EMPOWERMENT: A QUALITATIVE COMPARISON
OF DEFINITIONS BETWEEN SEXES

by

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ABSTRACT

By

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The definition of empowerment is a widely studied topic within the psychological literature (Hur, 2006). However, an exploration of how empowerment definitions differ between men and women has yet to be conducted. A total of 141 participants (100 women and 41 men) completed either the online version or the classroom version of a short answer questionnaire. The data were examined using qualitative, inductive, thematic analysis by two teams of volunteer undergraduate students. Themes that emerged from the men’s data were power, achievement, and capability, while themes that emerged from the women’s data were power, achievement, capability, influence, and community.
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CHAPTER 1:  
NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the study

The definition of empowerment is a widely studied topic within the psychological literature (Hur, 2006). However, a comparison of empowerment definitions between men and women has yet to be conducted. This study can give future researchers insight into defining the construct and creating instruments that may be more sensitive to sex differences. The present study focused on the differences in definitions of empowerment between men and women students at a medium sized public university. As this was the first study exploring how the different sexes defined empowerment, future research will be needed to explore differences between men and women from other populations.

Previous researchers have examined the definition of empowerment by focusing their research on disadvantaged populations (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) or the subordinates of employers within Industrial/Organizational psychology (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). To examine a population not classified as disadvantaged, such as college students, can give researchers another viewpoint.

Rationale

Over the past thirty years, empowerment has been investigated by many researchers (Hur, 2006; Menon, 1999, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995), and can be found in a variety of fields such as nursing (McCarthy & Freeman, 2008), social work (Wolfgang & Roessler, 2009), marketing (Fuchs, Prandelli, Schreier, 2010), rehabilitation (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Warschausky 1998), community psychology (Hur, 2006), and management (Lee & Koh, 2001). Within these areas, various theoretical perspectives of empowerment were used to design an
Empowerment definition (Hur, 2006; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). The researchers in these fields designed instruments in attempts to measure empowerment (Bolton & Brookings, 1998). Measures of empowerment consist of questionnaires, surveys, or brief interviews (Bolton & Brookings, 1998; Menon, 1999; Speer & Peterson, 2000). Commonly, empowerment measures are administered to disadvantaged populations (Dunst, et al., 1988). Disadvantaged is defined as groups of individuals who lack adequate resources (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, 1998; Clark & Krupa, 2002; Conger & Kanugo, 1988; Dunst, Trivette, Davis, & Cornwell, 1988; Gutierrez, 1990; Lorion & McMillan, 2008; Niesz, Koch, & Rumrill, 2008). The lack of adequate resources is based on race, age, sex, and ability (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, 1998; Clark & Krupa, 2002; Conger & Kanugo, 1988; Dunst, Trivette, Davis, & Cornwell, 1988; Gutierrez, 1990; Lorion & McMillan, 2008; Niesz, Koch, & Rumrill, 2008). However, empowerment measures are typically based on the definition the researcher believed to be most relevant, thus giving little consensus on the term empowerment.

Defining empowerment is one of the primary goals put forth by researchers, such as Zimmerman (1995), who defined empowerment as a process an individual or group may experience attempting to reach a goal of importance to that individual or group. From the theoretical research and measurement designs, empowerment is defined based on the perspectives of the author of a particular study. The development of a consistent definition of the empowerment construct has proven to be difficult as different authors make use of differing theories and perspectives (Gibson, 1991).

One such perspective of psychological empowerment is based on an individual level in which individuals may feel a sense of control of their lives (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). As psychological empowerment examined individuals’ experiences on an individual basis, an
aspect such as context may influence an individual’s definition of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). Context and definitions are explored through the design and administration of empowerment measures. These empowerment measures were designed to assess an individual’s definition by questioning the participant either through oral interviews (Postma, 2008; Speer & Peterson, 2000) or written surveys (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, 1998). Research suggests there are differences between written language and spoken language (Marinellie, 2009). An increase in the amount of words used and a higher level of vocabulary words were found in written language compared to spoken language. This finding may be the result of the increase in the amount of time an individual has to write in comparison to spoken communication (Marinellie, 2009).

Linguistic meaning was a key aspect in exploring definitions of empowerment as biology and culture influence how an individual uses words to create a definition (Chiarello, Welcome, Halderman, Julagay, Towler, Otto, and Leonard, 2009; Marinellie, 2009; Van Dyke, Zuverza, Hill, Miller, Rapport, Whitman, 2009). Biological research has shown that differences exist between men and women in regards to language processing (Chiarello, Welcome, Halderman, Julagay, Towler, Otto, & Leonard, 2009; Van Dyke, Zuverza, Hill, Miller, Rapport, Whitman, 2009) which has relevance to how different sexes create meaning. To clarify, sex was defined as the physical composition of an organism which is determined by chromosomes and genes (Unger, 1979); whereas, gender was defined as traits influenced by society that an individual expresses based on sex (Unger, 1979). Previous researchers who have examined sex and gender differences typically use these two terms interchangeably (Unger, 1979) which may have caused confusion.
The purpose of the present study was twofold. First, the study was designed to explore possible differences in how men and women define empowerment using a written answer format and possibly validate or expand on the present conceptualizations of empowerment. The second purpose for the study was to explore how a more advantaged sample might define empowerment. Participants in this study were asked a variety of questions pertaining to empowerment. These questions were designed to provide further insight as to how a particular participant views his or her experience(s) with empowerment. The emerging themes from participant responses were examined for differences through inductive qualitative analysis.
Empowerment

After conducting theoretical research studies across multiple fields, Hur (2006) concluded that empowerment was a multi-dimensional construct that consists of different levels, and involves a social process. A working definition proposed by Menon (1999) concluded that the empowerment construct is a cognitive state composed of three interconnected dimensions. These dimensions (or facets) consist of perceived control, perceived competence, and goal internalization. First, an individual experiencing a sense of perceived control has feelings and beliefs of influence and authority (Menon, 1999, 2001). Second, an individual experiencing a sense of perceived competence has confidence in his or her skills to complete a task or goal (Menon, 1999, 2001). As for the third dimension, an individual with goal internalization becomes excited about the goal given by the leadership of the organization (Menon, 1999, 2001). Additionally, Spreitzer (1995) stated that empowerment is an “increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence… self-determination, and impact” (p. 1443). Although the definitions have slight differences, it was concluded that empowerment is a multi-faceted construct (Menon, 1999) and that a clearer definition may aid researchers and clinicians in promoting and understanding experiences with empowerment among different populations.

Previous authors created definitions of the empowerment construct by utilizing various perspectives as well as the power theory. The Power theory is the basis of the empowerment construct (Hur, 2006; Yoder & Kahn, 1992), as empowerment has been described as involving a power struggle (Clark & Krupa, 2002). The Power Theory has two forms: power and the lack of
power (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Furthermore, power was divided into two sub-sets: power-to and power-over. First, power-over was described as the type of power used to control the lives of others for particular reasons, whereas, power-to was described as the ability to perform a particular action (Clark & Krupa, 2002). According to Yoder and Kahn (1992), power-over was composed of four different levels. The four levels include societal, organizational, interpersonal, and individual. The societal level focuses on society and male dominance. Organizational focuses on women employees and topics such as wage inequalities. Interpersonal focuses on relationships in which a person exercises power over the other individual in that relationship (e.g. marital conflicts, child abuse, and sexual harassment). But, at the individual level, power is viewed as a personality characteristic (e.g., dominance) or attitude the individual uses to influence others (Yoder & Kahn, 1992). Secondly, power-to emerged from within individuals as they control their own feelings and behaviors (Clark & Krupa, 2002) rather than controlling another person or persons (Yoder & Kahn, 1992). Power-to was referred to as individual empowerment (Yoder & Kahn, 1992). Banyard and Laplant (2002) indicated that empowerment consists of both power-over and power-to concepts.

Many power struggles span over the course of history in the United States, but the civil rights and women’s rights movements brought attention to the empowerment construct. The intentions of the civil rights and women’s rights movements were to remove segregation and promote equality to all Americans of minority. Other movements such as disability rights had intentions of bringing awareness and attention to disadvantaged groups (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Since these minority groups lacked resources and a certain amount of power (Clark & Krupa, 2002), these movements focused on changes needed in society to create equality for all. Empowerment played a major role as individuals of minority status and individuals pushing for
equal rights experienced the power-to and the power-over aspects of empowerment (Clark & Krupa, 2002). These individuals performed marches, sit-ins, and various other methods of protest (power-to) to establish equality for all Americans so that not one individual or group of people had more rights than another (power-over) (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Empowerment was a popular term during the 1950s and 1960s used by individuals and groups within the civil rights and women’s rights movements (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Eventually, laws were put into place prohibiting individuals from discriminating against people based on race, religion, nationality, and sex, thus providing empowerment opportunities to all people.

Today, the term empowerment is used throughout a variety of fields. Fields, such as social work and counseling psychology use the term empowerment to aid the client by drawing attention to his or her strengths and resources (Wolfgang & Roessler, 2009). The marketing field gives final product selection to consumers by utilizing empowerment in which consumers feel a sense of control (Fuchs, Prandelli, Schreier, 2010). The nursing field utilizes empowerment to aid hospital staff by practicing safety, and giving patients access to quality care (McCarthy & Freeman, 2008, p. 68). And, across a variety of fields, empowerment was studied through research spanning a variety of populations such as members of the El Proyecto Bienestar (EPB) (Well-Being Project). The Well-Being Project was established to examine any health risks and take action that Hispanic farm workers experienced in the Washington community (Postma, 2008). The study was intended to address the differences in how these participants described empowerment, but results suggested that the use of language is an important aspect to understanding empowerment (Postma, 2008). Postma (2008) discovered that translating the definition of empowerment from English to Spanish led to a slightly different meaning as power translated in Spanish has a power-over meaning.
Although a variety of populations have been the focus of much empowerment research, there is a lack of research exploring empowerment differences between men and women (Itzhaky & York, 2000). The few existing studies exploring these differences did not always yield the same results (Itzhaky & York, 2000). Yoder and Kahn (1992) focused on the power aspect of empowerment and discussed the differences between men’s and women’s behavior found in previous research. Jenkins (1994) conducted a study exploring “power-related gratification and frustration in the shaping of power-motivated women’s careers” (p. 155) compared with previous studies with men. Her results suggested that power satisfaction and stress in careers differ between sexes which are likely due to the differing roles women take in these positions of power compared with men. Itzhaky and York (2000) reported differences in community participation between men and women. Individuals who were involved in activities within the community in which they lived were believed to be more empowered (Zimmerman, 1995). Although Itzhaky and York’s (2000) findings did not reveal any significant differences between gender, men and women felt empowered at different points in their participation. Men felt more empowered when “they were participating as community representatives” while women felt more empowered when “they participated in the decision making process” (p. 232).

As the empowerment construct and its corresponding measures have developed over the years, authors have based the definition of empowerment on theories and perspectives relevant to that author (Hur, 2006; Menon, 1999, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995, 1998). Researchers have not all agreed as to how empowerment should be defined (Gibson, 1991; Menon, 1999; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zimmerman, 1995; Lee & Koh, 2001). These definitional disagreements stem from differing perspectives or approaches (Gibson, 1991) including social structural,
motivational, leadership, and psychological empowerment. (Refer to Appendix A) for a diagram as to how empowerment can be broken down into the different approaches).

The social structural perspective focuses on the actions of those who hold power, and does not examine the feelings of individuals (Menon, 2001). Empowerment has been described as a structure used to disperse power that allows all employees at varying levels to participate (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Seibert (2011) mentioned that early researchers believed the structures and practices of an organization were evidence that empowerment existed. According to Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998), organizations improved participation through empowerment processes and structures for their employees, thereby improving the organization’s validation of success for obtaining their goals. Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) suggested that a community empowerment exists in which the community and organizations come together to improve the lives of others within the community. The organization’s purpose is to empower its employees, but when the community and the organizations work together towards a common goal for the community it advances the lives of those who live within that community.

Within the Motivational approach, researchers focus on the feelings of workers generated by specific tasks. Individuals using this approach attempt to locate and improve situations that inhibit employees from feeling a sense of power (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Previous researchers believed empowerment was accomplished by enabling subordinates through improvements in self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). According to this approach, empowered employees performed competently (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Furthermore, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) added to Conger and Kanugo’s (1988) definition by describing
the motivation within empowerment as intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation was defined as an experience resulting from a task that was viewed as enjoyable (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

The Leadership approach is similar to the motivational approach in that it also examines the feelings of the employee. However, researchers examine the feelings of the employees generated by the direction and guidance of the leaders rather than the feelings the tasks generate. The leader is responsible for creating a stimulating vision of the goal that will enhance the performance of the follower (Menon, 2001). According to Yukl (1989), there are many leadership style theories that are connected to the effectiveness of the leader. These theories include path-goal theory, situational leadership, leader substitutes, normative decision, and a few others (Yukl, 1989).

The psychological approach takes place on a more individual basis than the approaches previously described. Within this approach, empowerment and its ethical issues are assessed (Menon, 2001) on a more individual basis. The psychological approach may be used in a variety of areas and is not exclusive to organizational settings, unlike the other approaches (Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment in this approach is often referred to as Psychological Empowerment (PE). PE involves the feelings an individual experiences when he or she is in control of his or her life as well as the behaviors and interactions he or she makes (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) explained that PE was composed of three main interworking factors that only take place at the individual level. Zimmerman (1995) referred to these three main factors as intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components. First, the intrapersonal factor refers to how a person views him or herself and how much control he or she has over his or her life. This component includes the individual’s feelings of self-efficacy, perceived control and competence (Zimmerman, 1995). Secondly, the interactional component
referres to the awareness an individual has about his or her community as well the cooperation to achieve goals (Zimmerman, 1995). Zimmerman referred to this factor as the bridge that connects the intrapersonal to the behavioral component. Lastly, Zimmerman (1995) suggested the behavioral factor involves the actions of individuals. Essentially, this factor involves a person engaging in a behavior to change a particular issue. This behavior includes seeking employment, joining a support group, learning to manage stress, etc. But, these intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components may not be the same for every individual. Individuals may define empowerment differently based on the situation or context in which they are involved (Zimmerman, 1995).

Zimmerman (1995) described three assumptions of psychological empowerment. The first assumption suggests that psychological empowerment varies from person to person as individuals’ backgrounds and needs differ. This suggests that the differing perspectives of individuals give empowerment different meanings. The second assumption suggests that circumstances influence the structure (e.g. skills, knowledge, actions) needed for empowerment. In this assumption, Zimmerman (1995) referred to the institute in which individuals are involved (e.g. school, work, and volunteer).

Context was defined as situations that are interconnected (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Context refers to the physical environment in which the individual is living or the concept of a particular circumstance such as being poor (Turro & Krause, 2009). The lack of money, a good education, health, and shelter play a part in poverty, as well as how the individual identifies him or herself and empowerment.

For the final assumption, Zimmerman stated that empowerment may change over time which was also supported by other authors (Hur, 2006; Gibson, 1991; Guiterrez, 1990). The
interactions and life experiences of individuals may cause empowerment to change and develop through an individual’s lifespan (Gibson, 1991). Hur (2006) concluded that empowerment is not constant, but continues to develop. From a social worker’s perspective, Guiterez (1990) suggested that the “empowerment process does not occur in a series of stages” but rather “simultaneously and [they] enhance one another” (p. 150). This suggests that the aspects of empowerment develop based on the experiences of the individual which may occur all at once. As the individual faces new challenges, these developing aspects may influence the decisions the individual makes based on different past experiences. This process eventually develops into an outcome that an individual has influenced in order to change a particular issue in his or her life (Hur 2006).

Many researchers have agreed that two forms of psychological empowerment exist: process and outcome (Clark & Krupa, 2002; Gibson, 1991; Lee & Koh, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995). First, the process of empowerment has been defined as a power struggle that involves a series of stages an individual or group experience (Guiterez, 1990). The empowerment process requires individuals to take actions; thus empowerment is a positive concept (Gibson, 1991). With these experiences, individuals are able to gain the knowledge needed in order achieve their goal (Zimmerman, 1995). These experiences can include organizations and leaders aiding individuals in empowering processes, such as members of a community mentoring adolescents (Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment outcomes are the results (Clark and Krupa, 2002) or consequences (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998) created by the empowerment process. Outcomes have been studied the most in empowerment research (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998) due to the ability to measure either qualitatively or quantitatively the effects
of a study on participants. The intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral factors are typically viewed as outcomes. However, measuring outcomes can be problematic due to varying definitions and contextual issues of the empowerment construct (Zimmerman, 1995).

A contextual issue within the empowerment research is the classification of advantaged and disadvantaged populations. Disadvantaged and advantaged populations are classified by the context in which they live such as an individual’s social economic status (Turró & Krause, 2009). A few disadvantaged populations include individuals with disabilities (Bolton & Brookings, 1998), individuals who have experienced childhood maltreatment (Banyard & LaPlant, 2002), families of children with health impairments (Dunst, et al., 1988), and sexual assault survivors (Ullman & Townsend, 2008). The term advantaged has not been defined in the literature that has discussed the disadvantaged definition. However, based on the definitions of the term disadvantaged from previous research, it can be inferred that advantaged includes individuals who do not lack adequate resources. Additionally, there has been a lack of clarity within previous research pertaining to adequate resources. It is this researcher’s belief that authors should define adequate resources for the population in question so that the context in which the population exists is clear. In some circumstances, a population may be classified as disadvantaged in one context, but not another. For example, a college student who earns a scholarship that pays for all college expenses may be classified as advantaged, but what about his or her social resources? If this individual lacks the social support needed to continue achieving good grades, should he or she still be classified as advantaged?

**Empowerment: Measures**

Theoretical research exploring the framework and structure (Hur, 2006; Seibert, et al., 2011) and the pursuit of a clearer definition (Menon, 1999) of the empowerment construct, aids
in the creation of instruments used to measure empowerment. Researchers from various fields have designed numerous instruments in attempts to measure empowerment (Bolton & Brookings 1998; Menon, 1999; Speer & Peterson, 2000). These instruments have been designed for a variety of reasons such as exploring the facets of empowerment (Speer & Peterson, 2000), exploring empowerment within a population (Bolton & Brookings, 1998; Postma, 2008), and exploring the empowerment of subordinates within an organization (Menon, 1999). These instruments usually consist of a questionnaire or survey asking participants from a specified population how they feel towards certain aspects of their lives.

A study conducted by Speer and Peterson (2000) was based on a community-organizing context of empowerment involving a coalition for substance abuse prevention. They designed a measure based on two variables. The first instrument, Cognitive Empowerment Scale, contained three perspectives: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. This measurement consisted of items designed by the researchers and a shortened version of Sociopolitical Control Scale (SPCS) (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). The Cognitive empowerment portion of this measure contained four sub-scales. The first sub-scale was based on the idea that power comes from interpersonal relationships thereby giving the individual strength. The second sub-scale was based on the idea that power comes from rewards and punishments within the community. The third sub-scale was based on the idea that certain outcomes of specific issues are influenced by people in power. The fourth sub-scale was based on the idea that these powerful individuals promote certain ideas or shape the ideas of the community. The emotional domain (PE in a socialpolitical context) was measured by the SPCS. The behavioral dimension reflects activities in the community that may change the conditions of that area while the second variable measures a sense of community and community leadership. Results indicated that power has a strong influence on the empowerment
construct, but the emotional and behavioral scales showed no significant correlation with the cognitive scale.

Menon (1999) conducted a principle study for the development of an empowerment measure. In this study, he defined empowerment based on the three facets of power: perceived control, competence, and inspirational leadership. Results indicated that perceived control (empowerment subscale) was strongly correlated with centralization which is the “degree of hierarchical authority with respect to involvement in decision making” (Paulson, 1974, p. 321), and perceived competence (empowerment subscale) was correlated with self-esteem (organizational variable). He also stated that goal internalization (empowerment subscale) was correlated “with affective organizational commitment and job involvement” (organizational variables) (p. 163).

Another instrument, the Personal Options Questionnaire (POQ), was based on theories and previous studies of psychological empowerment (Bolton & Brookings, 1998). The POQ was designed to measure the intrapersonal component of empowerment in individuals with disabilities. Along with previous researchers mentioned in this study, Bolton and Brookings (1998) agreed that the intrapersonal component is multifaceted and they developed an instrument with three factors: Personal Competence, Group Orientation, and Self-Determination. Personal Competence was described as the ability of an individual to be organized in setting goals while relying on him or herself, and working to achieve those goals. Group Orientation involves the ability of an individual to willingly participate in his or her community. Self-Determination refers to the ability of an individual to express his or her opinions competently and make choices in order to solve problems.
Researchers have designed instruments to measure psychological empowerment. Each instrument has been based on differing contexts, and each has limitations. First, Speer and Peterson (2000) from a social work viewpoint designed an instrument based on community-organization: the Cognitive Scale. Cognition is one aspect of empowerment, so the emotional and behavioral aspects were added. The emotional aspect of this instrument involves a shortened version of a previously developed instrument. As for the limitations, this instrument may have issues with construct validity as the Cognitive Scale did not correlate with the emotional and behavioral scales. Additionally, the shortened version of the instrument may have affected the results. Secondly, Menon (1999) based his instrument on the three facets of power and an employee context. A limitation that was not addressed in the study was the large number of participants (45% of \( n = 311 \)) who responded in French (p. 162). Menon (1999) did not state whether the questionnaire was written in English, French, or both. As discussed with the Postma (2000) study, language effected how empowerment was translated from one language to another. Finally, Bolton and Brookings’ (1998) research was based on a rehabilitation context. Although Bolton and Brookings’ (1998) findings were supported, this instrument was limited in that the characteristics were selected based upon the researchers’ own biases, and designed only to measure empowerment within a specific population (e.g., individuals with disabilities), which limit generalizability. If researchers only focus on specific groups of individuals, empowerment within other populations goes unexplored. Thus, current instruments may not adequately reflect the unexplored population’s definition of empowerment. Although empowerment researchers have argued that context may alter the definition (Zimmerman, 1995) very few studies have observed and addressed the linguistic meanings in individual definitions of empowerment (Postma, 2008).
Language

An individual’s mental lexicon consists of permanent words stored in his or her memory that can be recalled as needed including the meanings, pronunciations, spellings, as well as relation to other words (Chao, 2009). Two models aid in the explanation of how the lexicon is organized. Chao (2009) explained that the hierarchical network model was organized in a hierarchy in which words are broken into broad and precise terms. Secondly, words are broken down into networks within the spreading activation model (Chao, 2009). The words in this model are linked through related words and consist of “conceptual, syntactic, and phonological knowledge” (Chao, 2009, p. 43). A person’s mental lexicon is used to acquire words for both written and spoken communication.

Spoken and written words used in the creation of a definition are influenced by a variety of factors (Marinellie, 2009) such as biology and culture (Chiarello, Welcome, Halderman, Julagay, Towler, Otto, and Leonard, 2009; Van Dyke, Zuverza, Hill, Miller, Rapport, Whitman, 2009). Differences exist between written and spoken language (Marinellie, 2009). Written language is viewed as formal and used for such purposes as education, whereas, spoken language has a tendency to be viewed as informal and used for purposes such as socializing. Additionally, it has been found that variability exists in the amount and level of language used when writing or speaking. It is believed that an individual has more time to select and change words while writing in comparison to speaking (Marinellie, 2009), thus creating these known differences. For the purpose of the current study, sex differences in these areas (e.g., biological and cultural influences, written and spoken language) were examined as participant responses were individually hand written.
Researchers have explored spoken language and nonverbal cues, such as hand gestures, and have suggested a variety of theories explaining the differences between sex in regards to language. First, Chiarello, Welcome, Halderman, Julagay, Towler, Otto, and Leonard (2009), explored the possibility of differences in males and females associated with the language regions of the brain. Generally, language processing takes place predominantly in the left hemisphere of the human brain (Chiarello, et. al, 2009). However, some researchers have argued that women are able to process language in both hemispheres more so than men (Chiarello, et. al, 2009, p. 211; Van Dyke, et. al, 2009). Secondly, sex differences were found in studies exploring nonverbal cues (Hall, Murphy, & Mast, 2006; Rosip & Hall, 2004). However, the underlying explanation for an individual’s ability to accurately judge other person’s nonverbal cues is unknown (Rosip & Hall, 2004). Results from several studies have concluded that women score higher in nonverbal recall accuracy (NRA) than men (Hall, 1978; Hall, Murphy, & Mast, 2006; Rosip & Hall, 2004).

Sex differences have also been found in written language. Newman, Groom, Handelmann, and Pennebaker (2008), suggested that men and women use language differently such as sentence structure, amount of words used, and types of words used. Additionally, men and women were found to display different genres of writing style such as journalistic or scientific (Herring & Paolillo, 2006). However, there were some areas of language difference between men and women that were conflicting, such as the amount of first-person usage and emotion words. Newman, Groom, and Handelman (2008) stated, “women used more words related to psychological and social processes” while “men referred more to object properties and impersonal topics” (p.211). The researchers suggested that although men and women differed slightly in written and spoken language, these differences were significant and reliable.
Other research exploring definitions have found sex differences as well. Mahdavi (2010) conducted a comparison of men’s and women’s definitions of success. His study was relevant as success is an outcome of the Achievement Goal Theory which contains components of motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation), performance, and mastery (Hulleman, Schrager, Bodmann, & Harackiewicz, 2010). Similar to Zimmerman’s (1995) definition of psychological empowerment, achievement goal was defined as having a cognitive aspect that influences an individual’s behavior to complete an end goal important to him or her (Hulleman, et. al., 2010). These goals consist of either positive or negative outcomes (Hulleman, et. al., 2010).

Empowerment is said to have an aspect of motivation and positive outcomes (Gibson, 1991; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Thus, success may be an outcome of empowerment. In the Mahdavi (2010) study, participants were students from a private California university. The questions used explored how the participants defined success, how the university influenced the definition, and other questions pertaining to the influences on each person’s success. Although it was unclear as to what method of analysis was used, results suggested that slight differences in the definition of success exist between the two sexes. While both men and women believed that to be successful, an individual must be able to balance work and family, men varied as to how important child rearing was.

**Review**

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional construct which has been the focus of study for many years. Researchers from a variety of fields have studied empowerment and how it relates to individuals, groups, and organizations. Empowerment is a difficult construct to define because of the variety of perspectives and contexts involved (Gibson, 1991; Zimmerman, 1995). As for the most recent perspective, psychological empowerment is believed to change over time.
as well as take on various forms depending upon an individual’s context (Zimmerman, 1995). Despite the large number of empowerment measures, many are not generalizable.

Few studies have used open-ended questions or interviews to qualitatively explore a participant’s definition of empowerment (Postma, 2008; Speer & Peterson, 2000). The current study asked participants to define empowerment through open-ended questions so that participants were allowed freedom of expression. Because the purpose of this research was to explore sex differences, previous linguistic studies were explored. Linguistic studies have shown that there are differences in how men and women process and use words in spoken and written form (Marinellie, 2009; Van Dyke, et. al., 2009). Thus, possible sex based differences in how empowerment is defined was important to address for further research and instrument construction.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research may be conducted in several different ways by using questionnaires, interviews, etc. Similar to quantitative methodology, various methods of analysis within qualitative research exist (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unfortunately, most qualitative research used in previous studies of empowerment do not specify how the data were examined, therefore, making the studies difficult to replicate (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers utilizing qualitative methodology are able to conduct in-depth explorations and investigate aspects such as complex relationships between individuals more readily than those utilizing quantitative methods (Lultz & Hill, 2009). Qualitative analysis allows for researchers to examine participant responses, specifically the linguistics used to further explore meanings and apply theory to the findings (Lultz & Hill, 2009; Madill & Gough, 2008). Thus, qualitative methodology was used in the current study to explore the definition of empowerment.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

**Biases**

No researcher is without biases. It is important for these to be addressed in qualitative research so that studies may be replicated accurately and limitations addressed accordingly. The current researcher held the following biases: 1. Empowerment exists. 2. Empowerment exists across age, sex, race, and ability. 3. Empowerment is multi-faceted and comprised of factors such as power, and motivation. 4. These factors may influence one another. 5. The factors develop over time. 6. Differences exist between men and women in how they view empowerment.

**Participants**

The participants included 140 undergraduate students and 1 graduate student from the University of Central Missouri who volunteered to participate in this qualitative study of empowerment (African American = 20, Latino/Hispanic = 4, Caucasian = 114, Asian = 2, and “I choose not to respond” = 1). Three participants stated that English was not their native language. There were 100 participants were women and 41 participants were men. Participants were selected from different classes at the University of Central Missouri and volunteered through the Sona-System. All participants were above the age of 18. Ages were grouped into categories similar to the average ages of students attending college according to National Center for Education Statistics (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, Roth, Manning, Wang, & Zhang, 2012) (18-25 = 137, 26-39 = 7, 40-55 = 2, above 55 = 0).
Procedure

The researcher employed two selection procedures for gathering participants for this study. First, with the permission of the instructor, volunteer participants from Introductory Psychology classes on campus were given packets that included the consent form, demographics questionnaire, and the Empowerment Questionnaire (see Appendix B). Participants were given a couple of days to complete and return the packet to the instructor who maintained contact with the researcher. Second, participants signed up for the online version of the study through the Sona-system (an online program in which students may select to participate in a variety of research opportunities). Participants electronically signed the consent form by simply selecting a box that stated they agreed to participate. Next, the online study presented the demographics questionnaire followed by the Empowerment Questionnaire. In both procedures, participants read and signed the informed consent agreeing that they were above the age of 18. Participants received course credit upon completion of the study. The consent form contained the primary investigator’s contact information as well as contact information for the counseling center on campus. Once all data were collected, qualitative, inductive, thematic analysis were conducted as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to examine for emerging codes and themes.

Thematic Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Qualitative Analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was utilized in the current study to identify emerging themes (patterns). Utilizing the inductive approach, data were not placed into pre-existing codes, thus allowing for a bottom-up approach and for the research to be data driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To begin, two groups of volunteer undergraduate students interested in learning qualitative methods assisted in the analysis to minimize researcher bias. These teams were
trained in the process of qualitative thematic, latency analysis; coded the data; searched for emerging themes; and worked independent from the primary researcher who simultaneously coded and searched for emerging themes. The research teams were unaware that the data were grouped into two different data sets based on sex. Copies of the data were distributed to each member of each team. Both teams examined the first set of data until the coding and themeing processes were complete. Once each team had coded and themed the first set of data, they were then given the second set of data to code and theme. The teams consisted of both men and women.

The researcher and teams examined and individually familiarized themselves with the data by reading and rereading participant responses. First, the researcher and teams separately coded data by examining the meanings (consistent patterns) of the words used for each of the questions on the questionnaire. Each team separately met with the researcher to discuss their findings once data were coded. Next, the researcher and teams separately examined the codes which were organized into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were grouped together based on common definitions to form themes. The researcher met with the teams again to review emerging themes in an attempt to reach consensual validation of themes. Consensual themes were determined suitable whereas unmatched themes (themes not agreed upon by the researcher and team) were reexamined. If a consensus was not met with one or more coded themes, the data for these were discussed further until new codes were established. Next, themes were reviewed and refined by reexamining the data. This process included a reexamination of the codes, the themes, as well as examining the coherency of themes with other themes, as well as the data as a whole. Finally, all emerging themes were defined and renamed accordingly.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Descriptive

Once data were collected and examined, questions one and seven were reevaluated based upon the responses given by participants. Question one asked participants to state when and where they have come across the term empowerment. This question was examined separately from the other questions as it was intended to gather a contextual understanding of the participant’s definition of empowerment. The results of this question indicated that participants may have come across the term empowerment in social settings, educational settings, or through mass media. Social settings would include interactions with peers and family members, participating in political movements, listening to motivational speakers, and so on. Educational settings would include participating in church activities, public or private school courses, or extracurricular activities related to school, and so on. Mass media includes radio, television, or other electronic means that reach a wide audience.

Question seven asked the participants to describe a moment they were disempowered; however, after reading through the participants’ answers, it was concluded that most of the participants did not understand the term disempowerment. This was indicated by statements such as, “Never really knew what that word meant” and “When I got an F on my paper.” Most of the participant responses referred to disappointment, physical problems, depression, or bereavement.

Men’s and women’s data shared three themes with the same definition while two additional themes emerged from the women’s data. During thematic analysis, concentration on the male’s definitions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to empowerment resulted in three themes: power, achievement, and capability (see Appendix C). Concentration on the
women’s definitions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to empowerment resulted in five themes: power, achievement, capability, influence, and community (see Appendix C).

Sub-themes also emerged from several of the themes mentioned above. These sub-themes were considered to be internal or external based on how the participant described the overlying theme. In several cases, participants referred to both internal and external sub-themes in their response, so these were added into the percentages, thereby creating percentage rates that add to more than 100%. Internal sub-themes were defined as the main theme features that come from within the self or affecting the self in some fashion. External sub-themes were defined as the main theme features that were influenced by outside sources. Many of these themes and sub-themes included responses from participants that indicated positive and negative experiences or outlooks on that specific theme. Negative and positive sub-themes were determined by examining the words used by participants and basing them on the current definitions of those words. For example, a response such as “someone in charge like a dictator or Hitler” would be placed into the theme power. This response would also be placed into the sub-theme external-power based on the power being labeled as an external source to the individual. This response also would be considered negative due to the history associated with Hitler. In several cases, participants did not refer to a positive of negative sub-theme in their response, thereby creating percentage rates that add to less than 100%.

Experience was examined based on one of Zimmerman’s (1995) assumptions that suggested psychological empowerment varies from person to person. Experience was not considered a theme in this study since questions five and six of the questionnaire specifically asked participants to recall a moment in which they were empowered. As suggested by (Braun & Clarke (2006), themes should not be based on specific questions. Experience was noted
throughout the questionnaire although the higher percentage of participant responses for experience emerged from these two questions. The topic of experience related to empowerment will be addressed separately in each section similar to the other emerging themes.

Definitions

Themes found in the data for both men and women that share the same definition are presented here and include the themes power, achievement, capability, and experience. Power (noun) was defined as the ability to exercise control in a given situation. This theme was used by individuals to exercise control by introducing boundaries, limitations, or rules either on themselves or others. Achievement (noun) was defined as the outcome related to the actions taken to reach a goal of importance to that individual. Capability (noun) was defined as having the skills (physical or intellectual) and knowledge necessary to attain a goal. Experience (noun, verb) was defined as a subjective knowledge pertaining to a particular event and its context related to empowerment.

The sub-themes that share the same definition include external-power, internal power, external-achievement, internal-achievement, past-experience, and future/current-experience. External-power was defined as controls set in place by an outside source. Internal-Power was defined as the control an individual has over his or her own thoughts and behaviors. External-achievement was defined as a tangible goal that was attained by an individual using his or her skills (physical or intellectual). Internal-achievement was defined as the attainment of internal goals the individual felt was necessary for the betterment of him or herself. Past-experience was defined as a past event an individual experienced related to empowerment. Future/current-experience was defined as an expected experience, or an ongoing process that has not reached conclusion.
Thematic Analysis: Men

Power

The theme *power* was found in 55.56% of men’s responses. This theme contained words or phrases such as strength, power, leader, authority, control, make change, responsibility, lead, and rights. In some instances, power was given to individuals or groups by another or may emerge from within the self. Power given to individuals would include the government writing laws that issued rights to individuals. Results from the data suggest that this theme demonstrated both internal and external sub-themes. Responses were broken into these sub-themes and also examined for positive and negative sub-themes. 94.62% of participant responses were related to an external power, whereas 27.69% of participant responses were related to an internal power. The control in which *external-power* refers to might come from individuals such as a parent, or groups of individuals, such as government. Participant examples included, “something that gives you power” and “a person being put in control.” Participant examples for the *internal-power* sub-theme included “to make my own decisions” and “power of choice.” The participant responses for this theme were then examined for negative and positive sub-themes. The positive sub-theme consisted of 30.77% of the participant responses. These responses referred to leadership in a positive manner such as, “lead and encourage followers.” The negative sub-theme consisted of 11.54% of participant responses. These responses referred to negative leadership qualities, such as “dictator” or listing the specific name of a leader in history such as “Hitler.”

Achievement

The theme *achievement* was found in 38.46% of men’s responses. This theme contained words or phrases such as motivation, growth (physical, spiritual, and educational), bettering self,
self-esteem, success, wealth, confidence, graduation, promotions, overcome, and accomplishment. This theme was also found to have internal and external sub-themes. The external-achievement sub-theme consisted of 80% of participant responses. External-achievement sub-theme refers to tangible goals that might include awards, trophies, mastery of a physical or mental skill, etc. Examples from participant responses included “graduating high school and college” and “getting my driver’s license.” The internal-achievement sub-theme consisted of 35.56% of participant responses. Examples of internal-achievement included changing a thought process, attitude, feeling, or behavior. Other examples of internal-achievement included education and spiritual growth. Participant’s responses were also examined for negative and positive sub-themes. The positive sub-theme consisted of 63.33% of participant responses, while no negative sub-themes were found within the achievement theme. An example of a positive participant’s response was, “great feeling to improve myself.”

Capability

The capability theme consisted of 29.49% of participant responses. This theme refers to an individual’s capability of achieving a goal or being an effective leader. The words and phrases used by respondents were knowledge, ability, intelligence, and decision making. An example of an individual having the skills to attain a goal would include the necessary knowledge an individual needs to pass colleges classes that are crucial for meeting graduation requirements. Participant examples included, “ability to lead and encourage followers.” The responses for this theme did not indicate internal or external sub-themes, nor were there negative or positive sub-themes.
Experience

While experience was specifically addressed in two of the questions, it was found in several responses throughout the questionnaire. It was not classified as a theme as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), but was examined as such. After the examination of questions five and six, it was found that 93.59% of men suggested that they have experienced or will experience empowerment in their lifetime. Examples of participant responses of experience included, “when I graduated, I felt empowered.” Each participant’s situation is subject to perceptions and interpretations which may vary, so participants’ responses referring to feelings about empowerment were also captured in this category. These responses included, “confidence” or “excitement.”

The past-experience sub-theme consisted of 83% of men’s responses, while future/current-experience sub-theme consisted of 17% of participant responses which suggests they anticipate an experience of empowerment in the future. Examples of past-experience participant responses included, “when I graduated.” Participant examples for future-experience included, “nervousness for a new responsibility.” Participant responses were also examined for positive and negative sub-themes. Of these past and future experiences, 37.7% were positive in nature while less than 1% were negative. Some of the negative responses included fear, envy, anxiety, disgust, and others. Some of the positive responses included respect, excitement, happiness, ambition, and others.

Thematic Analysis: Women

Capability

The capability theme consisted of 41.5% of women’s responses that stated words and phrases related to human ability. These words included knowledge, ability, intelligence, decision
making, and phrases of physical and intellectual skills. Participant examples included, “own personal ability” and “ability to make decisions.” The responses for this theme did not indicate internal or external sub-themes, nor were there negative or positive sub-themes.

**Power**

The *power* theme consisted of 40.07% of participant’s responses that included words or phrases related to power. These included words such as strength, power, leader, authority, control, make change, responsibility, lead, and rights. Results from the data suggested that this theme has both internal and external sub-themes. The *external-power* sub-theme consisted of 97.50% of participant responses. Participant examples included, “government” and “dominated by another individual.” The *internal-power* sub-theme consisted of 11.10% of participant responses. Participant examples included, “being in charge of who I am” and “control… over your mind, body, and life.” The participant responses for the sub-themes were then examined for negative and positive sub-themes. The positive sub-theme consisted of 11.9% of participant’s responses, whereas, 13.1% were negative. Positive responses referred to leadership in a positive nature such as, “lead and encourage followers,” but negative responses often referred to a negative leadership such as “dictator” or listing the specific name of a leader in history such as “Hitler.”

**Achievement**

The *achievement* theme consisted of 28.30% of participants’ responses. These responses included words such as motivation, growth (physical, spiritual, and educational), bettering self, self-esteem, success, wealth, confidence, graduation, promotions, overcome, and accomplishment. This theme was also found to have internal and external sub-themes. The *external-achievement* sub-theme consisted of 94.90% of responses. Examples from participants
included, “winning a tournament” and “being financially independent.” The \textit{internal-achievement} sub-theme consisted of 20\% of participant responses. Examples included changing a thought process, attitude, feeling, or behavior for the positive, as well as educational and spiritual growth. Participants’ responses were also examined for a negative and positive sub-theme. The positive sub-theme consisted of 46.3\% of participant, and 1.7\% of the responses were negative.

\textit{Influence}

The \textit{influence} theme consisted of 22.8\% of participants’ responses. The participant responses included words or phrases such as leaders, role models, women’s rights and civil rights, encouraged, manipulate and “something that helps people.” \textit{Influence} (noun, verb) was defined as an external motivator (such as a person or an event) that affects an individual’s decisions and decision making processes within a given situation. Most of the responses pertaining to this theme were personal stories of the participants. These stories included topics such as, “team leaders” and “influence you have over others.” The responses for this theme did not indicate internal or external sub-themes, but participant responses were examined for positive and negative sub-themes. The positive sub-theme consisted of 27.70\% of responses, while 10.20\% were considered to be a negative influence. An example of a positive influence was encouragement, and an example of a negative influence was manipulation.

\textit{Community}

The \textit{community} theme consisted of 14.80\% of participants’ responses and referred to words and phrases that indicated interactions between people within proximity of each other (e.g. neighborhood, cities, ethnic groups, organizations, etc). Examples included government, women’s rights, civil rights, volunteer work, empire, and the phrase “rules over people.”
Community (noun) was defined as the group of people an individual may interact with either through volunteer work, leadership roles, religious activities, or other roles associated with the area in which he or she was connected. The people affected may include specific marginalized groups such as African Americans, women, or the poor. Examples from the data included, “charitable functions” and “fighting for one’s rights.” Although the words parents and family were stated a few times in the data, these were not added into this theme. These particular groups do not necessarily affect a community on a macro level, but more on a micro level. For example, women’s rights put into place by laws of the government affected masses of women during that time frame as well as women currently, but parents may only affect a couple of individuals when giving their children more freedom. The responses for this theme did not indicate internal or external sub-themes, nor were there negative or positive sub-themes.

Experience

While experience was specifically addressed in two of the questions, it was found in several responses throughout the questionnaire. It was not classified as a theme as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), but was examined as such. Female participants (87%) indicated in questions five and six that they have experienced or will experience empowerment in their lifetime. Examples of participant responses of experience included, “I felt a sense of empowerment, when I graduated high school.” Each participant’s situation is subject to perceptions and interpretations which may vary, so participants’ responses referring to feelings about empowerment were also captured in this category. These responses included, “confidence” or “proud.”

Women’s responses (87.2%) indicated they have experienced empowerment in the past, while 12.8% of participant responses suggested they may face an experience of empowerment in
the future. Examples of *past-experience* participant responses included, “when I graduated. Participant examples of *future/current-experience* included, “tribulations in my own life” and “volunteer at the homeless shelter.” Participant responses were also examined for positive and negative sub-themes. Of these past and future experiences, 46% were positive while less than 10% were negative. Some of the negative responses include fear, envy, anxiety, disgust, and others. Some of the positive responses include, respect, excitement, happiness, ambition, and others.

*Comparison: Men and Women*

Results from this study indicated that men and women share three of the same themes when defining empowerment: *power*, *achievement*, and *capability*. Men (55.56%) tended to use more words and phrases related to *power* than did the women (40.07%). The percentage of *external-power* compared between the two sexes was about the same, but men (27.69%) had a slightly higher percentage rate for responses indicating *internal-power* compared to women (11.10%). When examining the positive and negative responses between the two sexes, women (13.1%) had a slightly higher percentage of reporting *power* as negative than did men (11.54%), while men (30.77%) reported *power* as more positive than women (11.9%). As for *achievement*, men (38.46%) had a slightly higher percentage rate for using words and phrases associated with *achievement* than did women (28.30%). Both men and women used more words and phrases associated with *external-achievements* than *internal-achievements*. Yet, women (94.90%) had a higher percentage of responses related to *external-achievements* than men (80%), while men (35.56%) showed higher responses for *internal-achievements* than women (20%). Positive and negative sub-themes were explored for this theme. Men (63.33%) responded with more positive statements than did women (46.3%). While there were no negative responses given by men,
there were a few negative responses given by women (1.7%). Lastly, women (41.5%) tended to use more words and phrases associated with capability than did men (29.49%). Participant responses did not indicate sub-themes for capability.

However, two themes emerged from the data given by women that did not emerge from the data given by men: influence and community. Women (22.8%) used words and phrases that indicated an external source may influence empowerment. These sources could include parents, peers, significant other, leaders, organizations, and the community in which a person lives. As for community, 14.80% of women’s responses referred to words and phrases such as volunteer work, leadership roles, religious activities, or other roles associated with the area in which he or she lives.

Although experience was not considered a theme within this study, this construct did affect the examination of data. Within responses to questions five and six of the questionnaire, 93.59% of men and 87% of women reported to have experienced empowerment at some point in their lifetime. A high percentage of both men (37.7%) and women (46%) stated their experience as positive. Yet, a higher percentage of women (10%) indicated negative sub-themes related to experience than did men (less than 1%).
Conclusion

A thematic analysis was conducted comparing the differences between men’s and women’s definitions of empowerment. During thematic analysis, exploration of the men’s definitions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to empowerment resulted in three themes: \textit{power}, \textit{achievement}, and \textit{capability}. Exploration of the women’s definitions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to empowerment resulted in five themes: \textit{power}, \textit{achievement}, \textit{capability}, \textit{influence}, and \textit{community}. Results indicated that sub-themes emerged from \textit{power} and \textit{achievement}. Three of the emerging themes were similar in definition, but two themes emerged from the female participants’ data that were not present in the male participants’ data. Although many of the themes that emerged were similar, there were small differences between each theme.

The findings of this study are supported by previous language research that suggested women tend to be more verbose in written and spoken responses than do men (Newman, et. al, 2008; Herring & Paolillo, 2006). The verbose responses participants gave in this study tended to use multiple words to describe empowerment, for example, “strong, power, independent, and hard working…” This response was placed into the themes \textit{power}, \textit{achievement}, and \textit{capability}. Men tended to use one to two word responses. These verbose responses may simply stem from language differences between men and women. However, as the empowerment subject often refers to marginalized individuals, the possibility exists that women felt they could express themselves more freely on this subject thereby creating responses with a larger amount of words and details than men.
Additionally, the types of words used by women were slightly different in that they tended to be more specific or descriptive. This may have affected the results for some of the themes as participants were able to give a more descriptive image of their thoughts for that particular question, thereby creating a richer data base to code and theme. For example, a typical one worded response for men, such as “a leader,” would be themed as power. Since the response does not indicate a negative or positive sub-theme, it would not be categorized as such. However, a typical descriptive response given by a woman, such as “a leader who encourages others,” would be themed as power. Since this response states the word “encourage” it would be categorized as a positive sub-theme and would be placed into a second theme such as influence.

Men had a higher percentage rate for using words and phrases associated with achievement than did women. As discussed previously, this may be the result of women responding with statements about process rather than outcomes. As for the sub-themes of achievement, both sexes stated more words and phrases related to an external-achievement than internal-achievement. This result is consistent with the work of Spence (1985) who suggested that the American society “is an achievement-oriented society that has historically encouraged and honored individual accomplishment…” (p. 1286). These accomplishments include winning trophies, receiving a good grade, graduation, having a leadership position, and winning arguments. Furthermore, a higher percentage of men responded with positive statements within the sub-theme than did women. While there were no negative responses from men within this sub-theme, there were negative responses from women. These negative responses may be a misunderstanding of the question or of the term empowerment. An example of these negative responses was, “…people rising above others but not always in a good way.”
Another language difference discovered in this study was the way in which women described their experience with empowerment. Women tended to respond to these types of questions with details of the process and less about the outcome of a particular situation, for example, “standing up for my brother.” Similar responses may indicate that women hold the process of a situation as more significant than the outcome. These types of responses could explain the higher percentage rates in women’s responses for capability.

Power-over may be described as the type of power used to control the lives of others for particular reasons (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Yoder and Kahn (1992), suggested that power-over was composed of four different levels, one of those levels being the societal level which focuses on society and male dominance. Due to the roles in a patriarchal society, men are viewed as leaders. Small groups, such as a family of three, often place the father as “head of household” and look to him to make major decisions within the home. Both men and women in this study tended to define empowerment as involving a type of power. This theme was more prevalent throughout the data than other themes. However, power was broken down into sub-themes since the term is multi-faceted.

In this study, power-to was defined as the ability to perform a particular action (Clark & Krupa, 2002). Capability can be viewed as a variation of power, specifically the power-to achieve a goal. Women might view the process (capability) of obtaining a goal as being more significant than the goal itself. For example, if an individual were to run for President of an organization at his or her school, a woman might view the process (power-to) and the skills she learns along the way as valuable. However, men might view the end goal (achievement) as being the most important.
Both men and women had high percentage rates of using the *external-power* sub-theme in their responses in comparison to the *internal-power* sub-theme. Men had higher percentage rates of using words and phrases related to *internal-power*, than did women. This could stem from societal roles, by which men learn to engage behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes needed to maintain standards related to this role of power. Results suggested that men view power as positive. Men in authority may receive praise for the work they have accomplished thereby associating power as positive. Women in leadership positions may not receive the same praise that a male counterpart receives; this is especially true in male dominated areas (Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003). These women may be labeled with negative stereotypes that influence how other women view the position of power (Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003).

Zimmerman’s (1995) research on empowerment supports the findings of this study in which men and women reported they had experienced empowerment. Zimmerman (1995) stated that experiences aid individuals in gaining knowledge they need in order to achieve their goal. These experiences include past events upon which individuals build their future actions and behaviors, or future events for which individuals prepare themselves. As suggested by Gibson (1991), an individual’s actions give him or her positive concepts of empowerment. This supported the findings of the high percentages rates of positive experiences reported by both men and women. For example, “I ended a relationship that was detrimental to my well-being” was viewed as a positive past experience in which the woman gained the knowledge and understanding that she has the power to take control of her life.

Zimmerman (1995) stated that empowerment was comprised of three interworking components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral. In this study, participant responses related to the empowerment experience referred to at least one of these three components. An
example of the intrapersonal component, “I can provide for myself” refers to the control this participant has over his or her life. An example of the interactional component, “when I go to Pride events that support my community” suggested the he or she understood the need for gay rights in his or her community. An example of the behavioral component, “help/serve others to show that people are there for them and care…” illustrates that he or she took actions to improve his or her community. Furthermore, these examples also demonstrate the processes and outcomes of empowerment. As discussed previously, these components are viewed as outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995) that are the consequences created by the empowerment process (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Each example shows that the participant understood the potential outcomes of the actions he or she chooses. The difficulty with demonstrating the process for each example is that the experience would be different for each participant.

Throughout the questionnaire, participants described empowerment as a process or an outcome. These results are supported by previous research (Clark & Krupa, 2002; Gibson, 1991; Lee & Koh, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995).

Several responses given by women specifically state a lack of understanding of the term empowerment. Examples include, “I’m not sure” and “I may not know the exact definition.” Other responses specific to question one included, “I have never heard of empowerment” and “nowhere.” Although these statements were found, many participants later gave responses that would suggest otherwise. For example, a participant stating that she has never heard of empowerment, then gives an example of how she was empowered at one point in her life. Another indicator for this lack of understanding was the responses made through the entire questionnaire. For example, stating a phrase of bereavement to represent feelings associated
with the term *empowerment*. Fewer men mentioned not having an exact definition of empowerment, but the male participants responded to the other questions that state otherwise.

To summarize, men and women tended to view empowerment similarly, although varying slightly within each theme. Possibly due to the verbose responses given by women, two themes emerged from the data that were not as prominent in the men’s data. It is possible that with a larger number of men, these same themes could emerge. Men responded with a higher percentage of *power* type words than did women, while women responded with a higher percentage of *capability* type words. This gave the researcher the impression that men view empowerment more as an outcome, while women view empowerment as process. Although there were slight differences in the overall percentage of men and women responses related to *achievement*, those could simply be due to language differences as mentioned previously.

Furthermore, many of the words and phrases used by participants were captured in more than one theme. An example of this was a response made by a woman who stated, “When I graduated, I felt empowered.” This response was considered to belong to the *achievement theme* as well as the *experience* category.

Expectantly, participants shared several different experiences. Some of the experiences shared related to the strength the participant felt when standing up to bullies, the confidence he or she felt when accomplishing a task, the pride he or she felt when volunteering for the community, the respect he or she has for individuals in authority, and others. Yet, one particular experience that has not been addressed was the participant’s spirituality. A couple of male participants discussed their experiences with their spirituality, but it was discussed more by the female participants. Most of these particular responses were related to community involvement, but this particular topic should be explored further in relation to empowerment.
**Limitations**

Limitations of this study included a limited sample of the population. All of the participants were college educated. Therefore the themes might not accurately reflect the differences between men and women within the general population. A second limitation was the limited number of men who completed the questionnaire. A larger sample of men might have yielded slightly different results or caused further themes to emerge. A third limitation to this study was the use of a short answer questionnaire. Had this study used interviews instead, the researcher could have had participants clarify any responses that were ambiguous. This would have increased the amount of time spent on each question. Another limitation to a short answer questionnaire was the motivation for completion. Participants of this study were given course credit for completing the questionnaire. After further review of the time each participant spent responding to the questions, the average length for the online version was 8.7 minutes.

**Future Research**

Several possible research studies should be conducted to further the exploration of empowerment. First, future research on the topic of empowerment should explore the definitions between men and women within specific ethnicities. Cultures can be vastly different from the culture of most Americans. If men and women of this study have differences in how they define empowerment, the possibility that men and women from different cultures or sub-cultures define empowerment differently as well. Secondly, research exploring populations with limited education would also give researchers further insight into empowerment. This study explored a college population, but people with less education may experience and define empowerment differently. Based upon the findings of this study, future research should explore why women define empowerment more as a process and men define empowerment more as an outcome. It
was found in this study that women have a tendency to give verbose responses. Future research should also explore the possible reasons for women’s lengthy responses. For future research, a comparison of men’s and women’s definitions of empowerment using an interview format would give researchers an in depth exploration.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
EMPOWERMENT APPROACHES

Empowerment Construct

- Social Structural Approach
  - Outcomes of organizations

- Motivational Approach
  - Tasks that generate the feeling of empowerment

- Leadership Approach
  - Directions given that generate the feeling of empowerment

- Psychological Empowerment Approach
  - Feelings that individuals or groups experience
APPENDIX B
EMPOWERMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions asked of the participants.

1. Where and when have you heard of empowerment?
2. What is empowerment to you?
3. What thoughts emerge when you see the word empowerment?
4. What feelings emerge when you see the word empowerment?
5. How have you experienced empowerment in the past?
6. Please describe a moment in your life when you were empowered?
7. Please describe a moment in your life when you were disempowered?
8. What else would you like the researcher to know about empowerment?
**APPENDIX C  
DEFINITION OF THEMES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Power</strong> (noun)</th>
<th>the ability to exercise control in a given situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-External-power</td>
<td>controls set in place by and outside source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Internal-Power</td>
<td>the control an individual has over his or her own thoughts and behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Achievement</strong> (noun)</th>
<th>the outcome related to the actions taken to reach a goal of importance to that individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-External--achievement</td>
<td>a tangible goal that was attained by an individual using his or her skills (physical or intellectual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Internal--achievement</td>
<td>the attainment of internal goals the individual felt was necessary for the betterment of him or herself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Capability</strong> (noun)</th>
<th>having the skills (physical or intellectual) and knowledge necessary to attain a goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Influence</strong> (noun, verb)</th>
<th>an external motivator (such as a person or an event) that affects an individual’s decisions and decision making processes within a given situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Community</strong> (noun)</th>
<th>the group of people an individual may interact with either through volunteer work, leadership roles, religious activities, or other roles associated with the area in which he or she was connected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Experience</strong> (noun, verb)</th>
<th>a subjective growth of knowledge pertaining to a particular event and its context related to empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Future/current-experience</td>
<td>an expected experience, or an ongoing process that has not reached conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Past-experience</td>
<td>a past event an individual experienced related to empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** was not considered a theme, but was defined as such