

Women-Owned Small Businesses and Government Contracting:  
A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative case study is to identify barriers and challenges women small business owners (WOSBs) in the District of Columbia and the surrounding counties encounter during the United States Small Business Administration federal government contracting process. The general problem holds that women confront business challenges, especially when pursuing federal government contracts. Two theories guided this study: resource-based theory and socialist feminist theory. Additionally, two research questions were addressed, namely, *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for the Small Business Association (SBA) federal government contracts?* and *What strategies do WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring SBA federal government contracts?* The research sample for this qualitative case study was comprised of three African-American women between the ages of 35 and 50, who owned small businesses and have won at least one SBA federal government contract. One-on-one interviews and a focus group were conducted to allow the respondents to describe and discuss their experiences during the bidding and contracting process for federal contracts. During data analysis, four themes emerged: gender discrimination, pre-selection contract preference, business outreach and network development, and fostering contract officers' relationships. The respondents asserted that they had all experienced forms of gender discrimination during the bidding and contracting process and that the system encouraged pre-selection contract preference, meaning that contracts often went to previous awardees and to bigger businesses. Recommendations for practice should include training contracting officers to minimize perceptions leading to gender-based restricted competition to enhance WOSB contracting opportunities.

## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

While gender roles continue to change significantly, and Americans have articulated that individuals deserve equal opportunities regardless of gender, female leadership rights have plateaued (Adams, 2018). Although women have emerged as a formidable entrepreneurial group, Ficarra (2017) illuminated the stalling of gender equity growth in the 1990s and emphasized women experienced resistance when trying to make strides. Society must address the gender bias impacting female status, power, and security, resulting in female economic and social exclusion (Adams, 2018; Rhodes, 2014). Particularly, Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSBs) should receive equal participation opportunity in awarding federal government contracts, as well as recruitment efforts to meet the ongoing need for increased female engagement (Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017). A debate has surrounded WOSBs and the discrimination interfering with the securing of federal government contracts (Ayala, 2016; Wolfe, 2016). According to Mick and Greene (2015), administrators awarded nine contracts to WOSBs; in contrast, the administrators awarded 91 contracts to men-owned small businesses (MOSBs) in the same period. In 2007, a shortfall in the mandated requirements existed with only 3.8% of the contracts awarded to WOSBs. In 2016, women-owned 30% of the small businesses in the United States, but only 2.5% grew revenues or expanded beyond \$1 million (OECD, 2016; Wolfe, 2016). Although in 2016 WOSB government contract awards increased to 4.79% (SBA, 2017), MOSBs generated more revenue and produced a more profitable income than WOSBs (Wolfe, 2016). The focus of this study is to observe the female business owners' experiences in order to illuminate gender discrimination barriers to pursuing federal contracts.

Since the enforcement of the Women's Business Ownership Act of 1988, women's business ownership grew from 4.1 million to 8.6 million USD in 2013 (P.L. 100-533).

Additionally, the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act (FASA) law mandated 5% of federal government contract dollars annually go to WOSBs, but the government has met this goal only once in the act's 24-year existence—in 2016 (Herrington, 2016). For a country comprising 50% women, representing 35% of small business owners, meeting the 5% goal in awarding federal guidelines should not pose an onerous task (Herrington, 2016). In 2000, Congress passed the Equity in Contracting for Women Act (ECWA) to increase WOSB participation in the federal contract award process. The ECWA permits federal contracting officers to restrict competition to WOSBs, thus increasing the opportunities for females being awarded federal contract dollars.

The final rule, enacted in 2011, resulted from a 2005 U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce (USWCC) suit for not adhering to the ECWA (Mee, 2012). As part of the final rule, the SBA defined an economically disadvantaged WOSB as follows: a woman's income must be less than \$750,000, personal net worth should not exceed \$350,000 gross yearly income averaged over three years, and the fair market value of total assets cannot exceed \$6 million (Herrington, 2016). Furthermore, the new rule had to identify underrepresented WOSB industries; therefore, the SBA set a disparity ratio between 0.5 and 0.8 that depicts underrepresentation and a disparity ratio between 0 and 0.5 to identify substantial underrepresentation. The SBA identified 45 underrepresented industries and 38 industries substantially WOSB underrepresented (Herrington, 2016).

WOSBs would illustrate the fifth largest world GDP if they were a country, for they created 7.8 million businesses and generated \$3 trillion in revenue (Mee, 2012); however, WOSBs reflect less than 5% of annual federal contract awards (Ayala, 2016). The federal government, the biggest US buyer, buys billions of dollars of goods and services each year (Woods, 2017). However, WOSBs have continued to face barriers when competing for federal

contracts (Brown & Girth, 2018). According to Herrington (2016), the administration of the WOSB program has remained substandard, especially when compared to other programs such as the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) program. The SDVOSB program, created after the WOSB, surpassed its 3% goal. The goals of this study included understanding the WOSB personal experiences navigating the federal contract award process under the new legislation, such as ECWA, and understanding whether the initiative has helped women acquire federal contracting dollars.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The general problem is that women, especially minority females, continue to encounter gender-related business obstacles. Experts have portrayed pipeline problems in which women possess less human capital, training, and work experiences than men, causing this gender-representation gap (Northouse, 2019). Women experience fewer developmental opportunities and receive less encouragement. Female business owners in the DC area, the US federal government's home, experience these gender issues, posing barriers to federal contract acquisition.

Women operating DC businesses must navigate the federal government system when seeking new business opportunities, like federal government contracts. Existing legislation has inadequately facilitated WOSB government contract attainment (Welter et al., 2017). The ECWA passed in 2000 required certified WOSBs to receive a minimum of 5% of the contracts the federal government issued. As of 2015, the WOSB contract floor had yet to be attained (Wolfe, 2015); however, in 2016, the mandated 5% goal was achieved for the first time but that 5% goal has not been reached since then. The specific problem is to identify the barriers and

challenges women business owners in the DC and the surrounding areas encounter during the government contracting process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative case study is to illuminate obstacles and challenges minority women confront during the federal government contracting process. The study is a qualitative, in-depth analysis of the experiences of three African American women who own small businesses in the surrounding areas of DC area and have received at least one government contract. Through semi-structured interviews, the women's experiences with the process of applying for and receiving government contracts were described and discussed. Both the barriers they encountered and the strategies that they used to overcome those barriers were stressed as well.

Gender discrimination has limited WOSB government contract bidding, hence providing the context for exploring the challenges WOSBs face (Fernandez, Malatesta, & Smith, 2013). Women face various obstacles hindering federal contract procurement (Ficarra, 2017), revealing this study's intention. In an in-depth study conducted in Missouri and Kansas, Mick and Greene (2015) demonstrated women have remained under-represented in federal contracting, revealing the need to understand the barriers WOSBs face when seeking government contracts. Therefore, this study's findings could also clarify how to overcome the challenges and obstacles limiting female government contract attainment, thus improving WOSB potential to procure government contracts.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding this study entailed resource-based theory (RBT) (Barney, 1991, 2018; Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Holdford, 2018) and socialist feminist theory

(SFT) (DeVault, 2018; Murthy, 2014; Olesen, 2018). RBT relates institutional resources to business performance (Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014), engendering two assumptions: firms within an industry (or group) heterogeneously control diverse strategic resources, and resource mobility may not apply across firms (Holdford, 2018). Furthermore, heterogeneous resource immobility dynamically lasts for an undetermined time (Barney, 1991; 2018). RBT analyzes these two premises to determine sustained competitive advantage sources (Barney, 2018; Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Holdford, 2018).

According to Barney (1991, 2018), a firm's resources comprise its assets, like physical capital resources, human capital resources, and organizational capital resources (Zhao & Fan, 2018). Widely used in various fields, RBT displays how to leverage dissimilar resources to maximize outcomes (Palmatier, Dant, & Grewal, 2007; Zhao & Fan, 2018). Competitive advantage epitomizes when a firm implements a value-creating strategy the competition fails to use. A sustained competitive advantage occurs when the firm implements a value-creating strategy, and the competition fails to duplicate it (Barney, 1991; 2018; Palmatier et al., 2007). Zhao and Fan (2018) use RBT to investigate intangible technology resources, like reputation. Hence, this study will extend beyond the information science industry to analyze the intangible gender-biased reputational disparity between WOSBs and MOSBs that make it difficult to compete in the federal contract process and acquire resources. Since this research aims to unveil institutional resources promoting WOSB government contract acquisition, employing the RBT framework is appropriate.

Critical theories, like feminism, purport power influences knowledge production; therefore, reality forms via historical discourse, and hegemonic attitudes create structural conditions shaping reality. However, inherent gender power imbalances create tensions when

marginalized individuals question the disparities. The analytic frame oscillates (Weis & Fine, 2004), straining individual agency and broader economic, relational, political, and historical conditions initiate movement between theory and empirical data (DeVault, 2018; Weis & Fine, 2012). Thus, SFT analyzes gender's intersection with individual and group identity (Devault, 2018; Collins, 1998; Olesen, 2018) revealing diverse female situations the dominant patriarchal structures frame. Viewing a social issue through a feminist lens can reframe it for the observer, placing the problem in a new light (Olesen, 2018); thus, this new dialogue modifies how one talks about and addresses the problem (DeVault, 2018).

Given that the hegemonic business world exerts its male-dominated power over female actors, SFT proves relevant to WOSB marginalization in the federal contract award system (Adams, 2018). Social feminists believe societal and gender power relations negatively affect women's participation in the capitalist markets manifesting in unfair and gender-discriminatory practices; therefore, women miss opportunities to access decision-making power, reducing their ability to earn money (Adams, 2018; Bebel, 1910; Boxer, 2007; Conner, 2016; Ghodsee, 2007; Kabeer, 1994; Murthy & Rao, 1997; Murthy, 2014; Whitehead, 1979).

The gender-bias discussion is relevant to this study for it contributes to diminished WOSB performance in gaining government small business contracts. Coy (2016) opined gender discrimination engendered the ideological perception of MOSBs and WOSBs not being equal. Cuberes and Teignier (2014), consequently, claimed unequal perceptions have led to the disparate gender treatment. In addition to addressing the governmental prejudicial barriers, achieving equitable WOSB participation requires inclusiveness affording females a fair chance to thrive. Put differently, were it not for their gender, treatment or perception would have been different (Cuberes & Teignier, 2014). According to Garawi et al., (2014), the federal

government excludes WOSBs from contract opportunities based on female ownership, and this is the statement this research intends to investigate.

Table 1

*Small Businesses Growth Gender Comparison*

Business Type	Growth 1977-2007	Growth 2002-2007	Jobs 2002-2007	Employee change 2007-2012
Women	48	20.2	+500,000	+6.2
Men	12	5.2	-3,000,000	-2

*Source:* Adapted from “The Global Competitiveness Report 2016-2017,” by K. Schwab & S. Martin, 2016, World Economic Forum, Copyright by the World Economic Forum.

Table 1. shows the growth comparison of MOSBs and WOSBs. WOSBs from 1997 to 2007 have grown three times more than MOSBs.

Figure 1 shows WOSBs’ national competitiveness and economic opportunity. For instance, the WOSB national competitiveness score was 5.5 for the year 2013, while the economic opportunity was 92 (World Economic Forum, 2016).

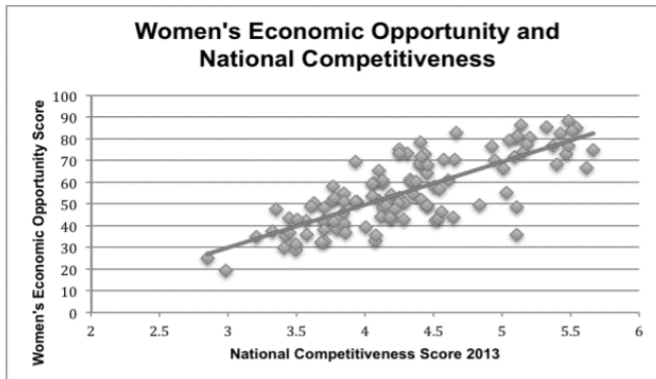


Figure 1. Women-owned small business national competitiveness and economics.

*Source:* Adapted from “USASpending.gov,” by Federal Procurement Data System Next Generation (FPDS-NG), 2018.

According to Bucher-Koenen et al., (2016), the gender bias WOSBs faced comprised appearing less financially able and inferior to MOSBs. Females were perceived to possess fewer



leadership skills and less experience than their male counterparts. The view of women as inexperienced hinders females seeking government contracts (Goffe & Scase, 2015; Wajcman, 2013). According to Akande (2013), another gender misconception remains the belief that WOSBs lack business acumen and strategic business networks, affording a competitive edge to MOSBs.

### **Nature of Study**

A qualitative descriptive case study approach explores minority WSOBs living and working in the surrounding areas of DC area and analyzes their lived experiences while securing federal government contracts and identifying the barriers encountered during the process. Conducting this qualitative study creates new opportunities to discover insights and themes regarding the female population owning small businesses, as well as an opportunity to view the problem and potential solutions through the lens of the RBT. A qualitative study allows the researcher to obtain a thick description of the phenomena more than what is possible with a quantitative study (Yin, 2014).

Previous experts such as Yin (2018) have supported qualitative case study research as an effective strategy that allows an investigation to explore and explain real-life events/complex phenomena. This case study attends to the complex nature of real-world business gender-biased structures. Through cyclically iterating theory-based reflection analysis and refinement, the researcher aims to produce principles to improve the WOSB experience securing federal contracts (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Therefore, the qualitative case study research represents the best method of answering the questions posed in this research and has the potential to provide a unique contribution to the federal contracting process and society. Differences regarding the casework, case history, and case method exist (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Yazan (2015) asserted a case study remains different because of its unique distinctive attributes: “Particularistic (focuses on particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon); Descriptive (yields a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study); Heuristic (illuminates the reader’s understanding of phenomenon under study)” (p. 139).

The study research sample comprises three minority, African-American women between the ages of 35 and 50 who owned small businesses and have won at least one federal government contract. WOSBs depict a small minority group; however, minority WOSBs add the racial layer to their experience. In the year 2001, WOSBs received only 2.5% of the government contracts; six years later in 2007, women received a mere 3.8% of the contracts and in 2014, only 4.68% of the contracts were awarded to women. Beede and Rubinivitz (2016) analyzed 500 businesses from various industries and found of the 365 small business owners who applied for government contracts, 286 represented WOSBs. The federal government awarded a total of 100 contracts, only 4% of which went to WOSBs.

The focus is on WOSBs securing at least one federal government contract to better illustrate the experiences throughout the entire bid and award process. Research questions are created to address specifically whether WSOBs encountered barriers or discrimination when pursuing federal government grants. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with the women asking open-ended questions, along with a sample copy of their awarded federal contract to understand the process, if available; furthermore, researcher memos are the data sources collected from the three participants to better document the researcher’s notes and ideas throughout the interview (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008; Brinkman, 2018; Galetta, 2013 ).

## Research Questions

The researcher uses the following questions to better understand the barriers that may prevent WOSBs from acquiring government contracts.

**RQ1.** *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for federal government contracts?*

**RQ2.** *What strategies do WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring federal government contracts?*

## Significance of the Study

This qualitative exploration into the experiences of minority WOSBs who have acquired a federal government contract remains significant for identifying factors contributing to the federal contract allocation inequality. This study adds to the literature on gender and racial discrimination and offers solutions to facilitate the provision of a suitable platform for WOSBs. Imperatively, the gleaned information from this dissertation could provide pivotal guidance to the stakeholders who work in tandem with contracting agencies and WOSBs improving potential barriers to awareness. The results from this study could also aid WOSB strategy development.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Discrimination.** According to Novo-Corti et al. (2014), discrimination demonstrates social exclusion, a process through which individuals are blocked from enjoying various resources, rights and opportunities.

**Federal contract.** This represents a mutual agreement enabling the payments for goods and services between the federal government and business entities (Snider, Rendon, & Idalou, 2013).

**Inequality.** Inequality depicts the state of failing to be the same in all aspects (Ostry et al., 2014). This study seeks to investigate whether WOSBs are treated and perceived similarly to MOSBs in government contracting opportunities.

**Stereotype.** McKinnon (2014) defines stereotype as an oversimplified idea about a particular thing, person, or group of people. This study seeks to establish the extent of harm caused by societal stereotypes on WOSBs.

**Capital.** In this study, the term capital refers to the initial resources (financial, assets, and human) required to execute an entrepreneurial venture. The researcher seeks to investigate whether capital influences WOSBs, particularly in government contracting.

**Government Policy.** According to Obaji and Olugu (2014), government policy portrays a statement of declaration of how the government's activities and plans should proceed. Entrepreneurship typifies an issue of primary government concern, as, among other reasons, it influences the rate of unemployment.

**Request for Quote (RFQ).** A request for quotation signifying a process to invite suppliers into bidding on a specific opportunity.

**Indefinite Delivery & Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ).** A type of contract that provides for an indefinite quantity of suppliers or services during a fixed period.

**Subcontractor.** A company or an individual the prime contractor or project owner hires to complete a certain task.

**Prime Contractor.** The company or individual who undertakes to perform a complete contract with full responsibility for its completion.

**Request for Proposal (RFP).** Documentation that solicits proposal, often made through a bidding process (sba.gov).

## Summary

Williams (2015) has shown that discrimination in the awarding of federal government contract opportunities for WOSBs exists. This study uses a qualitative approach to investigate this claim and facilitate the execution of interviews for the participants (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Additionally, the theoretical frameworks of RBT and SFT guide this study. A firm's resource base can be defined as the corporation's resources leveraged to gain a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; 2018; Holdford, 2018). SFT depicts societal and gender power relations manifesting in gender-based discriminatory practice adversely affecting female participation in the capitalist markets; therefore, women miss opportunities to access decision-making power and conduct money-earning business (Bebel, 1910; Boxer, 2007; DevValut, 2018; Ghodsee, 2007; Kabeer, 1994; Murthy & Rao, 1997; Murthy, 2014; Olesen, 2018; Whitehead, 1979). Chapter 2 contains an exhaustive literature review. The research sample for the study comprises three minority, African-American women between the ages of 35 and 50, who owned small businesses and have won at least one federal government contract. These women were chosen because they owned businesses and does business within the federal government. The study focuses on WOSBs who have secured at least one federal government contract to better illustrate the female experience throughout the bidding and award process. This study adds to the literature on gender discrimination and offers solutions to provide a suitable platform for WOSBs to earn government contracts. Imperatively, the gleaned information from this dissertation could pivotally guide stakeholders who work in tandem with contracting agencies and improve WOSBs awareness of the gender-based barriers.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter comprehensively discusses the empirical literature related to the study themes. The review introduces the study followed by a detailing of the gender-discriminatory framework WOSBs face when seeking federal government contracts. Additionally, the discussion includes barriers leading to WOSB social exclusion in seeking federal government contracts. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the existing gaps revealed in the prevailing research influencing discrimination conceptualization against WOSB in federal government contracting.

The researcher uncovered topics using the following keywords and phrases: *women-owned small business, federal government contract, federal government bidding, discrimination in federal government contracting, US legislation on federal government contracting, women entrepreneur, entrepreneurship among women, resource-based view, resource-based theory, Barney, resource-based theory and women-owned small business, feminism and business, gender equality in business, investment in women-owned business, international women-owned business, business networks, education level of women in business, District of Colombia startup community, District of Colombia small business administration, Washington metropolitan startup community, Washington metropolitan small business administration, women-owned business statistics, and qualitative research in business*. Databases used to search the literature include Digital Commons, Data USA, Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), Library of Congress, ResearchGate, United States Small Business Administration, Northcentral University Library, ProQuest Dissertations, Google Scholar, United States Women's Chamber of Commerce, United States Chamber of Commerce, Eric (EBSCO), and U.S. Government Publishing Office's Federal Digital Service. Peer-reviewed articles were searched from 1975 to

2018. The goal of this qualitative descriptive case study is to uncover barriers WOSBs face during the federal contracting process to increase female chances of acquiring federal contract awards.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bryson (2016) articulated that engaged theory gains societal comprehension to “challenge and change it” (p. 1). The researcher relies on two theories: the resource-based theory (RBT) (Barney, 1991, 2018; Holdford, 2018) and the socialist feminist theory (SFT) (Bebel, 1910; Devault, 2018; Ghodsee, 2007; Oleson, 2018; Weiss & Fine, 2004; Zetkin, 1889) to frame this study, including the research questions, research process, and analysis.

**Resource-based theory.** RBT, used extensively since the year 1991 (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001; Barney, 1991, 2018; Barney, White, & Ketchen, 2001, 2011; Das & Teng, 2000; Grant, 1996, 1999; Holdford, 2018; Newbert, 2007), engenders the way a firm builds its business using available resources as well as resources that can be acquired. RBT tenets reside on two assumptions: firms within an industry (or group) heterogeneously control strategic resources and resources do not maintain mobility across firms (Barney, 1991, 2018). RBT posits an institution can achieve sustained competitive advantage leveraging its unique resources (Barney, 1991, 2018; Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Holford, 2018).

According to Barney (2018), a firm’s physical capital resources include the physical office, plant, technology, geographic location, and access to raw materials to implement strategies. Human capital resources entail the training, experience, skills, knowledge, insight of managers and workers, and relationships among them (Barney, 2018; Holford, 2018).

Organizational capital resources include the firm’s formal reporting structure, operational systems, formal and informal planning, and relationships between groups inside the firm as well

as outside (Adams, 2018). A firm leverages strengths and accesses its resources to improve efficiency and effectiveness to create strategies garnering value to realize its competitive advantage (Barney, 2018). A firm’s weaknesses and liabilities exemplify resources preventing business growth and reducing effectiveness and efficiency (Barney, 2018).

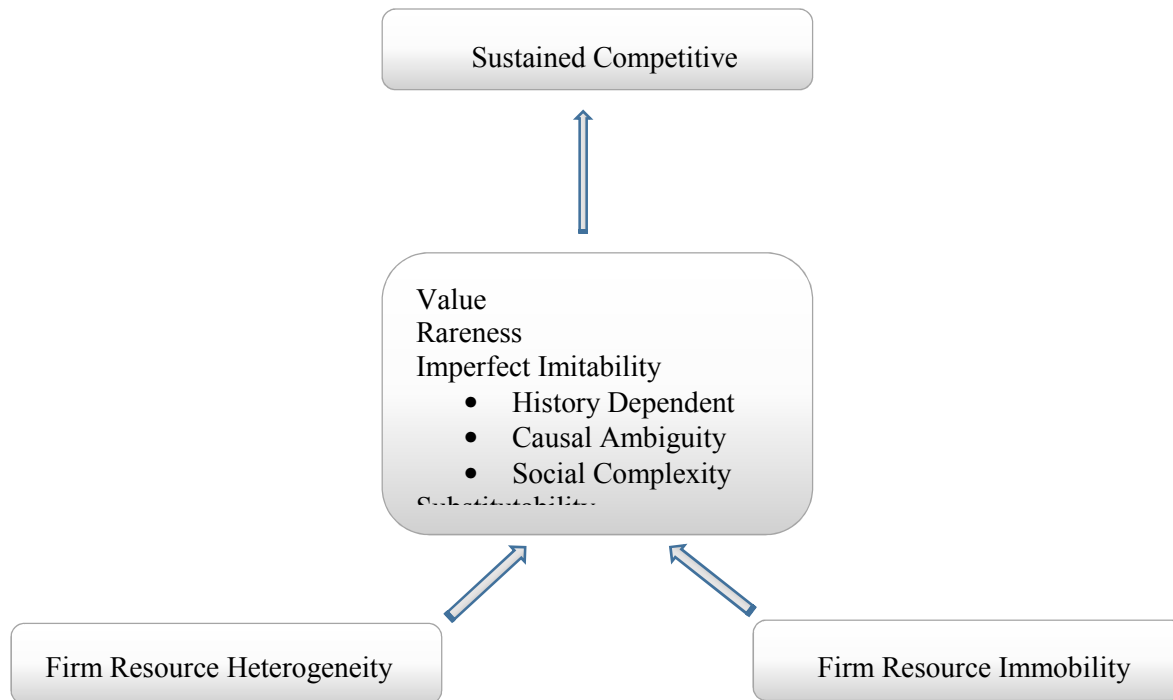


Figure 2. Resource-based view theory model.

Source: Adapted from “Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage,” by J. Barney, 1991, *Journal of Management*, 17(1), pp. 99-120.

In an industry containing heterogeneous corporations, the first-mover firm implementing a value-creating strategy realizes the sustained competitive advantage (Holford, 2018). For example, when Apple released the innovative iPhone in 2007, it rose to an industry leader creating a new mobile phone, a smartphone, to enhance cell phones beyond making phone calls and playing games. Years later, Samsung competed with Apple by introducing cheaper



smartphones. However, until Samsung posed a challenge, Apple maintained a sustained competitive advantage over its mobile phone competitors.

First-mover advantages pose barriers to entry into industries. According to Barney (2018), barriers to entry exist because of the unequal resources of heterogeneous firms. For example, institutions accessing the industry implement different strategies than established corporations. Explained further, an external business fails to possess the same resources a firm inside the industry garners; therefore, an outside business remains unable to implement the same value-creating strategies (Barney, 2018). This theoretical point is critical to this research study because WOSBs face barriers when entering the federal government contracting process. Acquiring resources to better compete in their industry remains a goal for WOSBs participating in the federal government contracting process.

**Socialist Feminist Theory.** Seminal authors of the socialist feminist theory (SFT) include Bebel (1910) and Zetkin (1889), as well as modern researchers such as Barney (2018) and Holford (2018). The SFT argues that women remain disadvantaged due to gender power differentials, restricting female participation. Societal institution access inequality hinders women from achieving decision-making power as well as denying entrance into capitalist markets (Bebel, 1910; DeVault, 2018; Ghodsee, 2007; Oleson, 2018; Weiss & Fine, 2004; Zetkin, 1889). Zetkin declared on Bastille Day 1889, “the emancipation of women, together with that of all humanity, will take place only with the emancipation of labor from capital.”

According to Devault (2018), capitalism and patriarchal structures intersect to subordinate females, and SFT experts seek to dismantle the misconceived perceptions to redefine male-dominated economic frameworks oppressing females. Feminism developed in three historical waves: the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; the 1960s and Vietnam War; and the 1990s

(Gamble, 2001), occurring in several societal contexts such as the United States and the United Kingdom and developing countries like Eastern Europe (Ghodsee, 2007). According to Eisenstein (1999), capitalism interrelated with patriarchy expressed through a sexual labor division epitomizes socialist feminism.

Feminism, derived from Western suffrage, engenders what Zetkin (1889) described as the bourgeois women's movement, rooted in a capitalist society (Ghodsee, 2007). Bourgeois feminism, similar to cultural feminism, spread through the West after the fall of communism in the late 1980s; however, this failed to account for the oppressive factors affecting Eastern European women in socialist countries (Ghodsee, 2007). Western feminism seeks to incorporate equally women into capitalist markets and challenges structures oppressing women, such as patrilineal inheritance (Engels, 1978) and female opportunity restriction in a male-dominated capitalistic market (Adams, 2018). Feminists such as Daly (2016) argued women and men remain equal, and societies should desist from sexism and patriarchy. In other words, a feminist theoretical approach to gender inequality targets male domination to eradicate gender inequalities. Benjamin (2013) acknowledged gender inequality based on feminism affected the bonds of love between individuals to a considerable extent, especially because one perceived the other as inferior or superior.

The researcher explores negative barriers as they relate to women participating in capitalist markets through owning small businesses and receiving markedly fewer government contract than MOSBs. The researcher also attempts to uncover adverse, but correctable, themes making the federal contracting process discriminatory. Finally, the researcher asks the WOSB participants to advise other WOSBs going through the federal bidding process on how to attain

more federal contracts. Figure 7 diagrams discrimination and social exclusion framework identified as challenges WOSBs face in federal government contract acquisition (Coy, 2016).

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to identify and discuss barriers WOSBs face during SBA federal contracts awards, concentrating on prejudicial barriers. Koellinger, Minniti, and Schades (2013) influences the conceptualization framework for this descriptive case study

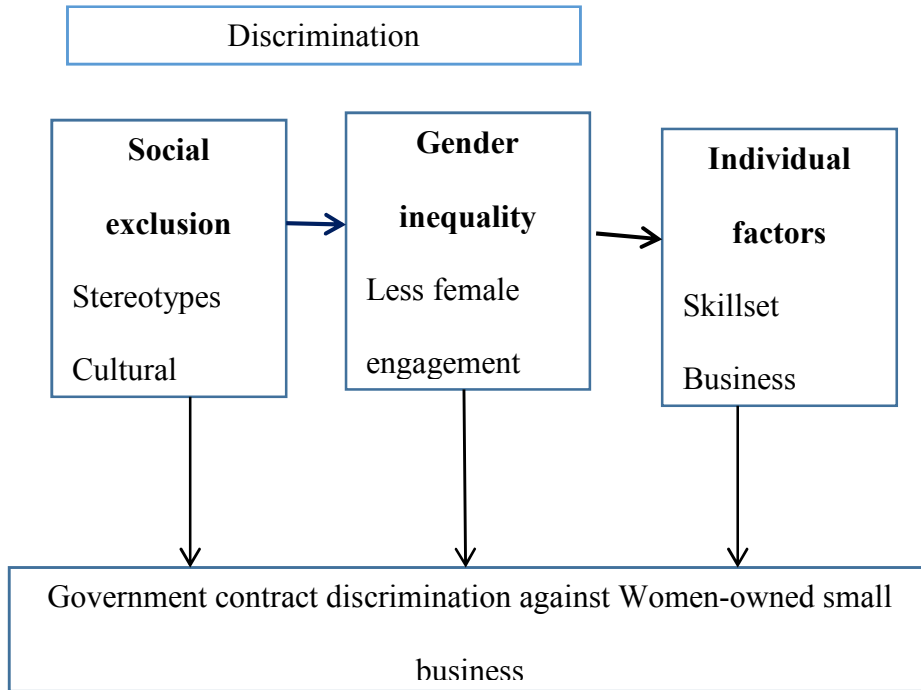


Figure 3. Federal government contract small business owner gender discrimination.

Source: Conceptual framework created by researcher (2018).

on gender disparity affecting entrepreneurial propensity. The researchers surveyed participants in 17 countries to understand gender barriers when starting a new business. Koellinger et al. (2013) contended women in all the countries lacked confidence in their ability to succeed at business. Females had different networks than males, impacting entrepreneurial success. Finally, women feared failure more than the men. The results from their research supported the study framework, providing a knowledge base upon which to build. While Koellinger et al. (2013) observed businesswomen’s global representation, this study expands their results with research

and outcomes obtained from WOSBs who have pursued and have earned federal government contracts.

Investigating representative bureaucracy theory (Brunjes & Kellough, 2018; Fernandez et al., 2013), the researcher explores whether federal agency gender representation increases predicted WOSB contract award dollars. According to Mosher (1968), the representative bureaucracy theory illustrates representation type: passive representation, with characteristics such as race, class, education, and gender, as well as active representation, like bureaucracy members, foment the group interest to which they belong (Brunjes & Kellough, 2018). For example, women bureaucratic members would promote the interests of other females, for experts have revealed a positive relationship between passive and active representation regarding gender (Keiser et al., 2002; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2005). The theory can be assumed as the following (Fernandez et al., 2013):

[M]embers of social groups undergo similar experiences; as a result, members of the same racial and gender groups hold similar values and beliefs; in turn, members of these groups that hold discretionary decision-making authority are inclined to act in ways to advance other members of their group. Based on this set of assumptions, researchers have examined if and when passive representation, or demographic congruence, leads to active representation (p. 10).

Additionally, Koellinger et al. (2013) explored small business owners based on culture and gender where gender differences impacted on the small business propensity, which MOSBs and WOSBs perceived differently. WOSBs' prejudices may hinder them from applying for government contracts (Ficarra, 2017).

## Women-Owned Small Businesses

Women-owned small businesses engender businesses maintaining at least 51% female ownership (Fernandez et al., 2012). The SBA (2017) further adds a WOSB is also “directly and unconditionally owned and controlled by one or more women who are citizens (born or naturalized) of the United States” (p. 1). Finally, the definition of “small” varies by industry and is determined either by average annual receipts or the average employment of a firm (Small Business Size, n.d.). In the United States, WOSBs comprise approximately 30% of the firms, but only 2.5% of these WOSBs grew beyond \$1 million as of 2001 (OECD, 2016; Wolfe, 2016). According to Calmes (2016), in 1997 the number of WOSBs accounted for 26% of small businesses with a 7% share of employment and 4.4% of revenues (American Express, 2017). In 2017, the numbers grew, with WOSBs accounting for 30% of US businesses, contributing 4.2% of business revenues, and employing 8% of the workforce in the private sector (American Express, 2017). As of January 2017, an estimated 11.6 million women-owned businesses operated in the US, employing about nine million people and generating more than \$1.7 trillion in the form of revenues (American Express, 2017).

The range and extent of American WOSB entrepreneurial activity have grown from 5% in 1970 to more than 38% in 2000 (Krook & True, 2012). These businesses employ 27.5 million workers and yield revenue of \$3.6 trillion. American WOSBs have continued to create new businesses at 2 to 3 times the rate of their male counterparts (Saridakis, Marlow, & Storey, 2014). Comparatively, in Britain, between 1982 and 1987, while MOSBs increased 30%, the number of WOSBs rose 70%, entailing one-quarter of business activity (Krook & True, 2012). In Japan, almost 23% of the businesses are WOSBs (Welsh, Memili, Kaciak, & Ochi, 2014).

Worldwide, the WOSB growth equals or exceeds MOSB growth in seven countries, according to GEM 2004 data (Azmat, 2013).

### **WOSB and Government Contracting**

WOSBs represent some of the fastest growing businesses (NWBC, 2014). Government contracts provide unique opportunities, which WOSBs can utilize to expand their businesses, as well as create jobs during tough economic times. In addition, these contracts provide great growth potential to their businesses, plus an ongoing income source for their families. Active WOSBs perform equally to MOSBs regarding revenue and employment opportunities. Furthermore, they have remained active in government contracting with an average investment of 59% (Wolfe, 2015). In spite of WOSBs' progression, WOSBs still face challenges in winning federal government contracts and must overcome additional gender-related barriers MOSBs do not face.

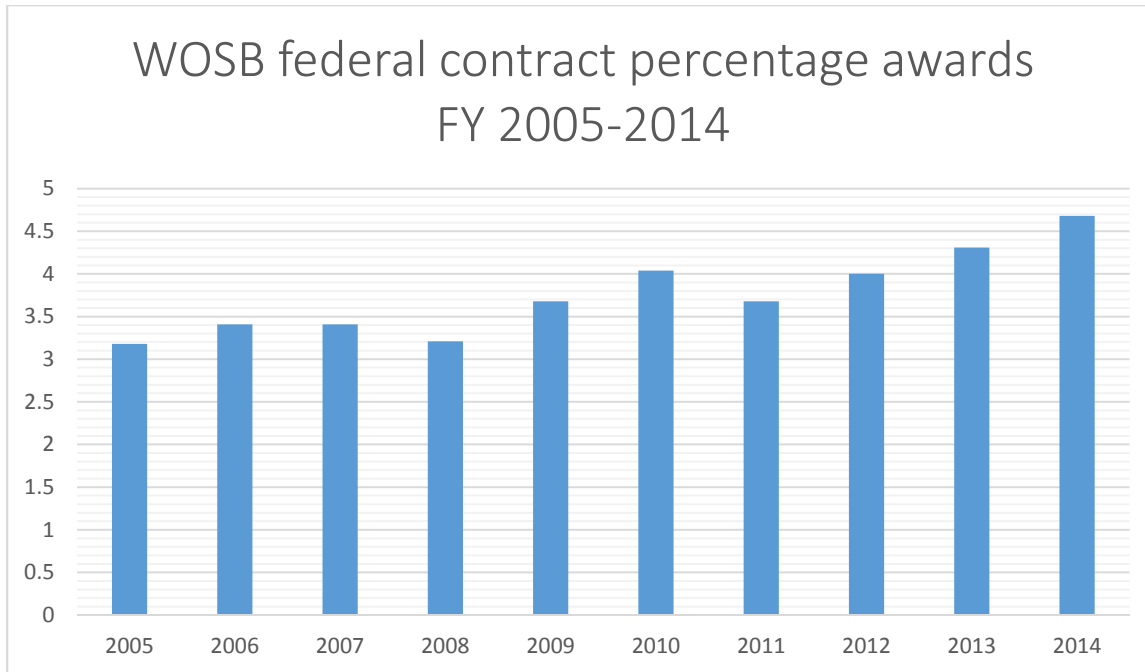
While exploring the bidding activity, WOSBs and other minority businesses reportedly take a significantly more active role in the process (Cantwell, 2014). Businesses wishing to compete for government contracts must register as potential contractors, filling out an online form in the System for Award Management (SAM) of the General Services Administration (GSA) of the US federal government (Center for Women in Business, 2014).

Earning an SBA federal government contract has proven arduous. According to Calmes (2016), the chances of a WOSB winning a government contract falls approximately 21% below similar ventures. Additionally, the steps in place to correct the disparity have failed to make noteworthy progress. However, the proportion of federal contract dollars ending up with WOSBs has risen to 4.68 % in 2014 from 4% in 2011. WOSBs, described as companies which have one or more women who own 51% of the company, represent approximately one-third of

American companies (SBA, 2018; Wolfe, 2015). Of the 600,000 small businesses operating in 304 industrial categories, WOSBs constitute 20% (SBA, 2018). WOSBs have remained extremely small and lack government contracting experience. According to Calmes (2016), WOSBs are less likely to acquire government contracts compared to similar MOSBs (Ayala, 2016).

Presently, efforts have attempted to improve WOSBs' chances of earning government contracts; however, their impact has remained limited (Ayala, 2016; Brunjes & Kellough, 2018; Wolfe, 2016). Wolfe (2015) corroborated 5% of the United States contracts should be awarded to WOSBs based on the ECWA passed in 2000 to counteract the historically male-dominated government-contract system. The 5% set-aside aimed to reduce government contract and award gender inequities (NWBC, 2014); unfortunately, the 5% WOSB procurement mandate has achieved a dismal success rate (Wolfe, 2016).

In the year 2001, WOSBs received 2.5% of government contracts; six years later in 2007, women earned 3.8% of the federal contracts, and in 2014 WOSBs acquired 4.68% of the contracts, as shown in *Figure 4*. In 2016, SBA report that WOSB are more likely to win 21% less of government contracts compared to similar firms not owned by women (SBA, 2016). In particular, the Department of Defense (DoD) reflected the steepest shortfall amongst government agencies (NWBC, 2014). In 2014, WOSBs obtained only 1.5% of awards the DoD offered (NWBC, 2014).



*Figure 4.* WOSB federal contract percentage awards 2005-2014.

*Source:* Adapted from “New Commerce Study Shows Women-Owned Businesses Making History but Still Significantly Less Likely to Win Federal Contracts,” by Economics & Statistics Administration, United States

Figure 4 shows an increase in the percentage of federal contracts awarded to WOSBs in 2005-2014. In 2005, the percentage of the federal contracts awarded to a WOSB was 3.18%. For the first time in 2014, the percentage of federal contracts awarded to females was 4.68% (FPDS.gov). Contracting officers do not apply personal discretion for restricted competition to heighten WOSB contracting opportunities, for no incentives exist to extend more contracts to WOSBs (Coleman et al., 2014), and the government encounters no consequences if it fails to adhere to the 5% ECWA law. Hence, contract official and enforcement framework laxity exacerbate the gender-biased contract award system (Coleman et al., 2014). Researchers observed MOSBs received five times more funding than WOSBs (Coleman et al., 2014) since the complex WOSB goals associated with small business contracting federal burdened



contracting officials (Wolfe, 2016); hence, WOSBs have continued to face discrimination barriers when pursuing federal contract awards.

This study intends not only to examine the financial and gender-related barriers WOSBs confront when seeking government contracts but also to glean from WOSBs who have secured a federal government contract ideas to help other WOSBs in growing their businesses. Although access to clients typifies one reason WOSBs expand more slowly, WOSBs also lack the larger customer group connections men possess.

This client dearth has restricted WOSB potential. According to Daugherty (2014), discrimination refers to the artificial attitudinal barriers, informally and unofficially acknowledged (Harrison et al., 2015), hindering a certain group (primarily based on protected characteristics) from excelling in a particular career. Likewise, McKinnon (2014) defined stereotype as an oversimplified idea about a particular thing, person, or individual group. Saul (2013) expanded upon the definition to purport besides being oversimplified, an idea or image must remain popular for it to form into a stereotype. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the widely held perceptions about WOSBs in government contracting, as well as the unofficially acknowledged obstacles restricting WOSBs from securing government contracts.

According to Enid and Maniraj (2013), discrimination has barred WOSBs from garnering success, since WOSBs that acquire government contracts generate more revenue and produce more profitable income than WOSBs without lucrative government contracts. Artificial and unofficial standards not only hinder female success in seeking government contract opportunities but also perpetuate economic gender-based inequality. Therefore, focusing on women earning SBA federal government contracts does not imply that gender discrimination only affects WOSBs, for gender disparity reflects a global problem (Curry, 2016). Vossenber (2013)

suggested the stereotypical barriers and discrimination severity for females becoming small business owners depended on the environmental context; WOSBs pursuing government contract opportunities in developing countries (especially in Africa and Asia) faced more barriers than their counterparts in developed countries ((De Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014).

Over the last decade, researchers have highlighted the challenges and obstacles WOSBs have confronted compared to other small businesses (Eptureanu & Ceptureanu, 2015; Finkle, Menzies, Kuratko, & Goldsby, 2013; Fritsch & Storey, 2014; McCann & Ortega-Argiles, 2016). Other researchers have attempted to drill down to WOSB in specific localities (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Azmat, 2013; Belwal, Belwal, & Al Saidi, 2014; Bullough et al., 2017; Carter et al., 2015; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Logan, 2014). However, research studies have failed to focus extensively on the hindrances and challenges WOSBs face that contribute to the insufficiently awarded government-contract opportunities. Carter et al. (2015) showed that from 2010 to 2015, men owned 90% of the American businesses funded during that period (Ayala, 2016). Conroy and Weilere (2015) displayed a large capital disparity between female- and male-owned businesses, as women received only 10% of venture funds. During 2014, WOSBs accounted for 30% of small business sectors, but only 4.68% of these WOSBs had their businesses grow beyond \$1 million (OECD, 2016), revealing the need for research to determine the inequities and how to address them.

According to Cantwell (2014), WOSBs have faced unequal access to opportunities for government contracting despite the passage of The Small Business Reauthorization Act in 2010, meant to mitigate gender disparity in government contracting. The government reportedly awarded contracts to WOSBs in excess of \$500 billion; however, WOSBs had not earned more than 4.7% of government contracts in a fiscal year (Cantwell, 2014). Procurement programs

under WOSB created numerous training and educational resources as well as government contract portioning to aid WOSBs, but contract procurement capability has remained paltry (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Although gender bias presents inadequate opportunities for WOSBs to obtain government contracts, a one percent shortfall reflecting an estimated \$4 billion (Cantwell, 2014) elucidates WOSB economic revenue loss (Doh & Quigley, 2014).

Demoralizing women from applying for government contracts, most countries set thresholds for WOSB contract prices. For example, before the US 5% ECWA legislation came into effect, WOSBs could not exceed \$4 million for any contract type (NWBC, 2014). The strict eligibility requirements requiring a firm to be at least 51% owned and managed by one or more women also limits females seeking government contracts, and businesses meeting these requirements account for 30% of American companies (Cantwell, 2014). Legislation supporting WOSBs has depicted how male-dominated government contracting system (Mick & Greene, 2015) might engender cultural issues presenting negative circumstances. Calmes (2016) illustrated in 304 industry categories, women owned 20% of businesses. In 2001, WOSBs received 2.5% of government contracts while six years later, the number increased to 3.8% of the contracts (Wolfe, 2016). Calmes (2016) acknowledged that, while growth existed in contracts awards, the federal government fell short in allocating the required 5% to WOSBs. In 2014, the 20th consecutive year in which the government did not meet the 5% requirement (Coleman et al., 2014), the government awarded only 4.68% of the contracts to women (SBA, 2017).

Figure 5 portrays the ratio of MOSBs and WOSBs applying for federal contracts in 2007 and 2016, comparing how the number of female applicants has changed over the last few decades; WOSB applicants amounted to 20-30% in 2007 and grew to almost 45-48% in 2016 (NAWBO, 2017). While this progression shows that WOSBs have emerged over the last few decades to more actively participate in government contracting, WOSBs are not on par with

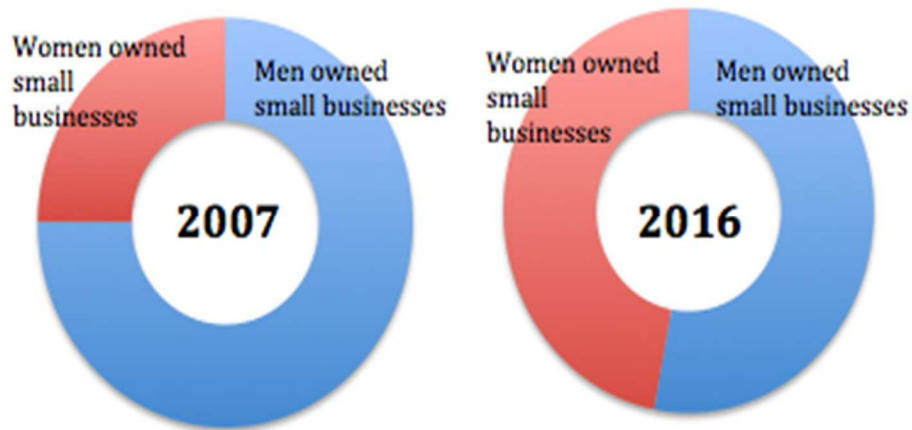


Figure 5. Small business owner government contracts applications gender breakdown.

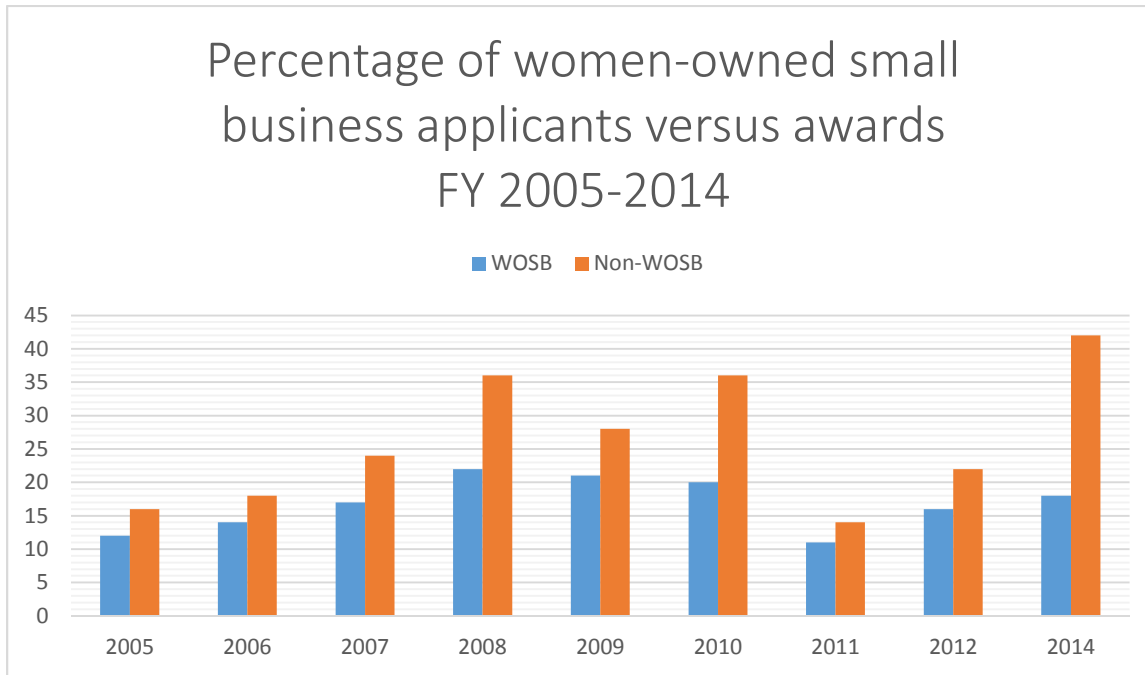
Source: Adapted from “National Association of Women Business Owners Media,” by NAWBO, 2017.

MOSB applicants. WOSB applicants have increased, but WOSBs have realized no encouraging change in receiving federal contracts. Only 2-5% of the WOSBs are awarded federal contracts annually (Ayala, 2016). Figure 6 clarifies award rates for WOSBs versus non-WOSBs, regarding applications for NASA contracts, a government contracting group. Furthermore, this graph shows that the gap widened dramatically in 2014.

### **Odds by Industry**

The most common obstacle WOSBs faced was appropriate senior support expertise needed for scaling their business and accessing capital. WOSBs tend to be in lower growth

industries, such as service-based sectors or retail, perceived as unreliable companies from which investors abstain. Krook and True (2012) indicated WOSBs more commonly have business models in which the funding organization has not invested previously.



*Figure 6.* Women-owned small businesses applicants versus awards 2005–2014.  
*Source:* Adapted from “Chapter 6 Participation of Women and Minorities SBIR at NASA,” by the National Academies of Sciences (NASA), 2016. Copyright by the National Academy of Sciences.

*Figure 6* represents the success rate of WOSBs and non-WOSBs during the period 2005-2014 regarding government applications for contracts from NASA (no data provided for 2013). *Figure 6* also presents information showing that non-WOSBs have a higher success rate and the gap has continued to widen. In 2006, the gap between WOSBs and non-WOSBs was around 5%, but in 2014, the gap had grown to around 25%.

Market opportunities have allowed WOSBs to set up enterprises in diverse fields, ranging from herbal product manufacturing and dressmaking to computers, electronics, chemicals, bio-

products, plastics, engineering goods, and industrial security (Azmat, 2013). WOSBs tend to be smaller and younger; therefore, while controlling for firm characteristics, such as size and age, WOSBs remain less likely to secure government contracts (National Women's Business Council, 2012). According to Calmes (2016), WOSBs in the U.S. and other countries stood a 35% less chance of acquiring federal government contracts as compared to the MOSBs (Calmes, 2016).

According to Beede and Rubinovitz (2015), of 109 industries representing 36% of industries, WOSBs demonstrated lower odds of obtaining government contracts. These 109 industries represented 62% of the dollars the government allocated. Concurrently, in an additional 145, constituting 48% of the 304 industries, the percentage of winning contracts remained lower than non-WOSBs but not significantly.

### **Government Contracting Gender Inequality**

Haberkern et al. (2015), who conducted a detailed European analysis, claimed MOSBs garnered more advantages than their WOSBs counterparts, who seemed to be more expressive in terms of their access to federal contracts (Haberkern et al., 2015). As such, the two categories of individuals were less likely to do the same jobs, hence the difference in wage rates. WOSBs felt males maintained a competitive edge because officials in federal government contracting preferred businesses capable of performing the job as opposed to corporations possessing the ability to express themselves. Jayawardena (2016) asserted that, worldwide, women accept their inferior feminine position, and men accept their superior masculinity status. Moreover, women from developing countries have encountered difficulties entering the formal labor market (De Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014). Even when they have the ability and knowledge to start a business, incentives and opportunities often present unfavorable conditions (Sharma, 2015).

## WOSB Government Contracting Barriers

Based on the arguments of Zimmerman (2016), a growth area among WOSBs is the federal government, because the federal government represents the largest global buyer of goods and services. However, WOSBs face a myriad of barriers, including discrimination, hindering equal access to government contract opportunities. A reason for achieving the goal of awarding 5% of government contracts to WOSBs has remained the complex requirements of small business contracting programs crowding out WOSBs (Van Auken & Horton, 2015). Additionally, Goltz, Buche, and Pathak (2015) identified challenges WOSBs have confronted, namely restrictions to financing, work-family conflicts hinging on gender-role expectations, inequitable regulatory expectations, and lack of resources such as education and childcare.

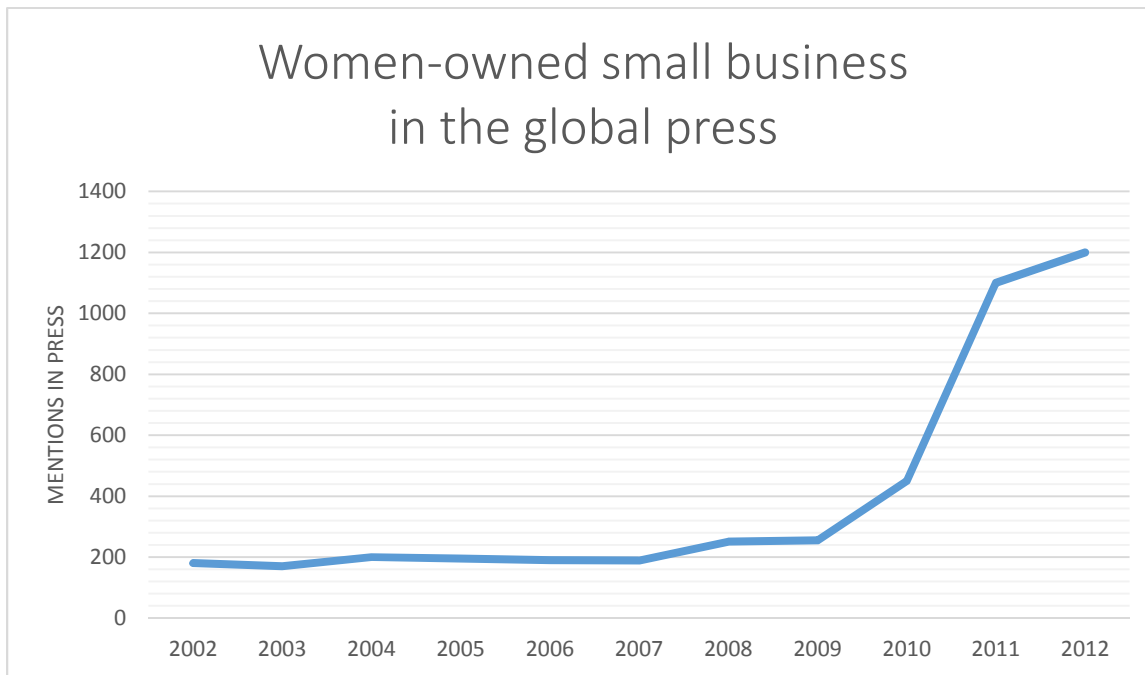
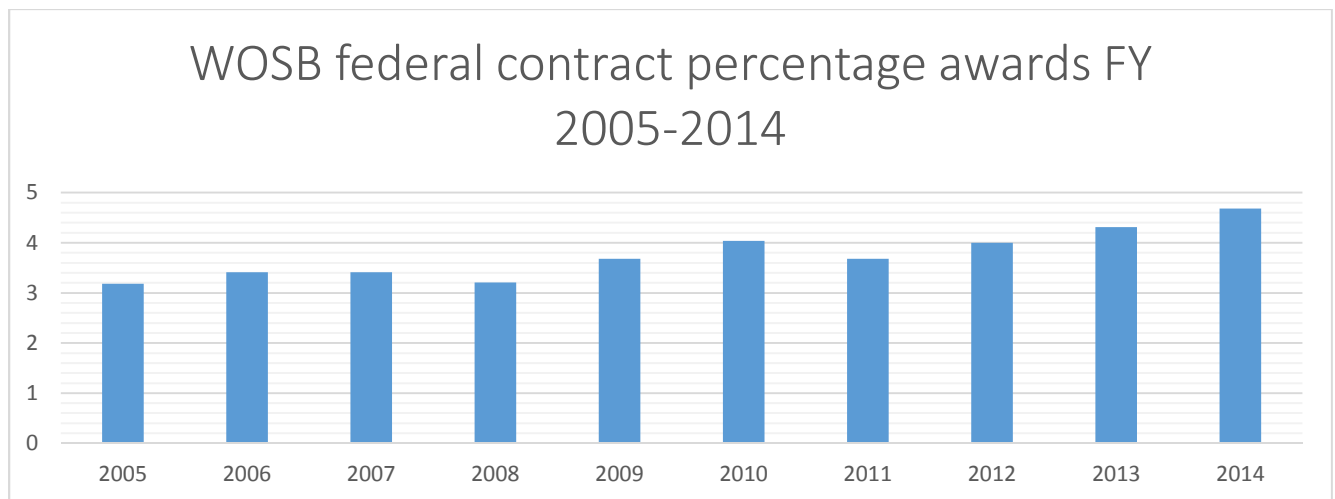


Figure 7. Women-owned small businesses in the global press.

Source: Adapted from “The Global Rise of Female Entrepreneurs,” by J. VanderBrug, 2013, *Harvard Business Review*.

Fernandez et al. (2013) addressed gender bias, the lack of procurement program understanding, the lack of sole source authority, and the lack of qualifications required to win contracts. Females also have remained more financially constrained than their male counterparts. In addition, government policies have failed to support WOSBs enough for them to rise to the level of MOSBs (Goltz et al., 2015). Furthermore, a negative societal stereotype promotes business as an exclusively male activity (Acs et al., 2014). This male-domination problem may affect WOSBs seeing themselves as thriving, as the potential for discrimination and societal stereotyping pose an obstacle (Williams, 2015). Furthermore, the human capital disparity grants MOSBs a competitive edge in government contracting (Robb & Coleman, 2013).

WOSBs have received considerable coverage by the press. *Figure 8* shows during 2002-2012 the global press increasingly recognizing WOSBs, suggesting WOSB progression and development despite the normative barriers, such as negative attitudes toward WOSBs.



*Figure 8.* Women-owned small businesses federal contracts award percentage, 2005–2014.

**Source:** Adapted from “New Commerce Study Shows Women-Owned Businesses Making History but Still Significantly Less Likely to Win Federal Contracts” by Economics & Statistics Ad.



In government contracting, the difficulty associated with the WOSBs receiving credit, attributed to inadequate overhead, contributed to the inability to fulfill government contracts (Fernandez et al., 2013).

According to the SBA (2016), registration with the central contacting registry guaranteed government contracting. Similarly, the SBA (2016) estimated less than 2% of the 10.5 million WOSBs possessed adequate knowledge of the paperwork and complex requirements associated with government contracting (Fernandez et al., 2012; SBA, 2016). Governmental reports have stressed that access to business networks and markets are significant in obtaining federal contract opportunities and maintaining business sustainability (WOSB Study Report 2017-www.sba.gov). Thus, the potential barriers hindering WOSBs demonstrate crucial components of government contracting (Fernandez et al., 2012).

The National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO, 2015) reviewed multiple studies on federal contracts awardees and discovered an increase in contracts the government awarded to WOSBs from 3.18% in 2005 to 4.68% in 2014. Beede and Rubinitz (2016) analyzed 500 businesses from various industries and revealed of the 365 small business owners applying for government contracts, 286 were WOSBs. The federal government awarded 100 contracts with 4% going to WOSBs.

*Table 2*

*Women-Owned Small Businesses Business Sector Percentage (in billions)*

Categories	Goal %	2016 %	2016 \$	2015 %	2015 \$	2014 %	2014 \$	2013 %	2013 \$
Small Business	23.00	24.34	99.96 B	25.75	90.7 B	24.99	91.7 B	23.39	83.1 B
Small Disadvantaged Business	5.00	9.52	39.13 B	10.06	35.4 3B	9.46	34.7 B	8.61	30.6 B

Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business	3.00	3.98	16.34 B	3.93	13.8 3B	3.68	13.5 B	3.38	12.0 2B
Women-Owned Small Business	5.00	4.79	19.67 B	5.05	17.8 1B	4.68	17.2 B	4.32	15.3 B
HUB Zone	3.00	1.67	6.86B	1.81	6.42 B	1.82	6.97 B	1.76	6.2B

*Source:* Adapted from “The Federal Government Achieves Small Business Procurement Contracting Goal for the 4<sup>th</sup> Consecutive Year,” by Tiffani S. Clements, Small Business Administration. 2017.

The SBA exceeded its 2016 goals by almost ten billion dollars over 2015, while small disadvantaged business owners topped their 2016 benchmark by close to four billion dollars over 2015. SDVOSBs surpassed their 2016 objective by close to three billion dollars over 2015. Table 2 presents the percentage growth of WOSBs and their dollar values, but unfortunately, WOSBs did not meet their 2016 ECWA goal of 5%. The government only met the target of awarding 5% of contracts to WOSBs once in 2015, with 5.05% of awards going to women (Ayala, 2016). The figure fell during 2016 to 4.79%. Finally, WOSB award percentages were consistently lower than the award rate for all small businesses, indicating a disparity in federal WOSB contract awards.

Gender inequality has permeated into both economic and economic human rights arguments (Olesen, 2018). Achieving true gender equality presents an onerous challenge considering the needed steps to empowering women through education and employment and the outcomes experienced so far (DeVault, 2018; McAdam, Harrison, & Leitch, 2018; Olesen, 2018 USAID, 015). WOSBs have continued to grow in size and number over the years, yet WOSBs have a long way to go to achieve parity with MOSBs. In 2007, females owned 30% of 26.3 million businesses in the US, with men owning 52.9% and 17.5% being equally owned (Wolfe, 2015). In 2017, WOSBs accounted for 39% of businesses, while MOSBs comprised 56% of

corporations, illustrating WOSBs underrepresentation. A number of scholars have asserted discrimination against women in federal government contracting explains differing contract award outcomes (Brown & Girth, 2018; Brunjes & Kellough, 2018; Ficarra, 2017); however, finding conclusive statistical evidence has proven arduous.

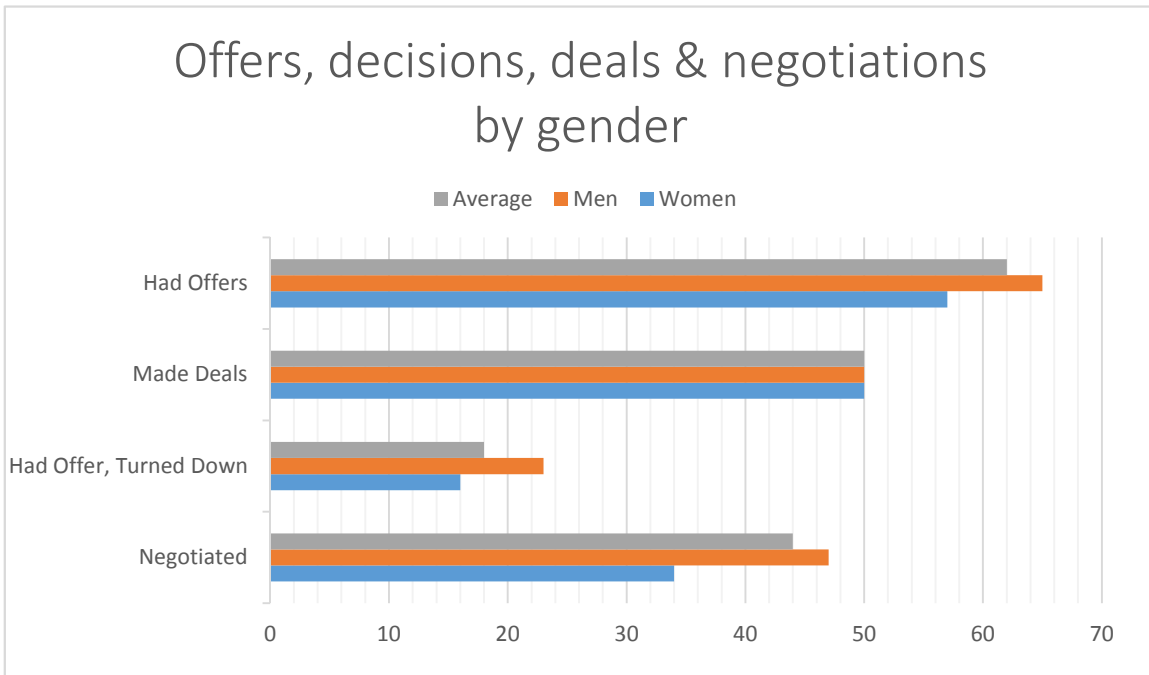


Figure 9. Contracts, offers, deals and statistics gender breakdown.

Source: Adapted from “Building Bridges: Leveraging Research and Relationships to Impact the Business Climate for Women,” by National Women’s Business Council, 2014.

Figure 9 outlines contracts, offers, and deals, as well as the statistics by gender. According to the NWBC Annual report (2014), MOSBs enjoyed a relatively higher percentage of offers and negotiations when compared to WOSBs. Men registered 65% of the offers while women entailed 60% of the offers, whereas men and women registered respectively 48% and 35% of the negotiated contracts.

**Social exclusion.** According to Hermann (2011), the term “social exclusion” has become particularly relevant in recent decades, both in the sociological debate as well as in the political

agenda. Hermann (2011) emphasized that social exclusion drives particular groups' members into an isolated state; thus, social intervention professionals face insurmountable barriers in their quest for gender equality. Social exclusion signifies a clear concept comprehended in three primary ways: distinct separation, participation deficiency, and emanation from the misrecognition practices (Azmat, 2013). WOSBs have failed to gain recognition as equals to MOSBs (Adams, 2018; Mick & Greene, 2015). According to Peruzzi (2014), social exclusion has emanated from debates over marginalization and integration. Despite the increased adoption of the term in the prevailing empirical literature, opponents argue social exclusion has proven too vague in explaining a particular historically preconceived concept (Peruzzi, 2014). Social exclusion as a means of revealing unsuccessful WOSB federal government contract procurement cannot be underestimated.

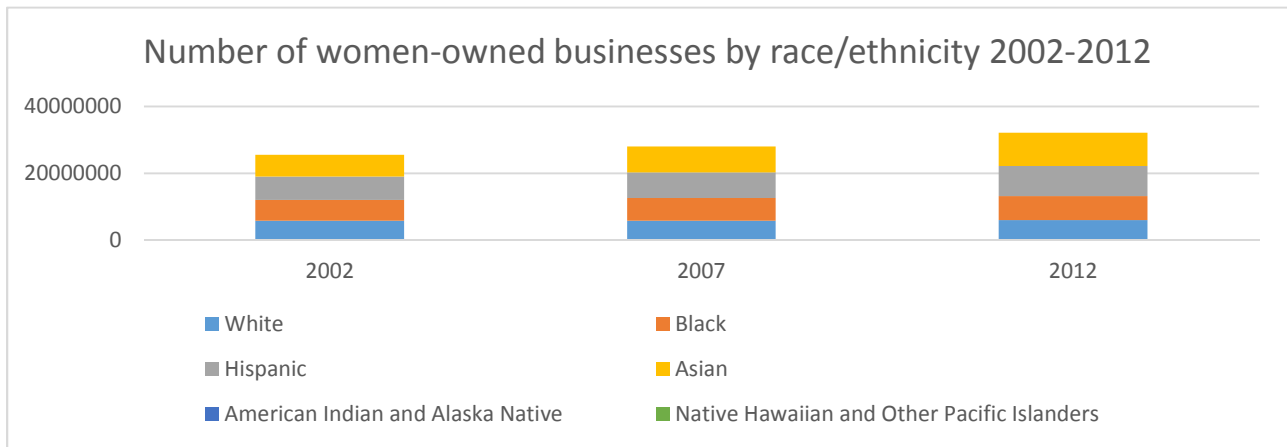


Figure 10. Women-owned small businesses ethnicity or race breakdown.

Source: Adapted from "Building Bridges: Leveraging Research and Relationships to Impact the Business Climate for Women," by National Women's Business Council, 2014.

Figure 10 presents WOSBs by ethnicity or race. In the year 2002, white women WOSBs numbered 5.5 million compared to other female ethnic communities, registering 2.2 million. By the year 2012, white WOSBs had increased to 6 million compared to other female ethnic

communities showing 4 million WOSBs, suggesting an unequal racial opportunity in landing federal contracts.

**Financial constraints.** Restricted capital access, particularly financial resources, has posed a significant barrier to WOSBs (Azmat, 2013). Azmat (2013) contended when WOSBs lack financial resources, females’ experience, education, and business building training remained limited, stifling WOSBs and affecting venture success, especially during start up (Belwal, Belwal, & Al Saidi, 2014). On average, females have started businesses with half as much capital as men (Belwal et al., 2014).

**Attitudes and stereotype constraints.** For Azmat (2013), the normative barriers WOSBs have encountered include societal attitudes and traditional unsupportive male stereotypes.

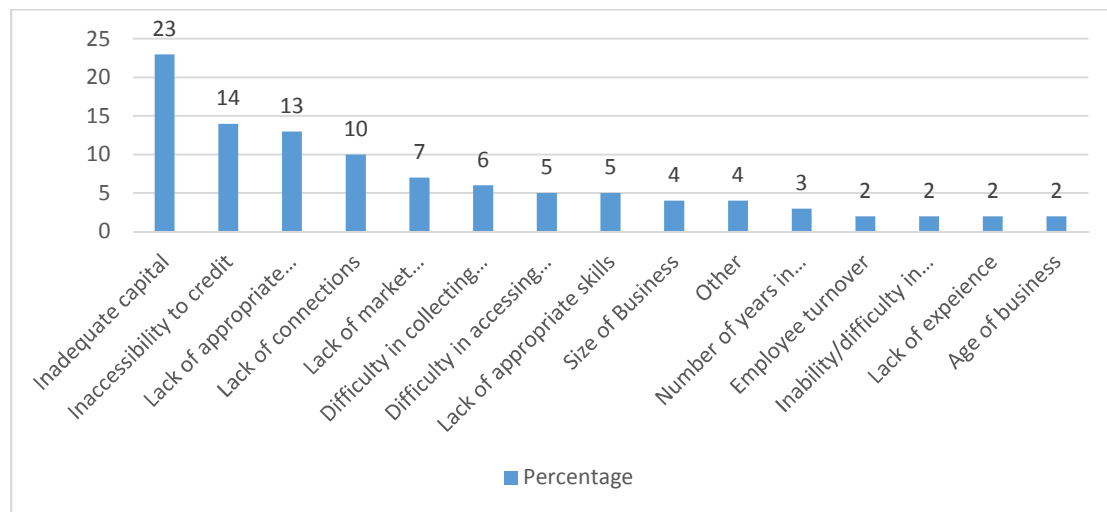


Figure 11. Factors hindering WOSB.

Source: Adapted from the “Women-owned small business report,” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2011.

Moreover, WOSBs, unlike MOSBs, often experience the dual responsibilities of family and domestic work outside the business, overburdening them (Adams, 2018; Rhodes, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Females, typically, look after children and other family members and

attend to household chores (Adams, 2018; Finkle et al., 2013; Rhodes, 2014). This dual responsibility deters concentration on running the business. Given the fact that females in many societies are expected to care for children and other family members, their role from these two domains divides a WOSB's attention (Ceptureanu & Ceptureanu, 2015, Rhodes, 2014).

**Female education level.** Small business scholars' views diverge regarding WOSB education level (Singh et al., 2001; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2011; Mainardes et al., 2011). For instance, Singh et al. (2001) indicated WOSBs possessed better education compared to MOSBs. On the other hand, scholars like Naranjo-Valencia et al. (2011) concluded the educational level of business owners remained equal among genders. Mainardes et al. (2011) asserted men opted to study more specialized subjects, whereas women enrolled in general subjects. *Figure 11* depicts factors hindering women from expanding businesses and winning federal contracts. According to Women-owned small business U.S. reporting (2011), inadequate capital hindered WOSBs from growing business and acquiring federal contracts.

#### Lack of Prior Business Expertise

WOSB experts have conceded prior business experience illustrates a decisive factor in starting companies (Adams, 2018; Singh, 2001); however, Audretsch (2012) showed that few businesswomen possessed previous business expertise. Moreover, more than 60% of the females surveyed typified first-time business owners informally refining their managerial approach (Welsh et al., 2017); thus, WOSBs tended to self-teach, once their projects commenced (Chang et al., 2011).

Despite the WOSB influx globally, WOSBs still face constraints when starting businesses (Ayala, 2016; Ficarra, 2017; Sharma, 2015). Many scholars have examined the challenges WOSBs encounter when seeking federal contracts (Ficarra, 2017). Financial constraints at both

start-up and during expansion continue to challenge WOSBs (Adams, 2018; Hodges et al., 2015). Other problems include inadequate experience, education level, gender discrimination, government regulations, loans access difficulties, hiring barriers, role conflict, skill deficiency, restricted business network access, and cultural constraints (Finkle et al., 2013).

Dinur (2011) observed WOSBs adopted a managerial style based on social and cultural values, and a feminine style differs considerably from its masculine counterpart. Additionally, experts have demonstrated WOSBs adopt a democratic and more participative managerial style than their male counterparts (Adams, 2018; Hotho & Champion, 2011). Women delegated more to subordinates and looked to achieve employee consensus (Hotho & Champion, 2011). BarNir (2012) suggests that as business relations in corporate culture have grown more complex, the traditional masculine managerial style has been rendered less and less effective.

**Knowledge constraints.** According to Hoobler, Lemmon, and Wayne (2014), WOSBs also faced network challenges as females engaged with few people in the business context (Adams, 2018), lacked adequate knowledge in dealing government contracting bureaucracies (Brunjes & Kellough, 2018), and experienced reduced power in bargaining (Herrington, 2016), inhibiting business promotion (Krook & True, 2012). Insufficient time devoted to business development adversely affected WOSBs, resulting in knowledge constraints and expertise lack. In addition, social and moral duties made WOSBs less productive, yielding lower returns than MOSBs (De Haan, 2016). Ottmann (2010) identified the primary obstacles WOSBs confronted: lack of funding, knowledge deficiency, and social exclusion, especially at a societal level (Finkle et al., 2013). Social stereotypes portraying females as less capable, less intelligent, and less organized than males produce barriers blocking organizational fund acquisition. However,

regarding government contracts' reception, the knowledge constraints prevented WOSBs from obtaining federal awards.

**Women-owned small business orientation.** According to Lim and Envick (2013), rectifying unequal government contract participation lies in WOSB orientation, encompassing risk-taking, reactivity, and innovation. Small business orientation has focused on the actions WOSBs take to drive contract opportunity identification, perception, and exploitation (Gotten & Gupta, 2013). A distinction between the small business orientation between WOSBs and MOSBs exists. WOSBs have remained less likely to identify themselves as small business entrepreneurs (Gotten & Gupta, 2013), to possess human capital engendering competencies, as well as the skills compared to MOSBs (Adams, 2018). However, WOSBs are more likely to possess social capital, like group harmony maintenance and nurturing of others, fundamental to the success of small business compared to MOSBs (Gotten & Gupta, 2013). Therefore, this feminine quality, demonstrating a social network, has increased support and confidence when taking risks in business (Gotten & Gupta, 2013).

More women have continued to venture into starting businesses and acting as entrepreneurs (Belwal et al., 2014). Belwal et al. (2014) examined the challenges and motivations of 180 WOSBs in the Ethiopian Somali region, revealing WOSBs needed the support of micro-financing loans. Since WOSBs often begin with personal savings and loans from friends and family, restrictive financial opportunities constrain business continuation (Azmat, 2013). Cultural challenges failed to pose barriers to WOSBs in this study, while network barriers and government regulations formed formidable obstacles to women securing federal contracts.



**Societal constraints.** Individuals in various social and economic sectors are treated differently based on gender, primarily due to gender-based misconceptions (DeVault, 2018; Olesen, 2018). Empowering females and regarding them equal to men would facilitate WOSB corporate success (Singh et al., 2001), for societies where gender differentiation has remained low, women have been more likely to start businesses (De Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014). However, many prevailing cultural occupational feminine stereotypes cloud females' vision, so women fail to envision themselves in roles transcending societal norms. Women have faced hardship in establishing businesses or even climbing the corporate ladder to obtain a top-level executive position (Adams, 2018; Hotho & Champion, 2011; Rhodes, 2014). Similarly, BarNir (2012) claimed cultural conditions primarily have steered females away from starting companies. Consequently, WOSB success has depended on the normative support, self-confidence, and sense of empowerment society conveys (Sharma, 2015).

### **Women in the Labor Market**

For the past five decades, increased gender-equal educational opportunities have generated half of the European economic growth. As females acquire higher education levels and join the labor force, gender equality campaigns have erupted (Finkle et al., 2013). The increased female employment has reduced the gender gap and facilitated the expansion of service sectors and workplace practices (Blossfeld, Skopek, Triventi, & Buchhotz, 2015). Moreover, flexible work schedules have eased the childcare burden and significantly improved family commitments while participating in the labor force, facilitating personal growth (Martin, Cooklin & Dawkins, 2015).

Ceptuneanu and Ceptuneanu (2015) argued reduced differences between gender job participation worldwide have enabled more women to earn government contracts. Since the

1990s, the gender gap in labor force participation has considerably shrunk as a result of increased education and WOSB participation (Gonzales et al., 2015). Though the divide has remained significantly higher in some regions, such as North Africa, the Middle East, and Central America, gender disparity on a global scale has diminished, with the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) recording the lowest historical rates (Belwal et al., 2014).

### **Women-Owned Startups Investment Lack**

Ninety percent of funding organizations and investors refrain from investing in women-owned startups (Belwal et al., 2014). This discrimination poses a major obstacle to WOSBs seeking funding. The OECD Data Portal showed WOSBs were less likely to receive funding or to obtain government contracts, primarily due to WOSBs either not being considered reliable enough or deemed to be at high-risk (Chen & Hao, 2014). Even though over 25% of WOSBs have acquired more education than MOSBs and have gained expertise before launching the business, females have failed to attain the necessary funding to expand businesses and engage in international business. Euro-barometer (2013) purported WOSBs compared to MOSBs retained the lowest chance of obtaining funding for their organization, let alone winning a federal award for their company. This translates to WOSB entrepreneurial capabilities and how the funding organizations and investors evaluate WOSBs. However, the inadequate financial support, business complexities, and bankruptcy fears have limited WOSBs from growing and prospering (Adams, 2018; Finkle et al., 2013).

Krook and True (2012) showed that WOSBs represented the fastest growing sector in developing countries, significantly contributing to their country's economy, yet when faced with funding or seeking investment from firms, lenders, and investors held WOSBs at bay (Finkle et

al., 2013). Belwal et al. (2014) revealed necessity, rather than a success opportunity, has driven females in developing nations (Mahmood et al., 2014). However, opportunities motivate women in developed countries, but the deterrent of receiving inadequate financial support based on gender has lurked in both developed and under-developed countries (Belwa et al., 2014).

### **WOSBs Strategic Networks Deficiency**

It takes time for WOSBs to acquire the skills needed to grow their businesses. The women learn from education, experience, or family members who have been part of a WOSB. However, the inability to establish networks has continued to hinder WOSBs (Goffee & Scase, 2015), for WOSBs have failed to form a strong network or establish connections, like MOSBs (Finkle et al., 2013). Educated women attract investors when asking for investments (Adams, 2018; Morley, 2014), revealing a definite link between establishing a strong network with bigger firms, investors, microfinance loan, and other lending institutions and securing investments for small businesses (Azmat, 2013; Brunjes & Kellough, 2018).

Legal and regulatory issues do not contribute to a favorable environment for female entrepreneurial success (Goltz et al., 2015). WOSBs possessing a network of administrative bodies of microfinance and lending institutions applied for microfinance loans, whereas WOSBs without connections lacked issue-related information (Belwal et al., 2014), reflecting an area for WOSB growth. Government factors constrained WOSBs (Golt et al., 2015), while legal issues and bureaucracy posed hurdles for WOSBs (Azmat, 2013; Brunjes & Kellough, 2018).

Even in the United States, one of the most developed countries, 80% of WOSBs started companies in their homes and have remained as small operators, inhibiting strong network establishment (Adams, 2018; Finkle et al., 2013). Some WOSBs have established imperative connections and networks to set up big businesses. Azmat (2013) used a chi-square test of

independence to examine the relationship between WOSB development and other growing firms and investors. The more educated the WOSB, the higher the probability it would establish connections with the bigger firms and create strong networks with the financial institutions and vice versa (Ceptureanu & Ceptureanu, 2015). In addition, women who failed to foster business relationships with industrial people and similar businesses never received adequate funding for their organizations and had no idea where to apply for investment opportunities (Mahmood et al., 2014). The researcher observed women of all ages owning small businesses; however, married women with children faced the problem of double responsibility conflict: family and work (Belwal, Belwal, & Al Saidi, 2014), hindering network development. Goldin and Mitchell (2017) suggested that a woman whose family members owned a small business was more likely to become an entrepreneur.

WOSBs have increased and have demanded market diversification, promoting economic growth. However, WOSBs must obtain business credibility, so female businesses possess the potential to grow and expand (Azmat, 2013). Goffee and Scase (2015) noted the significance of comparing WOSB development to multinational WOSBs to gain a better understanding of the scenarios and the results of such phenomena. Finkle et al. (2013) emphasized that noticeable gender disparities existed in management styles used to attract investors or funding organizations (Finkle et al., 2013). WOSBs should consider a strategic approach and systematic planning for attracting investors (Solesyik, Westhead & Matlay, 2014). Issues pertinent to funding or investment denials should proffer the appropriate resources to attract investors and develop credibility and reliability as a firm engendering a strong base and low-risk factors.

## **District of Columbia Metropolitan Area**

The District of Columbia and the surrounding areas have attracted educated people as well as entrepreneurs and startups. According to Data USA (Data USA Website, 2018), the DC metropolitan area (which includes Washington D.C., Arlington, Alexandria, Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia) has a population of 6.13 million people with a median household income of \$95,843 with a population make-up of 45.8% White, 24.9% Black, and 15.5% Hispanic (Data USA Website, 2018). In DC alone, 977 new businesses were established and 4,979 new jobs were created in 2016 (SBA, 2017a). Furthermore, African American businesses make up 40.2% of the small businesses in the DC area. DC hosts a metropolitan area with higher income-residents, especially in the counties surrounding DC. Additionally, an adult female-firm ratio of 1:10 exists in DC (SBA, 2017a).

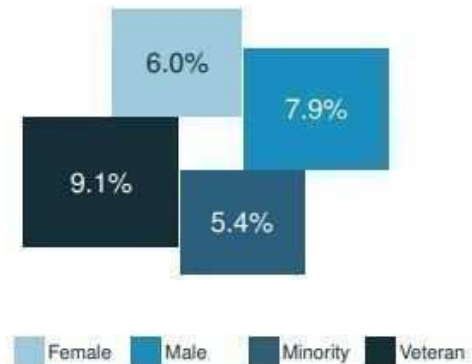
Moving to the DC metropolitan area to do business with the federal government entices people to live in the region since the federal government represents the country's biggest buyer of goods and services, buying billions each year (Ayala, 2016; Mee, 2012). The United States Chamber of Commerce, the United States Women's Chamber of Commerce, the United States Small Business Administration, the Washington DC's Women's Business Center, the National Association of Women Business Owners–DC Chapter, the Maryland Women's Business Center, and the District of Columbia's Small Business Resource Center provide resources and support to WOSBs in the DC area. DC comprises a diverse area evidenced by the number of minority-owned businesses. In DC, WOSBs have started businesses but not at an equal rate as MOSBs. The researcher, a female entrepreneur, conducts business in the DC metropolitan area and maintains access to WOSB through business networks.

## BUSINESS OWNER DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 2: DC Changes in Business Ownership by Demographic Group



Figure 3: DC Self-Employment within Demographic Group



- Figure 2 displays the change in overall firm ownership for each demographic group from 2007 to 2012 based on the Survey of Business Owners (SBO) for the District of Columbia, released in December 2015.
- Figure 3 displays the percent of each demographic group identified as self-employed according to the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.

Figure 12. DC Small Business Economic Profile (SBA, 2017a)

Source: Adapted from “The U.S. Small Business District of Colombia Business Profile,” SBA, 2017

### Summary

This qualitative study focuses on discriminatory factors facing WOSBs in the process of acquiring federal government contracts. The study relies on two theories: the resource-based theory (Barney, 1991, 2018; Holdford, 2018) and the socialist feminist theory (Bebel, 1910; DeVault, 2018; Ghodsee, 2007; Olesen, 2018; Weis & Fine, 2004; Zetkin, 1889) to frame this study including the research questions, research process, and analysis. RBT has been used extensively since 1991 (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001; Barney, White, & Ketchen, 2001; Barney, Ketchen, & White, 2011; Das & Teng, 2000; Grant, 1996, 1999; Newbert, 2007).

SFT argues that gender-biased power relations disadvantage women, impacting female market participation. Business expertise deficiency, financial constraints, non-systematic approaches, and restricted funding illustrated the major obstacles WOSBs have confronted, making them less likely to acquire government contracts as compared to their male counterparts

(Cumbers & Teenier, 2014). Researchers provided various perspectives as to why WOSBs have failed at attaining federal awards: sociological, conflict-based, interactionist, and feminist approaches. Investors have resisted providing funding because they either do not consider WOSB's reliable or remain reluctant to venture into a business traditionally perceived as an unreliable sector with high failure risks (Perruzzi, 2014; Ho, 2016).

Despite the influx of females into the traditionally male-dominated business arena, women worldwide remain constrained in business startup and operation (Adams, 2018; Sharma, 2015). The researcher examined the challenges WOSBs encountered when securing federal contracts. Sharma (2015) demonstrated women not only applied for government contracts at a much lower rate than men, but also the females possess less knowledge of the application process, making their applications less appealing to the awarding agency. The study takes place in the growing DC area, hosting higher income-residents, where 977 new business establishments were created and 4,979 new jobs in 2016 (SBA, 2017a). Since 10 firms exist for every 100 adult women, DC poses a great opportunity for WOSB success (SBA, 2017a). Chapter three details the study methodology, as well as the research questions, population and sample, study procedures, materials used, data analysis, and ethical assurances.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

WOSBs encounter various challenges when seeking government contracting opportunities, especially those from diverse racial backgrounds. Experts have indicated that the odds of a WOSB obtaining a government contract are about 21% lower than men-owned businesses (ESA, 2016). The purpose of this study is to explore the potential challenges and barriers to acquiring WOSBs SBA federal government contracts. The following research questions guide this study.

#### Research Questions

**Research question 1.** *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for SBA federal government contracts?*

**Research question 2.** *What strategies do WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring SBA federal government contracts?*

#### Research Methodology and Design

Researchers have different goals when using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method methodologies (Creswell & Poh, 2018). Quantitative researchers collect and analyze numerical data; qualitative research seeks to better understand participant experiences, and mixed methods combine both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Cleary et al., 2014; Creswell & Poh, 2018; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The researcher uses a descriptive qualitative case study methodology to address the literature gap. The participants comprised WOSB operators in the DC area, and the phenomenon depicted the participant experience of pursuing and winning a federal government contract. A qualitative research approach deals principally with verbal data (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Additionally, Khan and Van Wynsberghe (2008) professed a way to accrue maximum benefit from a qualitative case study that epitomizes cross-case



analysis, ensuring the feedback from sources is combined for broader analysis, views, and perspectives. The cross-case analysis process focuses on assessing the similarities and differences between cases (Bower et al., 2015). Yin (2018) noted the case study design provided an opportunity for learners and scholars to optimally contribute to a selected analysis unit's knowledge. The design allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016).

Using a case study design provided an opportunity for the interviewed WOSBs to share personal experiences in government contracting. Unlike ethnography qualitative design, where researchers seek group cultural patterns (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Hays & Wood, 2011), the researcher concentrates on learning about real-world experiences present in a case study design (Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018). Most importantly, the participants share the challenges and barriers they encountered during their business ventures. Furthermore, this case study uncovers elements influencing the success of other WOSBs in government contracting opportunities and sheds light on their progress in the male-dominated business sectors (Zhougiaogin & Xie, 2013).

Due to the limited studies regarding WOSB and federal government contracting, the researcher chooses a qualitative methodology instead of quantitative design to better describe the phenomenon in rich detail. Quantitative correlational analysis would have allowed the researcher to investigate the relationships between variables, like depression and motivation, to predict a certain outcome. However, the researcher maintains more interest in learning about the WOSB experience and the details of gender-related barriers instead of determining the relationships between variables. A grounded theory would have allowed the researcher to gather information to develop a theory, but the researcher remains interested in learning more about the

WOSB experience in pursuing federal government contracts (Smith & Koltz, 2015). Hence, a descriptive case study offers the best method to extract the lived experiences WOSBs face when seeking a federal government contract.

### **Population and Sample**

Qualitative case study design aligns with purposeful selection strategies because the researcher will intentionally seek out participants who meet study inclusion criteria (Creswell, 2017; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2013; Robinson, 2014). In this study, the primary participants are three African American female, small-business owners who have successfully acquired at least one government contract. According to Jette, Grover, and Keck (2003), using a lower number of participants in a qualitative study is acceptable if the individuals possess topic expertise. Additionally, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) pointed out that, while saturation remains pertinent conceptually, its practicality fails because it does not transfer to sample size depicting data collection in rigorous research (Yin, 2018).

The researcher conducts semi-structured interviews with WOSBs. Pundits have suggested that women have suffered gender stereotyping and discrimination male-domination imposes (Ansari & Ansari, 2016; Sommers, 2017), as shown by the many government contracts MOSBs obtain (Terjesen, 2017). Similarly, in the fiscal year 2013-2014, WOSBs achieved 30% of the contracts while being allocated two-thirds of the available dollars (Zimmerman 2016). As the national capital, the DC area attracts educated people, as well as entrepreneurs and startups creating 977 new businesses and 4,979 new jobs in 2016 (SBA, 2017a). According to the SBA report (2017a), one firm exists for every 10 adult-aged females residing in DC showing, specifically, the DC area's business saturation. Typifying global gender obstacles, DC area

WOSBs experience challenges, such as lack of capital, strict policies, inadequate training, and beliefs, norms, and practices hindering business success (Economy INAG, 2004).

The researcher uses purposeful sampling to select representatives from the numerous female WOSBs pursuing government contracting, giving preference to females representing diverse racial backgrounds, having attained one federal contract, and possessing at least two years of field experience. The researcher seeks to diversify the selection from sectors the participants operate (Thorne, 2016). About 33% of WOSBs have sought government contracts, but 2-4% received government funding (NWBC, 2014). For instance, of the 500 businesses investigated, 356 small business owners applied for the government contracts; of that group, 286 applicants represented WOSBs and of the 100 federal contracts awarded, WOSBs acquired four percent of the federal contracts, while the remaining 96% went to MOSBs.

The researcher targets minority women in the age range of 30 to 50 by obtaining email addresses from the Chamber of Commerce to communicate with potential participants meeting the age and gender qualifications and who have previously attempted to win government contracts. The Chamber of Commerce with their commitment to empowering women leaders to meet personal and professional goals provided a robust source to discover WOSBs meeting the research criteria (US Chamber of Commerce, 2018). Email invitations to participate are sent to qualifying women revealed through the chamber's database. The selected WOSBs have secured at least one government contract, because new entrants do not possess sufficient experience about the industry's gender challenges.

## **Materials**

Qualitative case study researchers require multiple data sources to capture participants' perceptions and describe the phenomenon (Baskarada, 2014; Creswell & Poh, 2018; Hays &

Singh, 2012; Yilmaz, 2013; Yin, 2018). Six primary materials improve case studies: validity, interviews, direct observations, archived materials, physical artifacts, focus groups, and document evidence (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). The researcher conducts semi-structured interviews and uses a focus group and federal government contract records as archived materials. Materials reviewed included a researcher-designed demographic survey designed to collect basic information: age, residential county, education, race, years in business, government contract award amount, mentoring, and mentor gender. The final data collection phase consists of interviews with the three selected women entrepreneurs (see Appendix A). Anyan (2013) cited an interview as an effective data collection tool, especially because interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to ask questions face-to-face, gain immediate feedback, and deduce information from non-verbal communication (Galletta, 2013).

### **Study Procedures**

First, the researcher obtains approval from NCU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study, followed by seeking out research participants and inviting them to participate through direct email. According to Temple and Brown (2011), direct email has increased study participation. Second, the researcher schedules and conducts the interviews and the focus group at a local small business office in Fredericksburg, VA. Third, the researcher reviews informed consent and confidentiality procedures (see Appendix C) and provides details in the event additional information regarding the study is needed. Fourth, the researcher asks for archived materials, such as federal government contract copies and reminds the participants that their participation is voluntary. Face-to-face interviews constitute the main data collection source because of its flexibility (Baskarada, 2014; Brinkman, 2018; Boutellier, Gassmann, & Raeder,

2014) and ability to explore phenomena at a deeper level (Brinkman, 2018; Houghton et al., 2013). Fifth, the interviews are recorded with two recording devices to prevent technical problems during analysis.

An interview protocol (see Appendix A) is used to guide the collection of data (Brinkman, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Sixth, the researcher begins the digital recording and the interviews last a minimum of 30 minutes. The researcher asks each interview question using phrases such as “tell me more” to elicit clarification and expand participant statements. Seventh, the participants are provided an interview transcript a week afterward for review. According to Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016), member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, occurs when the results are provided to the participant to verify accuracy. A follow-up phone call is conducted to clarify any errors or gaps discovered after the transcript review. Allowing participants to check for errors provides an opportunity for participant feedback (Grossoehme, 2014, Yin, 2018). Finally, the participants are given a week to return comments or corrections.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

According to Yilmaz (2013), qualitative researchers use terms such as trustworthiness, credibility, authentication, dependability, and transferability to address reliability and validity (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Galletta, 2013; Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers should include data accurately describing interactions, settings, and observations during the interviews so others can follow along and replicate (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). Validity in case studies can present challenges (Baskarada, 2014, Yin, 2018) but multiple data sources can address them (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). Interviews, archival material, and a focus group represent the three study data sources used to triangulate and

synthesize the collected information to increase validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2018; Galletta, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013, Yin, 2018). Member checking procedures requires each participant to review an interview synopsis to verify or add information.

Research question one provides information regarding the participant barriers encountered during the application process for federal government contracts. Research question two provides information regarding the participant strategies used to overcome the obstacles when acquiring federal government contracts. The study's research questions align with the data collection procedures, interviews, and archived materials, and the focus group provided answers for them. The researcher conducts face-to-face interviews and a focus group with WOSB at a site called CBAIA in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

**Interviews.** Participant insight into the phenomenon WOSBs face when seeking federal government contracts is provided and documented during face-to-face interviews. Since interviews allow participants to provide rich descriptions, this data source helps to answer both research questions (Brinkman, 2018; Creswell & Poh, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Following the interviews, transcripts are transcribed using Dedoose software and uploaded to software called NVivo to help with data coding and to create an audit trail. Thematic analysis guides the study data analysis and helps identify patterns and insights to better explain patterns of meaning (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Clarke and Braun (2013) described the six phases of thematic analysis: gain data familiarization, create initial codes, identify themes, review themes, define and name themes, and create the report. Thematic analysis constitutes a good fit for this study because of alignment with research design, research questions, and for identifying major themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). The researcher, a WOSB, understands how bias may interfere with

analysis. An expert who is not a WOSB reviews coding and transcripts to provide feedback and minimize bias.

**Focus group.** The researcher conducts the focus group on the same day shortly after the interviews. Data are collected from three participants after consenting to participate in the study. The researcher follows the interview protocol (Appendix A). A focus group relies upon a robust discussion, a good group composition motivating a rich discussion promoting a good dialogue among participants (Stalmeijer et al., 2014). According to Stalmeijer et al. (2014), the data from focus groups reside in the transcripts and researcher observations (Creswell & Poh, 2018). After transcribing the focus group transcript, the researcher uploads the transcriptions into NVivo to organize, code, and identify themes. The researcher uses thematic analysis starting with reading over the transcripts to familiarize herself with the data, followed by generating initial codes and themes, followed by reviewing the codes and themes to identify patterns. Finally, the data are used to answer the interview questions (Appendix B).

**Archival material.** The archival data entails information retrieved from the awarded federal government contract data including WOSB business demographic information, like business type, project type, industry type, and contract duration. The archival data is downloaded from the government website: <https://usaspending.gov/#/>. Participant identifiers are redacted from raw data. The six phases of thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013) are used to analyze the information from the participants' awarded federal government contracts. First, the researcher reads the contract several times to familiarize herself with the information (Ibrahim, 2012). The researcher then generates preliminary codes and themes using NVivo (Brinkman, 2018). Third, the researcher reviews and re-reads the contracts, looking for patterns to glean information helpful in determining if noticeable patterns posing barriers or revealing WOSB

strategies for acquiring federal government contracts are apparent (Creswell & John, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

These three data sources—the captured participants' in-depth details surrounding their experiences securing and winning federal government contracts.

### **Assumptions**

Realistic and unrealistic assumptions help when performing research as well as when theorizing in research (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). A qualitative approach offers a great fit for making assumptions about the participants' voices that ring true (Grant, 2014; Yin, 2018). Presumptively, the WOSBs participants are honest and talk openly about their experiences pursuing federal government contracting. One study postulation held the RBT assumes companies remain heterogeneous, possess mismatched resources and may be immobile across companies (Barney, 1991, 2018; Holdford, 2018). Another assumption according to Olesen (2018) and Thompson (1992) is that postmodern feminist researchers believe reality portrays a series of stories and texts oppressing women (DeVault, 2018). Third, the researcher remains interested in understanding the female business experience. Fourth, the qualitative research design offers the best method for collecting in-depth information surrounding phenomenon such as WOSBs experiences in pursuing and winning federal government contracts (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1990). Case studies are qualitative designs collecting information on the phenomenon (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2018).

### **Limitations**

Limitations occur in all research studies regardless of rigorous study construction, and limitation remains beyond researcher control (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Simon & Goes, 2013; Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018). Limitations also occur from the methodology



chosen (Creswell & Poh, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Simon & Goes, 2013). First, case study findings remain unable to be transferred to other populations in other contexts or environments (Simon & Goes, 2013; Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018). Second, the researcher's data analysis inexperience has been identified as a limitation in the literature (Elo et al., 2014). Fourth, Yin (2018) proposed a single case study design has been criticized for lacking robustness. This study explored one topic surrounding minority WOSBs pursuing and winning federal government contracts, considered a limitation.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations display researcher-set limits to help set expectations for the reader (Sampson, 2012). According to Simon and Goes (2013), delimitations occur because of limitations to what the researcher has decided to include or exclude in the study. First, the study includes women only and is conducted in the DC area due to accessibility. The research focuses on the experiences of WOSB, not MOSBs as a privileged group. Second, the study is limited to WOSBs who have been in business for at least two years and who have won a federal government contract. The research is focused on supporting other WOSBs to improve their odds of obtaining federal government contracts and learning from successful WOSBs' experiences and guidance. Third, the study includes federal government contracts and excludes other government-sponsored business programs for women, since the metrics for WOSBs acquiring federal government contracts remains more accessible than other program data.

### **Ethical Assurances**

The wellbeing of the participants is taken into consideration when conducting this study. The principles of do no harm, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, autonomy, and fidelity are applied when creating this study (Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018). The

researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training on ethics and human subject research prior to structuring this study. Additionally, the researcher first sought study approval through Northcentral University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Once the IRB granted approval, the researcher recruits participants using the US Chamber of Commerce database of WOSBs. Informed consent and confidentiality procedures are provided repeatedly, and participants are reminded their participation always remains voluntary. The researcher reviews informed consent and confidentiality procedures before the interviews at the site location in Fredericksburg, VA (see Appendix C) and provides details in the event she requires additional study information. Participants, interviewed in a private office, have five to ten minutes to read and accept the procedures. Labels are generated as Participant #1, Participant #2, and Participant #3 according to when their interview occurs (Galletta, 2013; Patton, 2015), are listed on an excel spreadsheet and are stored in a password-protected file (Baskarada, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). Data is coded and each participant's identifiable information is labeled with pseudonyms. Once audio-recorded interviews end, the files are stored according to NCU's IRB requirements. Finally, following Husserl's theory (1931) and later expanded by Moustakas (1994), the researcher uses epoché, the transcendental phenomenological process of blocking all biases and suspending all judgment about what represents reality to explain the phenomenon as truly as possible, suspending biases during analysis (Christiansen & Brumfield, 2010; Creswell & John, 2018)

### **Summary**

Scholars have indicated the odds of a WOSB winning a government contract remain about 21% lower than men-owned businesses (ESA, 2016). The purpose of this study is to explore the potential challenges and barriers to WOSB success in winning SBA government

contracts, as this responds to the call for research as Mick and Greene (2004) purported. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for federal government contracts? and (2) What strategies do WOSBs use to overcome the obstacles to acquiring federal government contracts? The researcher employs a descriptive qualitative case study methodology to address the gap in knowledge. The case unit of analysis is WOSBs in the DC area and the phenomena are the participants' experiences in pursuing and obtaining federal government contracts.

The researcher uses purposeful sampling to select three minority representatives from among the female WOSBs seeking government contracts, with preference given to WOSBs who earned one federal contact and who have at least two years of field experience. The researcher seeks to diversify the selection from sectors in which the participants operated (Thorne, 2016). The researcher conducts semi-structured interviews, reviews federal government contracts as archived materials, and also organizes a focus group. Materials used included a researcher-designed demographic survey that collected basic information, such as age, residential county, education, race, years in business, government contract award amount, and mentoring experience, as well as mentor gender.

The final phase of data collection entails interviews with the three selected women entrepreneurs (see Appendix A). After the IRB granted approval to conduct the research, the researcher recruits participants, reminds participants their participation remained voluntary using informed consent and confidentiality procedures, details how to gain additional study information, privately interviews the participants, maintains anonymity via labeling, redacting participant-identifying information, stores data securely, and codes data.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative case study is to identify barriers and challenges women encounter during the United States Small Business Administration federal (SBA) government contracting procurement process in the DC area. The study's goal is to uncover challenges minority WOSBs face while seeking government contracts, as well as clarify how to overcome these barriers that limit female success in government contracting. Additionally, the goal is to help WOSBs improve their potential in procuring government contracts. Specifically, discrimination and under-representation in federal contracting have posed barriers to WOSBs (Fernandez et al., 2013; Ficarra, 2017; Mick & Greene, 2015). The results from this study could help WOSBs to better understand federal contracting challenges and provide information for overcoming the barriers when seeking government contracts.

The study findings comprise six sections. The first section presents data trustworthiness, which includes the steps future researchers can use to replicate the study, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, methodology, design, and confirmability. The second section includes the results, outlining a study recap. The research questions section includes the steps for data analysis and is used to organize the results.

**Research Question 1.** *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for SBA federal government contracts?*

**Research Question 2.** *What strategies do owners of WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring SBA federal government contracts?*

The evaluation of findings provides a discussion on how the results fit with the two theoretical frameworks used for this study, the resource-based view and social feminist theories. Finally, the summary section provides important points regarding this chapter, as well as a discussion of

chapter five. Exploring WOSBs' experiences regarding the government contract acquisition process provides important information to support future government contract procurement awards.

### **Trustworthiness of the Data**

The three study participants comprised WOSBs and have won a federal government contract; thus, they are considered field experts because they were African-American women with small businesses, belonging to a small minority group who have experience with the federal government contract bidding and awarding process. According to Marshall et al. (2013), scholars have failed to establish definitive guidelines regarding estimating sample size. Also, Guest et al. (2006, p. 59) asserted saturation maintains prevalence conceptually, for estimating sample sizes its imperativeness declines. Likewise, Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended a range of three to five interviews as adequate for a case study.

Few WOSBs secure federal government contracts. In the year 2001, WOSBs received 2.5% of the government contracts; six years later in 2007, women received = 3.8% of the contracts and in 2014, only 4.68% of the contracts were awarded to women. Beede and Rubinivitz (2016) analyzed 500 businesses from various industries and found that of the 365 small business owners applying for government contracts, 286 represented WOSBs. The federal government awarded 100 contracts, 4% of which went to WOSBs. The population of WOSBs obtaining federal government contracts remains quite small. The researcher solicited participation through email from 35 local WOSB contacts through the Chamber of Commerce email database, as well as the researchers' professional business contacts on LinkedIn. The solicitation resulted in three participants who agreed to participate in the study.

Trustworthiness refers to the reliability and validity of qualitative studies. Qualitative researchers remain responsible for representing the data accurately, providing as much information as possible to describe interactions, settings, and observations for future researchers to replicate (Yilmaz, 2013, Yin, 2018). This study uses three data sources: semi-structured interviews to discuss sensitive information, a focus group to discuss broader themes (Appendix B), as well as archival material such as contract information. According to Baskarada (2014), triangulation of the three data sources establishes study validity and reliability. By triangulating the data, the results maintain transferability and replicability, as well as credibility (Cresswell, 2018; Yilmaz, 2013; Yin, 2018). Interviews, archival material, and a focus group developed the three study data sources triangulated and converged to increase study validity and reliability (Baskarada, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013; Yin, 2018). Additional triangulation occurs through member-checking and external transcript review, meeting data saturation (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013).

**Archival data.** Archival data for this study epitomizes the contract face page from the federal government contract award, obtained from the participants during the interviews. After receiving the document, the researcher reads the information twice. Doing so allows the researcher to better understand the information collected and determine the participant's business industry. According to Vohra (2014) and Braun and Clarke (2013), the researcher should re-read the data to gain familiarity with the studied phenomenon. Member-checking was used to triangulate data (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Questions such as "Is this information correct?" and "Can you please clarify this data point?" are asked to verify data accuracy.

**Interview data.** The researcher uses a web-based service ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)) to transcribe the digital recordings from both the individual and focus group interviews within 48 hours after

submission. According to Stuckley (2014), accuracy from the transcripts determines dependability (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Member-checking procedures, a tool to ensure credibility and dependability, requires participants to review an interview synopsis to verify or add information (Brinkman, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stuckley, 2014). The researcher conducts member checking allowing each participant a week to review the transcripts and offer any clarifications or edits (Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013; Stuckley, 2014). The research questions and data sources align. Since three women participated in this study, the results cannot be generalized due to the small sample size (Creswell & John, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018). *Figure 13* outlines the thematic analysis used to code and organize data (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Brinkman, 2018; Galletta, 2013). After transcribing the interviews, the researcher uploads the documents to NVivo, which coded and organized the data according to codes allowing themes to emerge. Then, the researcher checks and reviews the resultant themes for accuracy (Brinkman, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018).

**Focus group data.** The researcher conducts the focus group on the same day shortly after the interviews. Data are collected from three participants after consenting to participate in the study. The researcher follows the interview protocol (Appendix A). According to Stalmeijer et al. (2014), the data from focus groups can be found in the transcripts and researcher observations. The focus group consists of four questions (Appendix B). The researcher sends the participants the focus group questions a day before the interview, providing them an opportunity to respond without difficulty. The focus group lasts 30 minutes. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher uploads the documents to NVivo, where the transcripts were coded

and organized according to codes and themes. The researcher checks and reviews the organized themes for accuracy.

Code	Definition	Example	Occurrence
Obstacles or Barriers	People or processes that delayed or stopped the bidding	gender discrimination Stereotyping p.5	39
Contract decision-making (internal determinants)	What influenced your decision to submit a bid	look at the contents, talk to a small business rep	32
Processes that help	Experiences or learned tactics over time.	Reaching out to new companies (building relationships), submitting questions	24
Perceived risks	Why contracts are not granted to WOSBs	The moment they see small, they immediately associate a risk, because small, we have less resources, we may not be able to give them the same capability, we don't have the notoriety	7
Concerns about being taken advantage of.	Why WOSBs avoid taking certain contracts.	you have large companies that abuse their subs	8
Strategy	Managing the bidding process	there has to be a long-term nowadays because <u>it's</u> juice isn't worth the squeezing anymore	14
Positive factors in bidding process	Experiences or things learned; helpful people	Debriefings, helpful tips.	22

Figure 13. Researcher generated codebook

**Coding of the data.** The coding process begins after member-checking. According to Clarke and Braun (2013), the second phase of the thematic process occurs after the researcher gains familiarity with the data. Additionally, Clarke and Braun (2013) stressed more time is needed if someone other than the researcher transcribed the data. The researcher spends additional time listening to the digital interview recordings; the subsequent step involves determining the initial codes, helping with pattern recognition (Vohra, 2014). Participant statements also help with the organization of themes (Brinkman, 2018). Four themes emerge



from the participant's unique WOSB experiences when competing for a federal government contract.

## **Results**

Three WOSB participants consent to participate in this study. The first WOSB participant is a 49-year old African American woman who had owned her business for ten years. WOSB #1 earned an MBA and had conducted business for eight years before winning her first federal government contract award. Her business services included business consultation, human resources, contract administration, and career and business coaching. The second WOSB participant is a 32-year old African American woman who had owned her business for 12 years. WOSB #2 attained a bachelor's degree and had conducted business for one year before acquiring a federal government contract. Her business services entailed supporting the defense community. The third WOSB participant is a 53-year old African American woman with a master's degree in human resources. She had owned her business for three years. WOSB #3 worked in the federal government for 19 years and performed business for one year before securing a federal government contract. Her business services include professional consulting.

### **Research Question 1. What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for SBA federal government contracts?**

To answer Research Question 1, the researcher collects data through interviews, the focus group, and archival material to better understand the phenomenon of WOSB procuring a federal government contract. Interviews and the focus group capture the participants' experiences, and archived materials detailed the federal government contract. The following two themes address the first research question.

**Theme 1: Gender discrimination.** According to Daugherty (2014), discrimination refers to the artificial attitudinal barriers hindering a certain group (mainly based on their protected characteristics) from excelling in a career. Likewise, Coy (2016) opined gender discrimination epitomized the ideological perception of MOSBs and WOSBs not being equal. Moreover, Cuberes and Teignier (2014) stated divergent gender perceptions have led to the unequal treatment of the two groups due to their gender, producing informally and unofficially acknowledged barriers (DeVault, 2018; Harrison et al., 2015; Oleson; 2018).

The three WOSB participants report similar beliefs regarding gender discrimination obstacles faced when pursuing federal government contract awards. According to WOSB #2: “I’ve dealt with gender discrimination and then working with other companies, I’ve dealt with gender discrimination.” Likewise, the women voice that gender discrimination made them feel like a subordinate. For example, WOSB #1 said a group of businessmen believed she was a secretary instead of a businesswoman:

That admin role, even partnering with other companies to do contracts, sitting in a room full of men where all were CEOs, presidents, stuff like that, but when it came down to divvying out who was going to do what, it was, Oh, can you get this, and email all of us, and stuff like that.

Additionally, WOSB #3 asserts while WOSBs received special privileges for doing business as a member of a minority group, WOSBs had to overcome gender barriers when sub-contracting roles. She claimed:

I can see that it starts from day one because the reason why we’re there is that we are WOSB. Blatantly. That’s why we’re at the table because they need a check in the block. Then, as the process goes on, you see, once again, that you are minimized, so you end up

having to circumvent your staff to bring in somebody who can handle these power players because they're not going to talk to you.

**Theme 2: Pre-selection preference of contracts.** The foundational researcher who developed RBT (Barney, 1991, 2018) contended a firm outside of the industry does not have the same resources a firm inside the industry possesses and, therefore, remains unable to implement the same value-creating strategies. Restricted access to capital has presented a major barrier for WOSBs as reflected in the data collected. Financial resources and access to them, determining startups' success, spearheaded the significant challenges WOSBs encountered (Adams, 2018; Azmat, 2013). The lack of financial resources and name recognition were depicted as barriers, as well as the federal government contract officer perceiving WOSBs as risks. According to WOSB #1,

I feel like a lot of the RFPs are geared just to put it out there because they have to, but they already know, typically, the company that's going to apply. They see ABC company who they've been dealing with for years; as long as they see them on the list, the rest of us don't really get a fair shake in looking at that.

WOSB #2 professes a similar experience regarding the lack of name recognition and resources:

I literally remember sitting with a government customer and they said, "I will only go to ABC Company. "Why knock the small companies?" I said, "I can give you the exact same person, the exact same capabilities, for a quarter of the price, but with more resources, but there are a name brand and a favorite, and it's overcoming."

Additionally, federal agencies and contracting offices provide generic opportunities for small businesses, not specifically for WOSB or other minority business members. According to WOSB #3:

Then when you go to the big ones where the agencies invite you to, you're one of 2,000. It's not for us African Americans, not for anybody. It's just for anybody who shows up with a capability statement.

Contrasting these statements, WOSB #2 also mentioned small businesses accepted the risk of doing business with the federal government. She articulated,

The government never thinks that there's a risk for small businesses to do business, but I can tell you, there's a lot of risk doing business with the government, a lot of it. The risk you're not going to get paid, the risk that people don't know how to do their job, there's a lot of risks. That's all we take into account before we bid.

WOSB #1, who also believed a small business owner faced an inherent risk when doing business with the federal government, agreed:

I swear some of these companies and these program offices, they, in a way, deter small companies from approaching them. I don't know if they do it intentionally, but it's just like, "Oh my gosh, you want me to chart ...." They think that our G & As [i. e., General and Administrative Expenses], our fees and everything, they see our fee as our payment on a sports car. They don't realize that that's our risk and everything associated with doing business with them.

**Research Question 2.** *What strategies do WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring SBA federal government contracts?*

To answer Research Question 2, the researcher collects data through interviews, the focus group, and archival material to better understand the phenomenon of WOSBs pursuing federal government contracts. Interviews and focus group capture the participants' experiences, and

archived materials determine the federal government contract. The following two themes address the second research question.

**Theme 3: Reaching out to other businesses to grow networks.** WOSBs take more time to acquire the skills needed to grow their businesses and often learn from education, experience or family members who have participated in a WOSB. According to SFT, women have remained disadvantaged due to gender power relations, prohibiting decision-making and entrance into capitalist markets (Bebel, 1910; Zetkin, 1889; Ghodsee, 2007). WOSBs, generally, do not form a strong network or establish connections with other MOSBs (Finkle et al., 2013). According to WOSB #3:

I think the most empowering thing is the collaboration and the networking opportunities because you can't do this on your own. If you think you're going to stop a job one day, and because of your technical abilities, you're going to conquer the federal government, it's not going to happen. Connecting with other businesses is not easy for WOSBs.

WOSB #2 articulated,

We look at the capabilities, and we have companies that we usually go to in certain situations, but that just comes from years of getting burned and years of succeeding. Reaching out to new companies is always hard.”

This was confirmed by WOSB #1 as well: “Reaching out to new companies is always hard, but with the federal, we look at the customer.”

**Theme 4: Get to know contracting officers.** According to Lim and Envick (2013), WOSB orientation has contributed to female unequal participation in the government contracting process. Implicit to the WOSB orientation has remained the components encompassing risk-taking, reactivity, and innovation. Small business orientation has focused on the actions

driving WOSBs: identification, perception, and contract opportunities exploitation (Gotten & Gupta, 2013). As many as 98% of government contracts have been awarded to general businesses (MOSBs) and larger companies (Calmes, 2016; Gao, 2017), which could be a reason why the women participating in this study stated that getting to know the contracting officer can help with future government contract awards, as well as with orientation into the contracting process. WOSB #2 voiced:

I called the contracts, and this is how the start of my relationship with LOGCOM was. I called and I said, “I have so many questions about your RFQ because it’s so confusing.” The small business rep sat on the phone with me and she said, “All right, (WOSB #2), we’re going to go through this. We’re going to work this out. It’s going to be okay.”

Similarly, female participants speak about the debriefing process taking place after a federal contract has been awarded. According to WOSB #3:

Well, not on the federal government side, but on the stateside as a prime, because I have not had an opportunity to be a prime on the federal side, but on the stateside, and I think that the department of medical assistance did a great job. We didn’t win the bid, but they called us back, they did a debrief, they even let us know what the future procurement is going to look like so that we would be ready for the next one when it hit the streets.

Additionally, WOSB #1 worked in the federal government before starting her small business and understood both sides of the contract process:

My experience is that when I was a federal government worker at first and then came out to be a full-time entrepreneur. I found the flip side. I did contract administration and stuff as an employee, so I know the ins and outs of contracts and stuff like that. An advisory

group posed a problem because the experience of the company wasn't there and people are so used to going to that company that they know.

### **Evaluation of the Findings**

WOSBs represent some of the fastest growing businesses (NWBC, 2014). Business owners are interested in government contracts because they provide unique opportunities, which WOSBs can use to grow and create jobs, providing an ongoing income source for their families. WOSBs have remained active in government contracting with an average investment of 59% (Wolfe, 2015). WOSBs have faced obstacles in procuring federal government contracts and must overcome additional gender-related barriers MOSBs do not confront.

**Research Question 1.** *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for SBA federal government contracts?*

Gender discrimination continues to challenge WOSBs when seeking federal government contracts. Fernandez et al. (2013) indicated: gender bias, lack of procurement programs' understanding, lack of sole source authority, and lack of qualifications required to win contracts contributed to the barriers in attaining federal contracts. Women also tend to be economically and financially constrained, unlike their male counterparts. The findings from this study were consistent with SFT and RBT.

Social feminists have contended societal and gender power relations taking place through unfair and discriminatory practice have negatively affected women's participation in the capitalist markets; therefore, women miss opportunities to access decision-making power and conduct business to earn money (Bebel, 1910; Boxer, 2007; Devault, 2018; Ghodsee, 2007; Kabeer, 1994; Murthy & Rao, 1997; Murthy, 2014; Oleson, 2018; Whitehead, 1979). The

female study participants believe their gender prevented them from obtaining federal government contracts, as well as deterred collaboration with bigger businesses.

RBT reflects the way a firm builds its business using its resources, as well as resources that can be acquired, positing a firm can achieve a sustained competitive advantage through leveraging its unique resources (Barney, 1991; Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Holdford, 2018). Resources include a firm's physical capital resources encompassing the physical office, plant, technology, geographic location and access to raw materials to implement strategies, and human capital resources, like training, experience, skills, knowledge, insight of managers and workers, and relationships among them (Barney, 1991, 2018; Holdford, 2018). The women who participated in this study were CEOs of small businesses with fewer resources than their male counterparts who had bigger businesses and name recognition.

**Research Question 2.** *What strategies do owners of WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring SBA federal government contracts?*

Collaborating with bigger companies for sub-contract agreements would earn the WOSB entry into the federal contract system (Adams, 2018). Undoubtedly, the federal government contracting industry remains male-dominated, for a WOSB chance of winning government contract falls approximately 21% below otherwise similar ventures. This is significant when considering the fact the goal for WOSBs to win government contracts is set at a 5% (Cantwell, 2014; Coleman et al., 2014). The apparent problem has remained contracting officers do not apply their personal discretion for restricting competition to heighten WOSB contracting opportunities. Another reason is that no incentives exist to extend federal contracts to women (Coleman et al., 2014). Additionally, networking with contracting officers takes time, but it could pay off with a government contract. Considerable agreement exists among small business



scholars accessing business networks and the markets have remained significant in acquiring federal contract opportunities, promoting with the business sustainability (WOSB Study Report 2017-www.sba.gov). WOSBs associated with business relationships ultimately gain equal access contract opportunities and capital. Thus, the potential barriers hindering WOSBs are crucial to attaining government contracts (Fernandez et al., 2012).

### **Summary**

The goal of this study is to uncover challenges WOSBs face while seeking government contracts, as well as to clarify how to overcome these barriers limiting their success in procuring government contracts. Guiding this study, research question one asks, *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for federal government contracts?* Research question two asks, *What strategies do WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to securing SBA federal government contracts?*

The three data sources entail face-to-face semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and archival material. The interviews were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo to organize emergent codes and themes. The researcher checks themes and reviewed them for accuracy. Theme 1: Gender discrimination. Theme 2: Pre-selection preference of contracts. Theme 3: Reaching out to other businesses and grow networks. Theme 4: Get to know contracting officers.

After evaluating the results, gender discrimination poses a challenge WOSB face when seeking federal government contracts. Additionally, few opportunities continue to exist for WOSBs who fail to gain name recognition or past performance experience with federal government. Also, collaborating with bigger companies for sub-contracting agreements can earn WOSBs entry into the federal contract system. Although networking with contracting officers takes time and building relationships could secure a government contract.

## Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Chapter 5 outlines the study's implications, practice and future research recommendations, as well as the researcher's conclusions. The researcher investigates the problems women encounter in business, including women operating businesses in the DC area where they must navigate the federal government system when acquiring government contracts in pursuit of new business opportunities. The research questions organized implications. The recommendations for practice section includes a discussion on how the findings impact the professional field of WOSB entrepreneurship. The recommendations for future research entail revealing how future researchers can build and expand upon this study, as well as improve it. The conclusion section demonstrates the study significance and how it fits into the business empirical literature.

WOSBs have experienced challenges, such as lack of capital, strict policies, inadequate training and beliefs, and norms and practices hindering field success (Adams, 2018; Ficarra, 2017). According to Welter et al. (2017), existing legislation has failed to protect adequately WOSBs in earning government contracts. The study's purpose statement identifies barriers and obstacles WOSBs have confronted during the government contracting process in the DC area. Resource based theories (Barney, Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage, 1991; Clough, Fang, Vissa, & Wu, 2019; Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2019) and the socialist feminist theories (Murthy, 2014) form the theoretical framework guiding this study. A qualitative descriptive case study approach explores WSOBs living and working in the surrounding areas of DC and reveals their experiences in procuring federal government contracts to identify the barriers encountered during the process. Case study finding limitations entailed the inability to transfer results to other populations in other contexts and environments. As Adams (2018) purported, inexperience

hindered WOSBs pursuing and winning federal government contracts, posing an empirical limitation (Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, 2018).

## **Implications**

**Research Question 1.** *What barriers do WOSBs encounter during the application process for SBA federal government contracts?*

The general problems WOSBs faced comprised gender discrimination resulting in unequally awarded federal government contracts. The WOSBs who participate in this study confront gender bias, as well as lack of procurement program understanding, sole source authority, and lack of qualifications required to secure contracts, aligning with Shelton and Minniti's (2018) contentions about minority barriers. For example, since WOSBs have received a special category status vis-a-vis ECWA, male-dominated businesses have sought out WOSBs to fulfill a government-mandated requirement to gain the preferential treatment; however, after winning the contract, male-dominated business owners have minimized the WOSB's active role (Adams, 2018). According to Coy (2016), gender discrimination has engendered the ideological perception MOSBs and WOSBs remain unequal. Additionally, Cuberes and Teignier (2014) professed diverging perceptions have led to biased gender treatment; hence, this study validates prevailing SFT scholars' empirical findings.

The first theme depicts gender discrimination. The participants in this study report they felt others perceived them as less than due to their gender when subcontracting with other businesses and contracting with the federal government. The study participants also point out that because they won considerably fewer federal contracts than men, WOSBs had to partner with MOSBs to participate in the federal contract process. SFT seminal authors Bebel (1910) and Zetkin (1889) and modern pundits DeVault (2018) and Olesen (2018) built upon the premise

women have remained disadvantaged due to gender-biased power relations, negatively affecting female market participation. According to DeVault (2018), Western feminists seek to incorporate women into capitalist markets as equals instead of challenging structures keeping women oppressed, as patrilineal inheritance validates. Subjugating WOSBs has generated fewer market opportunities in a male-dominated capitalistic market (Adams, 2018; Ghodsee, 2017).

This study captures the voices of three WOSBs to unveil their lived experiences on their journey to procuring a federal government contract, thus extending feminist theory. The three participants' experiences demonstrate the gender-related challenges women who attempt to gain contracts as federal government vendors faced. Even though WOSB participation has remained generally less than 20%, the women in this study successfully secured at least one federal contract; these women joined an elite group who could help others to navigate the federal contract process.

Theme 3 exemplifies the need for fostering relationships with other business owners and joining networks to circumvent gender discrimination present in federal government contracting (Shelton & Minniti, 2018). RBT is vital for this study because according to Ngoasong and Kimbu (2019), barriers to entry exist because of the heterogeneous firms possess unequal resources (Adams, 2018). This theoretical point proves critical for WOSBs due to the barriers women face when entering the SBA federal government contract process to acquire federal contract dollars. Supporting RBT, the researcher shows the resources WOSBs lack to better compete in the federal government contract process. The male-dominated federal government contract industry has shown that the chances of WOSBs winning government contracts falls approximately 21% below similar MOSBs; the goal for WOSBs to procure government contracts has remained at a small figure of 5% (Cantwell,2014; Coleman et al.,2014). More federal

government set-asides in tandem with the ECWA should accommodate women as a special category (Brown & Girth, 2018). Measures need to hold the agency accountable whenever it fails to adhere to the law (Coleman et al, 2014; Cantwell,2014), which could increase federal government contracts awarded to WOSBs.

**Research Question 2.** *What strategies do owners of WOSBs use to overcome the barriers to acquiring SBA federal government contracts?*

Women typically have created smaller businesses focused on a narrower product or service line; yet WOSBs have remained less likely to win government contracts (Adams, 2018; Ayala, 2016; Ficarra, 2017; Wolfe, 2016). Government legislation created the 5% set-aside to increase the female chances of winning a federal contract (Wolf, 2015), but women still lack the connections and resources to compete with bigger male-dominated businesses (Shelton & Minniti, 2018). Reflected in the second theme, preferential contract pre-selection observed the preference afforded to resource-rich businesses. Framed from RBT, a firm outside of the industry does not possess the same resources firms inside the industry garner, making the business unable to implement the same value-creating strategies (Brown & Girth, 2018; Shelton & Minniti, 2018). The women in this study mention the significance of acquiring connections even if it required the women to work in subordinated sub-contractor roles instead of being the primary contractor (Adams, 2018).

Additionally, the WOSB participants believe fostering relationships with the contracting officers in charge of selecting the small business jobs remained imperative (Brunjes & Kellough, 2018). For example, WOSB #2 called a contracting officer at LOGCOM to gain clarification about the RFQ. In making the call, the contracting officer agreed to help her throughout the process, assisting her in winning the federal government contract. WOSB #2 portrayed WOSBs

who create relationships with contracting officers attracted a winning proposal. Additionally, performing business with bigger businesses boost hopes of securing future business. Informing the need for creating relationships and extending RBT, the researcher identifies the value in the relationships held WOSBs can play a small role in big businesses projects that contract with the federal government to accumulate resources.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The results from this qualitative case study uncover the need for the training of federal government contract officers to promote WOSB inclusion to create fair competitive bidding practices. To reach specific federal mandates to set aside at least 5% of WOSBs for awarding contracts, contracting officers need to develop the competencies required to advance WOSBs in the contract bidding process (Brown & Girth, 2018; Wolfe, 2016). In 1994 the U.S. Congress passed legislation requiring certified WOSBs to receive a minimum of 5% of federal government contracts; as of 2015, they had not yet attained this goal (Wolfe, 2016). In 2016, the federal government met the mandated 5% requirement for the first time, but the goal has not been reached since (Ayala, 2016).

The fourth theme recommends getting to know contract officers before submitting contract bids. The relationship a business owner develops with the contracting officer was beneficial to the study's WOSBs. Experts have demonstrated the government is failing to meet benchmarks for awarding WOSBs with federal contracts (Coleman et al., 2014; Ficarra, 2017). However, WOSBs can improve their chances of winning a federal government contract through active involvement in professional associations and attending training to learn and interface with regional and national federal government representatives. This practice broadens the professional networks of WOSBs, effectively guiding and providing them support in pursuing

federal government contracts. Additionally, the closer WOSBs are to decision-makers who may participate in professional associations and networking groups, the greater the likelihood of them increasing their reputation that could lead to more work and becoming a preferential contact.

Another recommendation for practice remains continuing to educate senior leaders and decision-makers in the federal government about gender discrimination when contracting with WOSBs. Given the limited number of WOSBs contracted with the federal government (Adams, 2018; Brown & Girth, 2018; Shelton & Minniti, 2018), senior leaders and decision-makers must commit to providing WOSBs with contract opportunities beyond mere verbal proclamations. Adams (2018) revealed firms use women as a token when seeking gender-specified funding, but the male-dominated structures relegate the females to inconsequential figurehead duties after securing the contract. Hence, measures and strategies regarding federal government contracts awarded incorporate WOSBs as equal partners capable of running the business (Adams, 2018; Brown & Girth, 2018). Even though the WOSB's name reads on the application during the federal contract bidding process, incorporating additional gender-related information highlighting WOSB equal participation could ensure contract award diversity beyond the application. Adopting inclusive practices could signal to WOSBs the federal government understands their specific needs and supports their participation in the bidding and business process (Brown & Girth, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

WOSBs would prove the fifth largest GDP in the world if they were a country, creating 7.8 million businesses and generating \$3 trillion in revenue (Mee, 2012). Unfortunately, WOSBs reflect low percentages in federal contract awards. The federal government is the biggest buyer in the United States, spending \$4 trillion with half a trillion on goods and services

annually (Woods, 2017). Since WOSBs have faced barriers when competing for those resources, WOSBs government contracts awarded meagerly increased to 4.79% in 2016 (SBA, 2017). While women in 2016 owned 30% of US small businesses, only 2.5% expanded revenue or expanded beyond \$1 million (OECD, 2016; Wolfe, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to determine, through the experiences of WOSBs, the barriers to pursuing federal contracts. Information from this study could improve stakeholders' working with contracting agencies and WOSBs potential barriers to awareness. The study results could also help WOSB strategy development. The first recommendation for future research holds to increase sample size conducting more interviews over a longer time. This study took place in the DC area where numerous minority businesses conduct business, but where few minority WOSBs have won federal government contracts. The federal government represents the country's largest purchaser of goods and services (Woods, 2017), thus the federal government market provides an optimal place to start a business (Brown & Girth, 2018; Clough, Fang, Vissa, & Wu, 2019).

Additional research on minority WOSBs working in the DC area could offer more information regarding experiences of conducting business with the federal government. For example, mavens could investigate specific industries where minority WOSBs have garnered more success in securing federal government contracts (Brown & Girth, 2018). Additionally, exploring further federal government contracting offices where minority WOSBs have earned contracts provide a starting point in understanding the strategies contracting officers utilized when attracting WOSBs to open jobs. This could improve and extend this research, as well as increase the number of WOSBs winning federal government contract awards.



WOSBs confront a challenge when building strong networks (Adams, 2018; Shelton & Minniti, 2018). Ayala (2016) affirmed educated women succeed at attracting investors and asking for investments. Thus, establishing a strong network with bigger firms, investors, microfinance loans and other lending institutions correlate to obtaining investments for small businesses (McAdam et al., 2018). Even in the United States, one of the most developed countries, 80% of the WOSBs have started in homes and have remained small, inhibiting the establishment of strong networks (Finkle et al., 2013). Future research should focus on networking and professional relationships of WOSBs.

The third theme uncovered in this study held for WOSBs to collaborate with other businesses and grow networks. Numerous associations, institutes, and organizations assisting WOSBs exist. Further understanding their success could provide another research vein benefitting WOSBs seeking federal government business. For example, research into the federal government contract awards members in women-focused business associations, institutes and organizations won could pinpoint specific business industries and agencies awarding WOSB federal government contracts.

Likewise, future research should focus on gender discrimination WOSBs encounter. Discrimination limits the WOSB potential causing females to be under-represented in federal contracts (Ficarra, 2017; McAdam, Harrison, & Leitch, 2018; Mick & Greene, 2015; Shelton & Minniti, 2018). Women continue to experience various challenges hindering WOSBs from obtaining federal contracts, what this research intended to reveal. The results from this study helped WOSBs understand the obstacles they might face while seeking government contracts. These challenges derived from the themes included gender discrimination, small businesses with fewer resources and contacts, as well as not having a well-known reputation for contracting

officers. The findings also clarify how to overcome obstacles, such as partnering with more reputable businesses with larger resources and befriending federal government contract officers, improving the potential in procuring government contracts. Future research into the WOSB lived experiences and gender discrimination could be extended from this study. The women study participants encountered gender discrimination when conducting business with other organizations. Exploring additional contextual situations and factors where gender discrimination has occurred could expand this research.

## **Conclusions**

Chapter 5 presents the study implications, recommendations for practice and future research, as well as the researcher's conclusions. The researcher investigates the problems women confront in business, comprising women operating in the DC area navigating the federal government system to pursue new business opportunities government contracts offer. RBT (Brown & Girth, 2018; Zhao & Fan, 2018) and the SFT (DeVault, 2018; Olesen, 2018) engendered the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. According to Creswell (2018), three to five interviews prove sufficient for a case study. Three WOSBs recruited for this study demonstrated the sample could be extended with additional funding and time.

WOSBs experienced general problems when seeking federal government contracts: gender discrimination and gender inequality. The WOSB study participants reported others made them feel "less than" because of their gender when performing business with other institutions and pursuing federal government contracts. Females encountered gender bias demeaning their contributions to the contract (Adams, 2018; Brunjes & Kellough, 2018). Hence, more federal government set-asides should recognize and assist women in not only securing federal contracts but also minimize the gender marginalization after attaining the contract

(Adams, 2018; Brunjes & Kellough, 2018). Implications must hold the government accountable when it fails to adhere to the law (Cantwell, 2014; Coleman et al., 2014). Implementing these measures could hold the federal government more accountable to follow the law, increasing the federal government contracts awarded to WOSBs.

WOSBs are 21% less likely to earn government contracts than their male counterparts (Zimmerman, 2016). Even if the women had to work in subordinate, sub-contractor roles, not as a prime contractor, the female study participants articulated the significance of fostering connections. Though relationships, WOSBs gained more exposure with bigger businesses to entice future business and accumulate resources playing a small role in big projects of big businesses holding federal government contracts. This study reveals the need for creating relationships extending RBT.

Recommendations for practice include training contracting officers to apply their personal discretion for restricted competition to heighten WOSB contract opportunities. Theme #4 asserted WOSBs recommended getting to know contract officers before applying for contract bids. The relationship a business owner establishes with the contracting officer held beneficial to the study's WOSBs successful federal contact acquisition.

Additional research on WOSBs working in the DC area could offer more information regarding experiences of conducting federal government business. This, as a result, could improve and extend this research, as well as increase the WOSBs winning future federal government contract awards. Future research should also focus on the gender discrimination WOSBs face as well as building strong networks.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol for WOSB

Below are the guidelines for before, during, and after the interviews:

1. Convenient dates, times, and locations for the face-to-face interviews will be scheduled by the researcher.
2. Before the interview, each WOSB will be sent the Consent Form (Appendix E).
3. At least two days before the interviews, each counselor will receive a phone call or email from the researcher and be asked to bring a sample copy of their awarded federal government contract.

Before the face-to-face interview begins, each WOSB will be given a Confidentiality Statement (see Appendix C) to read.

4. Participants will be reminded that participation in this study is voluntary and at any time may withdraw from the study. In addition, participants will receive assurance of confidentiality.
5. Additional time will be allotted for participants to ask questions prior to signing the Consent Form.
6. Once written consent is obtained, the interview will be digitally recorded and expected to last 30 minutes.
7. The digital recorder will be turned on and each WOSB will be asked to answer the interview questions (see Appendix B).
8. Each interview question will be read to the WOSB and clarification will be provided, if needed.
9. To prevent bias, the researcher will not make assumptions based on what participants choose to share or attempt to present answers but instead, probe the participant through phrasing such as “tell me more.”
10. After the interview questions are asked, the digital recorder will be turned off.
11. The WOSB will be thanked for her time and acknowledged for her contribution to the study.
12. Following the interviews, the researcher will memo and jot down reflective notes of observations and all data will be collected and transcribed.
13. After the interviews are transcribed, each participant will receive a copy of the transcribed interview to verify for accuracy.
14. Participants will have one week to review the transcripts for accuracy, make any corrections if necessary, and return to the researcher.
15. After one week, if the participant does not return the transcripts to the researcher, the researcher will move forward with the comments as written. However, if changes are made, the researcher will include the changes in the data.

### **Welcome and Introduction:**

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I need to collect the signed copy of the Consent to Participate in Research.

### **Purpose of the Interview:**

As stated in the Consent form, this interview is intended to collect information for a research study that explores the experiences of WOSB in the surrounding District of Columbia counties

who have pursued and won a federal government contract. During this interview, we will simply talk about your experiences. Please be candid in your responses, as there is no right or wrong way to answer the questions.

**Confidentiality:**

As a reminder, any information that you share with me today will be used for research purposes only. Information that could be used to identify you, such as your name, will not be used or published in any report or document. As discussed, today's interview will be digitally recorded and I will be taking notes of the conversation. The digital recordings and notes related to this study will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet and password-protected laptop. All information related to this study will be destroyed after three years.



## Appendix B: Interview and Focus Group Questions

### A Descriptive Case Study on Women-Owned Small Businesses and Government Contracting

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to examine the experiences of Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSB) and their experiences faced during their pursuit and awarding of federal government contracting dollars. The results from this study may be used in presentations, reports, or publications, but your name, school where you work, or any information that could be used to reveal your identity will not be disclosed. Your responses will be confidential.

#### Demographic Information:

WOSB: # \_\_\_\_\_ Industry: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1.) First and Last name:
- 2.) Preferred Phone number:
- 3.) Preferred email address:
- 4.) Name of business:
- 5.) Years in business:
- 6.) Please indicate your age range and highest degree(s) held: \_\_\_\_\_
- 7.) Number of years as a WOSB: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8.) Number of years in business before winning federal contract: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9.) Do you belong to professional association? \_\_\_\_\_
- 10.) Do you have a business mentor? \_\_\_\_\_
- 11.) If so, what is the gender of your business mentor? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introductory Question

- 1) Please describe your background before becoming a WOSB and why you chose to become a WOSB? **(INTERVIEW)**
- 2) Please describe all of your job duties that are involved with being a WOSB, particularly your duties related to \_\_\_\_\_, and what challenges, if any, you face in your role. Is there more that you want to add? **(INTERVIEW)**
- 3) Please tell me about your business (size, employees, industry, etc.), Who is your customer? How do they influence your business practices? **(INTERVIEW)**

### **Research Question 1.**

- 4) Please describe your experience when you bid on a federal government contract? What influenced your decision to submit a bid? **(FOCUS GROUP)**
- 5) Please explain any specific obstacles or barriers related to your gender that you faced throughout the contract bid process? Were they present throughout the entire process? If not, what specific areas did you encounter the barriers? **(INTERVIEW)**

### **Research Question 2.**

- 6) Please describe in detail and through examples of any positive factors that you received from participating in federal government contract bidding process? **(FOCUS GROUP)**
- 7) Tell me specifically about at least one success story that stands out in your mind that came from participating in the federal government contract bidding process? **(INTERVIEW)**

### **Research Question 3.**

- 11) Please tell me in detail what elements of the federal government contract bidding process that can influence other WOSBs to participate in bidding on federal government contracts? **(FOCUS GROUP)**
- 12) Please describe what competencies you gained that could help other WOSBs to bid on federal government contracts? **(FOCUS GROUP)**

### **Closing**

Thank you so much for your time and participation. Your responses were very thorough. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

## Appendix C: Confidentiality Statement

### *Descriptive Case Study on the Experiences of Women-Owned Small Businesses Pursuing and Winning Federal Government Contracts*

As a researcher working on the above research study at Northcentral University, I understand that I must maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning research participants. This information includes, but is not limited to, all identifying information and research data of participants and all information accruing from any direct or indirect contact I may have with said participants. In order to maintain confidentiality, I hereby agree to refrain from discussing or disclosing any information regarding research participants, including information described without identifying information, to any individual who is not part of the above research study or in need of the information for the expressed purposes on the research program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D: Case Study Protocol

1. Secure permission to conduct research.
2. Seek IRB approval
3. Identify participants through purposeful sampling.
4. The researcher will schedule convenient times dates to meet in person with each participant/focus group at an agreed upon location to discuss the purpose of the study, provide details about the interview process, and time commitment required.
5. Prior to the scheduled meeting, each participant will receive the NCU consent form via email at least two days before, to review in preparation for the interview.
6. At least two days before the interviews, each WOSB will receive a phone call or email from the researcher and asked to bring or email a sample copy of her federal government contract that was awarded.
7. Before the interviews begin, each participant will be given the confidentiality statement (see Appendix C) to read. The researcher will remind participants of the following: participation is optional and that any time may request to be removed from the study; identities will be concealed, and all data collected and analyzed will be secured, confidential, and destroyed all data from this study will be destroyed through the process of shredding and deleting electronic and digital files after three years.
8. The consent form will explain the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time and the confidentiality statement will explain how anonymity (participants' names, school site, and contact information), privacy, and confidentiality will be maintained and protected.

9. Afterward, the researcher will ask the participants if they have questions regarding the research.
10. Once the participants agree to participate, the consent-to-participate forms are signed, which allow the rights and wellbeing of the participants to be protected, each will receive a number (Participant #1, Participant #2, etc.). The numbers will be used in lieu of the participant's name. Only the researcher will know which numbers and letters correspond to each participant.
11. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher will jot down reflective notes of observations and work through a transcription company to transcribe the interview data.
12. As data is collected, it will be uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative software tool to store and organize data. Data analysis will begin once data are uploaded into NVivo.

## Appendix E: Northcentral University Consent Form

### **Introduction:**

My name is Keesha Harris. I am a student at Northcentral University. I am conducting a study for my degree in Business Administration. I plan to study women who run a business in the District of Columbia. I chose you because you won a federal contract. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

I want to interview you about your business. We will discuss the issues you faced when you applied for the government contract. The 30-minute meeting will take place at Bizworks. The meeting will be recorded with a digital device.

### **PRIVATE INFORMATION**

I will keep your information private. I will use a label to identify your information. Accidents do happen, and information may be released.

### **Activities:**

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Sign informed consent and review confidentiality agreement. 2 minutes
2. Make responses to a demographic questionnaire. 5 minutes.
3. Recorded interview where you will be asked two research questions regarding your background as a WOSB and your experiences pursuing federal government contracts. 30 minutes.

### **Eligibility:**

You are eligible to participate in this research if:

1. You are a woman who has been a small business owner in the D.C. area for at least one year.
2. You have been successfully awarded a federal government contract.
3. You are between the ages of 30-50 years old.

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. You have not been successful at winning a federal government contract.
2. You are a woman who has become a small business owner for less than a year.
3. You are a woman younger than 30 years old or older than 50 years old.

I hope to include 10 women in this research.

**Risks:**

There are very few risks in this study. A possible risk is the accidental release of personal information. I will notify you if this happens.

**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits to you.

**Confidentiality:**

The information you provide will be kept confidential.

I will secure your information by locking the computer files with a password.

I will keep your data for 7 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

**Contact Information:**

If you have questions for me, you can contact me at [m.harris1697@o365.ncu.edu](mailto:m.harris1697@o365.ncu.edu). My dissertation chair's name is Marie Bakari. Dr. Bakari is a professor at Northcentral University and currently supervising my research. You can contact Dr. Bakari at [mbakari@ncu.edu](mailto:mbakari@ncu.edu).

If you have questions about your rights in the research, or if a problem has occurred, or if you are injured during your participation, please contact the Institutional Review Board at [irb@ncu.edu](mailto:irb@ncu.edu) or 1-888-327-2877 ext 8014.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to quit at any time without any penalty.

**Future Research**

Any information collected from you during this research may **not** be used for other research in the future, even if identifying information is removed.

**Signature:**

A signature indicates your understanding of this consent form. You will be given a copy of the form for your information.

Participant Signature

Printed Name

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature

Printed Name

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Audiotaping:**

I would like to use a voice recorder to record your responses. You cannot participate if you do not wish to be recorded.

Please sign here if I can record you: \_\_\_\_\_