third of CAO positions. However, thirteen years later, the representation of women in CAO positions shows only a marginal increase from 33 percent to 37 percent.

Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities. The Act applies to federally regulated industries and crown corporations. The Act does not apply to municipalities. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/labour/programs/employment-equity.html

Interestingly, the ICMA (2021) *Women in the Profession Survey* reported that, among their membership, women represent 20 percent of CAOs. On a broader scale, as Hunt (2023) reports in the *Women Leaders Index 2022*, Canada stood out as the G20 country with the highest proportion of women in public service senior executive ranks at 51.1 percent, a significant increase from 46.1 percent in 2014. Canada has held this top position among G20 countries since 2012 and remains the only G20 country to achieve gender parity among national civil services as of 2022 (Hunt, 2023). Canada's results are no doubt the result of the legislation and commitments (including financial) supporting federally regulated organizations with opportunities to remove barriers to equity (Canada (a), (b), 2022). However, the importance of gender parity at *all levels* of government is evident in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 5.5 – "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life" (Berevoescu & Ballington, 2021, p.5).

Despite the decades of attention brought by ICMA, among others, to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in local government, the question of *why* this disparity persists remains today. Moreover, we should expand this question and explore *why, even with the federal government successfully achieving gender parity among its core public administration executive ranks, the issue remains pervasive at the local government level*.

Examining the Greater Golden Horseshoe

There are several reasons for selecting the 110 municipalities in the GGH for this paper. Firstly, the GGH region is one of North America's most dynamic and fast-growing areas. According to the provincial government, the GGH generates upwards of 25 percent of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is considered Ontario's "economic engine" (Ontario, 2020,

p.1). The GGH contains significant ecological and hydrological natural environments and some of Canada's most essential and productive farmland (Ontario, 2020). It is also a destination of choice for newcomers to Canada and people and businesses relocating to Ontario from other parts of Canada (Ontario, 2020). Several Treaties providing treaty rights with First Nations and Métis communities also cover this area (Ontario, 2020).

Secondly, the GGH comprises two key regions: the Greater Toronto and Hamilton (GTAH) area and the Outer Ring (Ontario, 2020). The GTAH includes the regional municipalities of Halton, Peel, York, Durham, and the cities of Toronto and Hamilton. The GTAH, with a population of nearly 7.3 million, forms the core of the GGH urban agglomeration (Statistics Canada (a), 2021). The Outer Ring includes the counties of Brant, Dufferin, Haldimand, Northumberland, Peterborough, Simcoe, and Wellington, the cities of Barrie, Brantford, Guelph, Kawartha Lakes, Orillia, and Peterborough, and the regional municipalities of Niagara and Waterloo. The Outer Ring municipalities are generally considered less urban, less dense and populated and mainly experience less growth pressure than the GGH core (Ontario, 2020). The total 2021 population of the Outer Ring municipalities is 2.4 million, representing one-quarter of the entire GGH population. The GGH represents over 60 percent of Ontario's population (Statistics Canada (a), 2021).

Lastly, the *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* governs municipal growth, which aims to accommodate a projected 45 percent increase in Ontario's population by 2051 (Ontario, 2020; Hemson, 2020). This substantial growth has far-reaching implications for local municipalities, impacting land use planning, housing, infrastructure, and the economy, to name but a few. Consequently, the relationships between municipalities and the provincial government are becoming even more complex. Most recently, the Ontario government

passed Bill 3*, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022* and Bill 112, *the Hazel McCallion Act*, 2023, which have considerably impacted municipalities. For instance, Bill 3 granted strong mayor powers to 26 municipalities, mainly within the GGH. At the same time, Bill 112 resulted in the dissolution of the regional municipality of Peel, with Mississauga, Brampton, and Caledon becoming single-tier municipalities effective January 1, 2025.

The municipalities in the GGH region are facing immense changes that are shifting the governance structure and risking the fundamental tenets of local government, including good governance, democratic accountability, and the role of the CAO. Now more than ever, the CAO will require leadership skills to navigate this new environment, particularly the trifurcated nature of leading in three directions (Siegel, 2015; Fenn et al., 2023).

Fenn, McIntosh, and Siegel (2023) identified several themes from the culmination of "wisdom" shared by the contributors to *The Role of Canadian City Managers* that offer insight for aspiring and current leaders, councils, professional associations, and training institutions (p. 333). Those themes have significant relevance to this research paper, as the issues and findings raised in this paper intricately interconnect with much of the profound wisdom conveyed throughout the book. For example, City managers must continue to advance gender equity because "municipalities will benefit from having managerial leadership and workforces that more closely resemble the communities they serve and to accommodate new talent and skills" (Fenn et al., 2023, p.334). Regarding the requirement to lead in three directions, "leading out and working with local community groups will be an increasingly important and complex relationship for the city manager" (Fenn et al., 2023, p.338). The CAO needs to build a strong management team and "promote diversity of views around the senior management table … the best decisions will be made when there are diverse inputs into the decision-making process"

(Fenn et al., 2023, p.342). Personal mastery required of the CAO "means learning from others in that role, peer counsel, personal reflection, and the advice of a mentor … they will have to spend time developing external relationships and "get out of the kitchen" (Fenn et al., 2023, p.347).

Looking deeper into the data

The data used for this research is limited to publicly available information, which means that apart from the CAO's name and gender, there is very little information about their career paths, education, and professional experience. Consequently, comparing this data with the survey results from O'Flynn and Mau (2014) is less meaningful than it would have been if the data were available through a Canadian survey or membership database, similar to what is available through the ICMA.

As shown in Table 1, of the 110 municipalities in the GGH, women make up 37 percent of municipal CAOs. However, upon closer examination of the data, several noteworthy observations come to light.

Table 2: Gender Representation of GGH CAOs by Growth Area and Population.

	Provincial Growth Area			Population				
	GTAH	Outer Ring	Total GGH	0-25,000	25-100,000	100-500,000	500,000+	Total
Men	18	51	69	29	20	15	5	69
Women	12	29	41	25	8	4	4	41
% women	40%	36%	37%	46%	29%	21%	44%	37%
Total	30	80	110	54	28	19	9	110

As Table 2 illustrates, women are more likely to hold CAO roles in municipalities with populations under 100,000, consistent with O'Flynn and Mau's (2014) findings. CAOs in municipalities with populations over 100,000 are more likely to be men. Of the 41 municipalities with a woman CAO, 61 percent have populations below 25,000, compared to 42 percent of men

in CAO roles at municipalities under 25,000. Interestingly, gender representation of CAOs in municipalities with populations under 25,000 is close to parity, with 46 percent having a woman in the CAO role.

To gain a better insight, Table 4 illustrates the municipal backgrounds of CAOs and whether they came from administrative services or areas that provide services directly to the community. Just over half of women in CAO roles come from administrative backgrounds, such as finance and corporate services, compared with 41 percent from a direct services background (community services, planning, economic development, engineering). Of the 41 women CAOs, backgrounds are unknown for three CAOs either because the information was unavailable, or it appears the CAO role was their first role in the municipality. On the other hand, just over half of men in CAO roles came from direct service areas, and interestingly, two male CAOs previously held elected positions on a municipal council.

Another interesting observation of the data for this research is the length of time as a CAO and time spent in the municipal sector, as shown in Table 5. Nearly half of all CAOs in the GGH have held the role for less than five years, with women representing 44 percent of those in the role for less than five years. In the GGH, one-quarter of CAOs have been in the CAO role between five and ten years; less than 30 percent are women. One possible reason for the short tenure in CAO roles is retirements. O'Flynn and Mau (2014) noted a significant number of likely retirements within five years because over 40 percent of survey respondents were over 55, and 42 percent were within the age range of 45-55 years (p.157).

Over half of the GGH CAOs have been in the municipal sector for over twenty years; consistent with earlier research, 74 percent of these long-serving CAOs are men.

Consistent with other research, over 80 percent of CAOs with less than 15 years of experience are at the helm of municipalities in the Outer Ring, suggesting more opportunities in smaller and less urban municipalities for both genders interested in attaining CAO roles. It is worth noting that over half of CAOs with less than 15 years of experience are women, suggesting there has been an effort to increase women's representation in CAO roles. Conversely, women with over 20 years of municipal experience remain underrepresented at the CAO level, with women representing 32 percent. Even fewer of the CAOs with over 25 years of experience are women. Considering that 74 percent of CAOs with over 25 years of municipal experience are men and that over half of these seasoned CAOs are in the Outer Ring municipalities, it suggests that descriptions of the municipal CAO as being a member of the "old boys club" may describe the characteristic representation of CAOs in the Outer Ring.

Table 4: CAO representation by Service Area of Municipal Experience by Growth Area, Population, and Gender.

		Provincial Growth Area			Population					Gender		
		GTAH	Outer Ring	Total GGH	0-25,000	25-100,000	100-500,000	500,000+	Total	Men	Women	
Municipal Service Area of Experience	Administrative Services	11	38	49	28	11	8	2	49	28	21	43%
	Direct Services	19	34	53	22	14	10	7	53	36	17	32%
	Elected/Political	0	2	2	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	-
	Unknown	0	6	6	3	3	0	0	6	3	3	50%

Table 5: Length of Time as a Municipal CAO and Time in the Municipal Sector by Growth Area, Population, and Gender.

		Provincial Growth Area			Population					Gender		
		GTAH	Outer Ring	Total GGH	0-25,000	25-100,000	100-500,000	500,000+	Total	Men	Women	
Total Time as CAO	0-5 years	20	34	54	24	15	9	6	54	30	24	44%
	5-10 years	4	24	28	15	7	5	1	28	20	8	29%
	10-15 years	5	9	14	6	3	4	1	14	9	5	36%
	15-20 years	1	11	12	8	2	1	1	12	9	3	25%
	20-25 years	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	100%
	25+ years	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	-
Total Time in Municipal Sector	0-5 years	0	3	3	2	1	0	0	3	2	1	33%
	5-10 years	2	9	11	7	2	1	1	11	6	5	45%
	10-15 years	3	9	12	9	1	1	1	12	4	8	67%
	15-20 years	2	18	20	12	6	1	1	20	10	10	50%
	20-25 years	8	19	27	11	8	6	2	27	20	7	26%
	25+ years	15	20	35	11	10	10	4	35	26	9	26%
	n/a		2	2	2				2	1	1	50%

Table 6: Years of service in the municipal sector - comparison of gender representation of municipal CAOs in the GTAH and Outer Ring municipalities.

	Years in Municipal Sector							
GTAH	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25+	n/a	Total
Men	0	1	1	0	7	9	-	18
Women	0	1	2	2	1	6	-	12
% women	-	50%	67%	100%	13%	40%		40%
OUTER RING	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25+	n/a	Total
Men	2	5	3	10	13	17	1	51
Women	1	4	6	8	6	3	1	29
% women	33%	44%	67%	44%	32%	15%	50%	36%

Also interesting in Table 6 is that close to one-quarter of CAOs (26 of 110) researched for this paper have been in the municipal sector for less than fifteen years, three times more than reported by O'Flynn and Mau (2014) for Ontario. This finding could support O'Flynn and Mau's observation of pending retirements during their study (2014, p.157). Another possible consideration is a shift to hiring CAOs from outside the municipal sector, given that fourteen CAOs in the GGH have less than ten years of municipal experience (3 have less than five years of municipal experience).

Siegel (2015) describes the role of municipal CAO as unique in that it sits at the "pinch point" (p.50) between staff and council, and the broad scope of municipal services only makes the job that much more unique and complex. The Ontario Municipal Administrators Association (OMAA, 2019, p.3) states, "The CAO has critical responsibility to provide the highest-quality professional advice on behalf of the administration to council. "Beaty and Davis (2012) state, "Professionally trained administrators are critical to the operation and management of government agencies" (p. 617). As a profession, the municipal CAO requires highly skilled individuals with the knowledge, experience, and training to succeed in such a complex environment.

CAMA's toolkit for hiring a CAO includes "exemplary examples of best practices," including a sample job description for a City Manager (CAMA, 2015, p.1). The stated qualifications include post-secondary education related to "municipal service delivery" and a "minimum of ten years of senior administrative experience"; "graduate training in public administration" is an asset; enrolled or completion of a "certified local government management program"; and "demonstrated knowledge of the Municipal Government Act" (CAMA, 2015, p.11). With this in mind, qualified and capable candidates with the requisite municipal experience may be denied the opportunity in favour of an external candidate without municipal experience.

Table 7: Years of service as a municipal CAO - comparison of gender representation in the GTAH and Outer Ring municipalities

	Years as Municipal CAO							
GTAH	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25+	n/a	Total
Men	11	3	3	1	0	0	-	18
Women	9	1	2	0	0	0	-	12
% women	45%	25%	40%	0	0	0		40%
OUTER RING	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25+	n/a	Total
Men	19	17	6	8	0	1		51
Women	15	7	3	3	1	0		29
% women	44%	29%	33%	27%	29%	36%		36%
TOTAL	54	28	14	12	1	1		110
% women	44%	28%	36%	25%	100%	37%		37%

Table 7 examines the total length of time that the incumbent has been a municipal CAO, and when compared with the findings in Table 6, nearly 90% of the CAOs have over 20 years of municipal experience, yet 61% have been a municipal CAO for less than five years, and only 1 CAO in the GTAH has been a CAO for over 15 years. In comparison, 70 percent of the CAOs in the Outer Ring also have been in the role for less than ten years; the remaining 30 percent have

between 10 and 25+ years as a CAO. Of the 22 CAOs in the Outer Ring with over ten years of experience in the role, 68 percent are men. With incumbents remaining in the CAO role for long durations, aspiring CAOs will have to wait or be willing to relocate and follow the job opportunities, and mobility is one of the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the position.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

"The need for gender balance in public sector leadership should not be a contested proposition"
(DeHart-Davis et al., 2020, p.4).

Implications for Municipalities

Gender balance should be regarded as a fundamental value, not just a means to an end. The current underrepresentation of women in municipal CAO roles results from gender bias stemming from stereotypes and societal expectations about women's behaviour. Consequently, even if a woman is highly competent, she may not advance to the same organizational level as a similarly performing man.

The 41 women CAOs in municipalities across the *Greater Golden Horseshoe* have shown that the glass ceiling can be shattered. Nevertheless, women still face numerous obstacles, roadblocks, and dead ends in their career paths. These challenges cannot be overcome solely through training or policies; they require fundamental changes. It is essential to recognize that women navigate the workplace differently from men.

Achieving gender parity necessitates strong leadership and a steadfast commitment to transforming culture and society. Gender equality in the workplace is intrinsically linked to gender equality in society; as McKinsey (2017, p.8) asserted, "the former is not possible without the latter." In a recent study, the World Economic Forum (WEF) identified five critical success factors for initiatives promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion among underrepresented groups (WEF, 2023, p.57). These factors include understanding the root causes of underrepresentation, defining success meaningfully, having accountable and invested leaders, tailoring solutions to specific contexts, and implementing rigorous tracking and course corrections. The first step is figuring out where the "broken rung" is and taking steps to fix it (McKinsey, 2022). That starts

with identifying where the most significant promotion gap is for women in municipal leadership. Then, municipalities must commit to supporting women as they navigate the workplace and work to retain existing women in leadership roles.

Considerations for Future Research

Increasing representation of women in local government senior leadership positions is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable governance. While progress has been made in recent years, there are still many areas for future research to address the persistent gender disparities in this domain, especially in the Canadian context. There were many avenues I would have liked to explore further in this paper; however, that was not possible. One area, in particular, is examining women's experiences from diverse backgrounds, considering factors such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation to understand the intersectionality that exists entirely. Another consideration for future research is how family work policies may have unintended consequences that perpetuate gender imbalances. Lastly, research should focus on the long-term effects of increasing women's representation in municipal leadership positions, including the impact on policy outcomes, governance dynamics, and community development. By exploring these areas or delving further into any considerations addressed in this research report, researchers can contribute to evidence-based policymaking and help accelerate progress in achieving gender equality in municipal government, fostering more inclusive and effective governance for all.

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