

DISSERTATION

CAREER REENTRY AND THE KALEIDOSCOPE CAREER MODEL: EXPERIENCES OF
HIGH ACHIEVING PROFESSIONAL WOMEN REENTERING THE WORKFORCE AFTER
OPTING OUT

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Fall 2017

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ABSTRACT

CAREER REENTRY AND THE KALEIDOSCOPE CAREER MODEL: EXPERIENCES OF HIGH ACHIEVING PROFESSIONAL WOMEN REENTERING THE WORKFORCE AFTER OPTING OUT

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of career reentry of high achieving professional women who had opted out of the workforce after having children. The theoretical framework was based on the Kaleidoscope Career Model of Mainiero and Sullivan, and its parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge. The research indicated that most professional women did not willingly leave the workforce after having children. Instead, due to family pulls and workplace pushes, they felt like they had no other option.

While the main focus of the study revolved around the experiences of high achieving professional women reentering the workforce, reasons why these women opted out as well as their experiences while opted out were also examined to fully understand the phenomenon. Although there is considerable research as to why women opt out, minimal research exists on their experiences while opted out and their career reentry experiences. The participants studied were eight high achieving professional women who had successfully reentered the workforce after opting out. They were married, had attended graduate school, and had been in professional careers prior to opting out. In-depth interviews and life histories were conducted.

Data were analyzed using Clarke's situational analysis method, and the story of these women was told through the composite woman. Three types of maps were used to help analyze the data: situational maps, both messy and ordered, social world/arena maps, and positional

maps. While Clarke's maps are typically used for the hard sciences, they were beneficial for this social science study. Modifications to the maps were made and the differences are discussed. The Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory (KCSI) was also given to the participants to better understand which parameter of authenticity, balance, and challenge was given the most focus.

Rich results were added to the existing research. Flexibility was critical for the composite woman to successfully reenter the workforce. She faced challenges reentering and was offered a lower salary. Balance became a daily struggle. She strived to achieve authenticity, while putting the least emphasis on challenge. Understanding why she left the workforce, her experiences while she was opted out, as well as her struggles to successfully reenter the workforce provides valuable information for organizations, human resource professionals, those who create government policies, as well as women who have opted out. New models were created to provide a framework on how to succeed during these three stages: decision to opt out, experiences while opted out, and career reentry experiences. Creating a more equitable and flexible work environment would result in inching closer to breaking the glass ceiling by reducing the prevalence of opting out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this dissertation has been a tremendous accomplishment and lifetime dream and goal. Starting this Ph.D. program prior to having any children, my life has transformed as I now have three little boys and a different career trajectory and viewpoint on life. I could not have completed this journey without the help and support of so many. To my committee: Dr. Gene Gloeckner, Dr. George Kamberelis, Dr. Lisa Mainiero, and Dr. Haddock, I am forever grateful for your support. To my advisor, Dr. Gloeckner, thank you for always being there to help, as well as the fun boat rides. Dr. Mainiero, thank you for allowing me to work with you and sharing your incredible knowledge and expertise. Dr. Kamberelis, thank you for teaching me about qualitative research and situational analysis. I also want to acknowledge all of my professors I worked with at CSU. Specifically, thank you to Dr. Sue Lynham and Dr. Thomas Chermack, I really enjoyed your classes. In addition, I want to acknowledge the women I interviewed during this study. You are all an inspiration for successfully reentering the workforce.

My family is my rock and my support system, to whom I will forever be grateful. To my husband, Patrick, thank you for raising the bar so high and being my forever friend. To my parents, Clinton and Anne, who have given me endless love and support my whole life and have been incredible role models, thank you. And to my older brother, Justin, I always pushed myself in school to be as successful as you. Writing this dissertation has been a tremendous learning experience as I learned so much from this research and writing. I hope this dissertation can help others and make a positive difference. While one chapter is closing, I look forward to the next chapters that will open and the accompanying journey.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my three little boys, Benjamin, William, and Jonathan. Being your mom inspired me to pursue this topic and your endless laughter and smiles make it all worthwhile. I hope you follow your passions and embrace learning, as I have followed mine.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While women have a plethora of career opportunities, inequity remains (Carter & Silva, 2010). Professional women lag behind men throughout their careers, and if they take career breaks, the opportunities to reenter at the same level are sparse (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett, Sherbin & Forster, 2010). Women in leadership roles face prejudices that their male counterparts do not, simply because they are women (Eagly, 1995; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000). As their careers progress, they typically lag further behind men, especially when they face family pulls and workplace pushes (Cahusac & Kanji, 2013; Jones, 2012). When faced with the biology of reproduction, internal pressures within marriage, and aging parents, women often slow down their careers, while men's careers accelerate (Hoschchild, 1975). When the women are not challenged and are not receiving the same opportunities as their male counterparts, they can become frustrated, and those who can afford to often quit or opt-out (Ibarra, 2010). In fact, many high achieving professional women are not opting out of the workforce, instead they are being shutout (Stone, 2007). When they are ready to reenter their careers, they find opportunities for reentry few and far between (Hewlett, 2007).

This study seeks to understand the career reentry experiences of high achieving professional women reentering the workforce after opting out. For that purpose, background information is essential to telling the story. There are typically a series of events that lead up to a woman opting out and eventually reentering the workforce. Understanding what occurs prior to reentry helps to inform the stories of these women's lives, and can lead to deeper and more enriched qualitative research on the phenomenon. In the present, qualitative study, a relatively

new method was used to analyze the data, Clarke's situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), which emerged from grounded theory. Using this process, a variety of visual maps, specifically situational maps, social worlds/arenas maps, and positional maps were created to better understand the phenomenon.

Especially critical to this study is the fact that there is minimal prior research that has been conducted after women have opted out and attempted to reenter the workforce (Stone, 2007; Stone & Hernandez, 2012; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). The limited research makes this study valuable given that many individuals and families are involved, as well as organizations that value talent, and each of these parties could benefit from understanding and improving the reentry process after opting out.

In telling the story of these women's lives, this dissertation covers three distinct phases that align with the research questions provided later in this chapter. First, the dissertation explores why high achieving professional women opt out of the workforce. Second, the experiences of these women once they opt out is documented. Third, and the primary focus of this dissertation, the experiences of high achieving professional women reentering the workforce after opting out are explored. While the third issue is the main focus, in order to understand their stories, the events that led up to career reentry are important in telling the story. Throughout the dissertation, the parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge will be incorporated. Like a kaleidoscope that shifts and forms various patterns, the Kaleidoscope Career Model explains shifting priorities throughout women's careers, including opting out of the workforce (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), and eventually reentering the workforce. While opting out is a choice that is not for all women, whether women choose to opt out because of family pulls or workplace pushes, many attempt to reenter the workforce and face incredible challenges (Hewlett, 2007).

Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model as the theoretical foundation, this study examines how the parameters of the Kaleidoscope Career Model – authenticity, balance, and challenge – shape the lives of high achieving professional who have opted out of the workforce and have begun their new careers after opting out (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, 2006; Sullivan, Forret, Carraher & Mainiero, 2009; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Sullivan, Martin, Carden & Mainiero, 2003). Like a kaleidoscope that creates different patterns and shifts based on how three moving mirrors combine, women’s careers can take on different shapes and patterns based on the events in their lives. Within the Kaleidoscope Career Model, authenticity signifies when values are aligned with the individual’s external behaviors and values of the organization, balance refers to the equilibrium between work and non-work demands, and challenge represents a need for stimulating work as well as career advancement. This approach provides a non-traditional career model that aligns closely with non-linear career research, including protean careers (Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1995, 1996), boundaryless careers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), and portfolio careers (Gold & Fraser, 2002).

Statistics regarding high achieving professional women are startling. When it comes to having a high-powered career and a family, the painful truth is that women in the United States do not “have it all” (Slaughter, 2012). At least a third of this country’s high-achieving women do not have children, even though most women desire motherhood (Hewlett, 2002a). The more successful the man, the more likely he is to have a spouse and children. At age 40, 49% of high achieving women are childless, while 19% of their male peers are. Family or not, the number of women in high powered positions is quite low. According to the research firm Catalyst, in 2015, women held 5.8% of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies. They held 20.2% of board seats for Fortune 500 companies and, worldwide, women held only 12% of the world’s board seats

(Catalyst, 2017). In 2013, less than one-fifth of companies had 25% or more women directors. In the last study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, women in the general workforce earned an average of 20 cents less for each dollar earned by men (United States Government Accountability Office, 2009). In the United States, in 2015 while women were nearly half (46.8%) of the labor force, only 39.2% were managers. And higher up the corporate ladder, women are rarer (Catalyst, 2017).

While these figures are for women in the workforce, the numbers are equally telling for women who are attempting to reenter the workforce after opting out. Hewlett, an expert on gender and workplace issues, conducted studies in 2004 and 2009, examining the experiences of women who reentered the workforce (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett, Sherbin & Forster, 2010; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Thirty percent did not return to the workforce. After only being out of the workforce for 2.7 years, only 74% of women who left the workforce could obtain any type of job and only 40% could find a full-time mainstream job. If a woman was out of the workforce for three or more years, she lost an average of 46% of her previous salary. Twenty six percent of the women lost all or some of their management responsibilities. In a different study examining women who opted out of the workforce, 50% of participants were frustrated about job-hunting and 18% said the experience was depressing (McGrath, Driscoll & Gross, 2005).

Government policies and organizational policies are providing some help to working mothers, but we as a country still have more we can do. When reviewing the statistics of the percentages of women in our United States government, the people who are creating and instituting both national and state policy, the numbers involving high powered women in government tell a bleak story. While there are some encouraging examples, such as the 2016 Presidential election, where the United States had the first woman represent a major party as a

candidate for president, and in 2007, the first woman was elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives, these cases are rare. Currently, in the 115th United States Congress, the House of Representatives includes 19.1% of women and the senate consists of 21% of women. Four current governors are women, and women hold 24.8% of U.S. state legislators positions (Catalyst, 2017). Government organizations such as the United States Department of Labor and the various departments that make it up have some policies for working mothers, including the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. And states have some individual policies as well. But in too many cases, the organizations, while they follow the bare minimum as required by government, do not do much more than that. Many companies have “lip service” benefits. They say they have benefits that support the working mother and families, but if women try to use these benefits, they are penalized. *Working Mother*, a magazine that advocates for the country’s more than 17 million moms (Working Mother, 2017) ranks the best companies for working mothers. Initiatives placing companies high on the list include having more women as top ranking executives, leadership development programs, flexible workplaces, mentoring, parental leave, family support, and advancement opportunities for women (Working Mother, 2017)

This study has an important place in the larger social context of the United States. Women have more opportunities in their careers than they did fifty years ago, but also more demands and pressures. Historically, a new wave of feminism in the United States was initiated with the 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan. She conducted interviews with suburban housewives in the late 1950s/early 1960s and discovered they were unhappy in their family lives, even though they had the stereotypical happy family and seemed to “have it all.” The feminine mystique referred to the idea that women were fulfilled by devoting their lives to being housewives. However, the results indicated otherwise. This spark galvanized a revolution,

with more women entering the workforce, a movement for equal pay for equal work, and for equal access to quality education (Friedan, 1963). Since then, women have made strides in the workforce, but simultaneous with the development of important buzz phrases such as the second shift, which refers to the labor that women perform at home in addition to the paid work in the workforce (Hochschild 1989; Hochschild & Machung, 2012), and the glass ceiling (Lyness & Thompson, 1997), which signifies the unseen, yet unbreakable barrier that often stops women from advancing their careers, regardless of their achievements.

Women face continuing challenges in the workplace, and many can be understood through social role theory (Eagly, 1987). Social role theory explains why men and women have traditionally taken on different roles, and why there are different expectations of men and women, including expectations regarding workplace behavior (Eagly, 1987, 1995; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000). Specifically in the workplace, role congruity theory predicts prejudice towards female leaders in the workplace (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002). A male leader exhibiting leadership styles will be viewed more favorably than a woman exhibiting those same behaviors. As a result, successful women are typically less often liked, and may receive fewer development opportunities for career advancement, leading to lower levels of career satisfaction. When women are less satisfied and are facing external pressures in their personal lives, they are more likely to respond by opting out of the workforce (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Jones, 2012).

Statement of the Research Problem

The problem addressed here is that high achieving professional women are opting out of the workforce and, when they attempt to reenter the workforce, they face significant challenges (Hewlett, 2009; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012; Stone & Hernandez, 2012). Not only do they

experience difficulty finding a job, but they also encounter lower wages, prejudice, and discrimination. In addition, a majority of high achieving professional women who have opted out also believe they have to change careers entirely to fit their preferred lifestyle (Hewlett, 2007; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012; McGrath, Driscoll, & Gross, 2005). This belief has a negative impact on the careers of high achieving professional women, but also creates a problem for organizations because turnover is costly (Hewlett, 2002). In an analysis of 30 case studies in 11 research papers published between 1992 and 2007, the results indicated that businesses spend about one-fifth of an employee's annual salary to replace that worker (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). That same study found very highly paid jobs and those at the senior or executive levels can have turnover costs of up to 213 percent of the position's annual salary.

Some U.S. based companies seem to be getting it right. *Working Mother* magazine's 2016 list of "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers" reported the following major trends among their winners: benefits such childcare support, flexible schedules, and telecommuting help working families thrive while advancement programs are helping women continue to succeed (Working Mother, 2016). These organizations exhibit some elements of Kaleidoscope thinking and alternative career paths, such as building on-ramps as well as off-ramps, so that professionals and workers can take career interruptions and return later, making top-level managers accountable for turnover and advancement rates of women, creating rewards systems based on outcomes and actual performance, instead of face time, and fostering an organizational culture that encourages and rewards the use of family-friendly programs should (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). While many organizations have some of these policies in place, the culture often does not reflect the intent of the policies (Hochschild, 1997). As a result, women who take advantages of these benefits may still be frowned upon and indirectly penalized (Stone, 2007).

Research Questions

In qualitative research, inquirers state research questions, not objectives or hypotheses.

The research questions assume two forms: a central question, which is a broad question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon, and associated sub questions, which follow each general central question (Creswell, 2009). In order to explore the questions fully and gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon, the third research question and sub-question will be the main focus here. However, the first two research questions are still important to reflect life historically and better understand the experiences that lead up to career reentry. The research questions are as follows:

Research Question #1: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce?

Research Question #2: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women while they were opted out.

Research Question #3: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women when they return to the workplace after opting out?

Research Question #3a: How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge factor into their experiences of career reentry?

Operational Definitions

Various terms are utilized throughout this study. The following definitions are provided to help readers understand the terms as well as the context for this study.

Career Reentry - A term synonymous with “on ramps” that refers to individuals reentering the workforce after taking a break from their careers (Miller, 1996).

Family Pulls – Family demands which may provide a reason for women to opt out of the workforce (Stone & Hernandez, 2012).

Gender Identity - Individuals' beliefs about the extent to which they possess psychological traits that are associated with gender stereotypes for each sex, with “masculine” traits for men and “feminine” traits for women (Kite, Deaux, & Haines, 2008; Powell & Butterfield, 2003, 2012).

High Achieving Professional Women - The definition of high achieving professional women is taken from Stone's opting out research. Stone's “high achieving professional women” are similar to Hewlett's “high achieving women.” Stone's definition includes women who are highly educated, had previously worked as professionals or managers and enjoyed career success, and who were married to men who could support them being at home (Stone, 2007). Hewlett's definition includes the requirements that women have a doctorate or professional degree in medicine, law or dentistry, were employed full-time or self-employed and earning an income that places them in the top 10 percent for their age group (Hewlett, 2002). While Hewlett's definition was originally chosen for the study, when the researcher was seeking participants, she found many compelling stories were available from professionals who better met Stone's less specific requirements but had equally important experiences to share.

Kaleidoscope Career Model - The theoretical framework of this study and the model created as a means of understanding the “opt out” or career interruption phenomenon. Like a Kaleidoscope, individuals shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways. The three parameters of the model are Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, 2006; Sullivan, Forret,

Carraher & Mainiero, 2009; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Sullivan, Martin, Carden & Mainiero, 2003).

On Ramps - A term used by researcher Hewlett that refers to process of reentering the workforce after taking a career break, usually to care for a family member. This term is paired with “off ramping” (Hewlett, Sherbin, & Forster, 2010).

Off Ramps - A term used by researcher Hewlett to refer to highly educated and qualified women opting out of the workforce (Hewlett, et al., 2010).

Opt Out Revolution - A term coined in 2003 by a *New York Times* writer that tells the story of a number of women who choose to leave the workforce or alter their careers after having children (Belkin, 2003).

Role Congruity Theory - A theory that explains prejudice towards female leaders and assumes that both gender roles and leader roles influence leadership styles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Social Role Theory - A theory that recognizes the historical division of labor between men and women, and helps explain why men and women have traditionally taken on different roles (Eagly, 1987, 1995; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000).

Workplace Pushes - Challenges that women face in the workforce which contribute to them opting out (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett, Sherbin & Forster, 2010).

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are the study parameters that are under the control of the researcher but still have the potential to impact the study (Roberts, 2010). The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. Study participants were delimited to those in or connected with the Stapleton Mom's Group, a group of mother's who live in and around the Denver neighborhood of Stapleton.
2. The study participants were delimited to English speakers who had worked in U.S. based organizations.
3. The study participants were delimited to women who could financially afford to opt out of the workforce after having children.
4. The study was delimited to participants who fit the criteria in order to richly explore the women's experiences.
5. The study was delimited by myself as a novice qualitative researcher. I recognize that my ability to interview and analyze the data is a learning experience, and my limited experience in conducting research could impact the overall findings.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are the study parameters that are not under the control of the researcher but still have the potential to impact the study (Roberts, 2010). This research study has the following limitations.

1. The findings cannot be generalized to the larger population of professional women in the United States who have previously opted out and reentered the workforce.
2. The researcher's nature of self-reporting and analysis of situational analysis will be limited to the her knowledge of those processes.
3. Time constraints on the dissertation do not allow a longitudinal study of the experiences of these high achieving professional women. The research and analysis is

limited to a series of interviews and the results of the KCSI, Kaleidoscope Career Self Assessment Inventory.

4. The findings are limited by the honesty of the participants. One can only assume that the participants will be honest but no fact checking by the researcher will take place.

Need and Significance of this Research

The goal of the study is to explore the career reentry experiences of high achieving professional women who had previously opted out. Career breaks are costly (Arun, Arun, & Borooah, 2004), and while there has been much research on the opt out phenomenon (Belkin, 2003), the main focus has been on issues in the workplace that push women out. A debilitating cycle is thereby created. Professional women tend to earn less than their husbands, and this creates an incentive for women to take time off work after having children. Lower earnings increase the likelihood of career interruptions for mothers, which in turn leads to even lower earnings down the road (Hewlett, 2002). Once the women have opted out, they are part of the “leaky pipeline” which involves women’s disappearance from professional careers. Highly trained, high achieving professional women are disappearing from the workforce instead of remaining in or returning to high-paying positions of leadership and authority (Stone, 2007). From there, however, the research on these women essentially stops, almost as if they have entered a black hole. Once they are opted out, they experience a transformation of their working identity (Ibarra, 2003), often losing a sense of their former professional self, only to reemerge with different needs and expectations. While they are opted out, they experience joy from their families, but they also experience many negative emotions, including isolation and sometimes depression (Stone, 2007). The research is minimal on the experiences once they have opted out of the workplace, with Stone being the primary researcher on the subject (Stone, 2007). Once

they decide to reemerge from staying at home, they often have difficulty reentering the workforce. In the last few years, the career reentry phenomenon has begun to be brought to light by more researchers and news stories, yet only a handful of researchers have explored the phenomenon of reentry (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett, et al., 2010; Stone, 2007; Stone & Hernandez, 2012; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004; Warner, 2013; Belkin, 2013). Until we break the glass ceiling so there are equal opportunities for both men and women, more studies are needed to facilitate efforts to break this debilitating cycle.

A wide variety of people, organizations, and even those involved in impacting government policies will be able to use the results of this study to work towards improving retention of new mothers so fewer initially opt out, and if they do opt out, to create smoother pathways for them to successfully reenter the workforce. Women who are considering opting out can use this information to better understand the potential ramifications of opting out and the challenges they may face if they choose to later reenter. Women who have already opted out and would like to reenter the workforce or have already reentered the workforce can use this information to provide tools to help them attain successful career reentry. Organizations can use this information to better understand why high achieving professional women leave organizations and the challenges they face when attempting to reenter the workforce. If organizations can address the women's needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge, they will be more likely to retain the high potential women who often feel they have no other choice than to leave (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). In addition, organizations can create better, more flexible opportunities for highly achieving professional women to reenter the workforce without significant penalties. And if more government policies can be implemented that support working mothers and families, organizations might follow their lead.

Researcher's Perspective

Predispositions exist which qualitative researchers carry with them into research situations (Glesne, 2011). As a researcher, I have a unique perspective as well as subjective biases that should be identified. Identifying biases brings further credibility to one's findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Perhaps the most important source of bias is that I am a member of the group of women that I studied. Having been a high achieving professional myself, prior to having children, I had an exciting international organizational development position that took me all around the world, meeting interesting people and doing work that I loved. After having my first child, everything changed. I switched from being a full-time employee to starting my own consulting business, taking on the same company as my first client. This change gave me more flexibility for my child, yet I still traveled to Asia quite a bit and was working more than I desired. My husband had a demanding job and was not able to help much, so I was working for pay, working towards a Ph.D., and taking care of a child as well as the home. When I became pregnant with my second child, I had a difficult pregnancy. I faced the hard decision to "opt out," because I just could not do everything. I opted out. Since then, I have worked on my Ph.D and had a third child. While I recognize that opting out is a choice and a luxury that not everyone can afford, my experiences have not been without frustrations and challenges. At some point, I would like to go back to work, and often wonder how I will ever manage all of my responsibilities. This desire to better understand the experiences of how high achieving professional women who opted out experience workforce reentry is extremely meaningful to me. Personally, as I better understand this phenomenon and the experiences of the women I studied, I have gained insight into how I will be able to reenter the workforce after opting out. By sharing this research with others, I hope others will also benefit. My perspective and emotional

connection to the research undoubtedly introduces biases, as I believe the women I study deserve and warrant successful career reentry given their past successes, and believe I do as well. By the same token, I believe this perspective and connection places me in a unique position to empathize with and understand the experiences with reentry reported here.

Summary

This chapter provided background and an overview of the phenomenon of opting out and career reentry, the research problem was stated, research questions were introduced, key terms were defined, both delimitations and limitations for the study were outlined, the value of the research was explained, and the researcher's perspective was provided. The results of this study may illuminate the women's experience and help us to better understand how authenticity, balance, and challenge impacted their decisions and the results. As long as high achieving professional women are opting out of the workforce, often because of increasing frustrations, a lack of flexibility, and a lack of opportunities within their workplace combined with family pulls, organizations will continue to lose valuable skilled professionals. We need to better understand why they opt out so policies can be implemented to retain them. And if they do opt out, understanding the challenges they face when returning to the workforce will not only help women who are considering opting out, but will also help organizations better understand how they can hire and rehire these highly skilled professional woman. By better understanding the experiences of career reentry of high achieving professional women, both women as well as organizations can move closer to breaking the glass ceiling.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of women's career reentry after opting out. This literature review summarizes and synthesizes what is already known on the subject and presents the bodies of literature informing the research. While the topic of career reentry after opting out is critical to this review, there are other topics of equal importance because they explain how women navigate their careers and lives, as exemplified by the Kaleidoscope Career Model over the entire life course. There are five main sections of this chapter. First, the theoretical framework for this study is discussed, namely the Kaleidoscope Career Model. The second, third, and fourth sections relate to the specific research questions: 1) the experiences of high achieving professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce, 2) the experiences of high achieving professional women while they are opted out, and 3) the experiences of high achieving professional women once they return to the workplace after opting out. The last section reveals current government and organization policies that are focused on supporting women and families, including those in the Millennial generation, since they now represent close to 40% percentage of the workforce (Deloitte, 2017). Relevant theories and research as well as current events are intertwined to provide a thorough synthesis and analysis of the literature related to the study. In addition, gaps in the research are noted to demonstrate the need for additional research.

Theoretical Framework of the Kaleidoscope Career Model

The theoretical framework of this study is the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM). KCM is embedded in non-linear career research which includes protean careers (Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1995, 1996), boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), and portfolio careers

(Gold & Fraser, 2002), where people make customized career choices often across organizations and fields in which the person is operating. Traditional career models assume that career success embodies career advancement and material achievement within an organization (Heslin, 2005) whereas nonlinear career models offer opportunities for reconfiguring careers to incorporate individual needs and values (Buzzanell, Goldzwig, 1991; Greenhaus, Canahan, & DiRenzo, 2012). While men typically have continuous, linear career patterns, the careers of women managers have patterns that more closely resemble snakes and ladders. Their career paths are not straight, but instead curve and sidestep (Richardson, 1996).

The Kaleidoscope Career Model evolved through the research of Mainiero and Sullivan as a means of understanding the “opt-out” or career interruption phenomenon. This phenomenon is discussed later in the chapter. Mainiero and Sullivan completed five studies (interviews, focus groups, and three surveys) of over 3,000 U.S. professional workers to identify underlying patterns in women’s and men’s careers, and discovered many complexities (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007; Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009). Their research revealed that, in contrast to a majority of men’s careers, the career trajectories of women are relational (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, 2006). Career options and decisions are made while considering the impact they will have on others. The authors describe career progression as similar to a kaleidoscope with changing patterns, such that “women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways” (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 111). Three parameters that individuals may focus on when making decisions evolved from this research (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007; Sullivan, et al., 2009):

1) *Authenticity*. Values are aligned with the individual's external behaviors and the values of the employing organization.

2) *Balance*. The individual strives to reach equilibrium between work and non-work (e. g. family, friends, elderly relatives, personal interests) demands.

3) *Challenge*. A need for stimulating work as well as career advancement.

Whereas the kaleidoscope uses three mirrors to create patterns, the KCM has three mirrors, or parameters, that combine and shift throughout a lifetime (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007; Sullivan, et al., 2009). Typically, the patterns of both males and females are initially the same, but by mid and late career, there are differences. In the early stages, both men and women tend to focus on their careers to pursue challenges. In mid to late career, women focus on balance and family/relational demands, while men focus on authenticity as they deal with possible layoffs, or a career that may plateau. Men often ask if they have chosen the right career path. Finally, in late career, authenticity moves to the forefront for women as balance issues are resolved, while men seek balance in their lives. The typical male pattern just described is labeled the Alpha Career Pattern; the female pattern is the Beta Career Pattern. While this is the typical pattern, this was an artifact of the 20th century careers studied; women can be alphas and men are betas, especially among Millennials, there is a rise in both patterns (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007).

Experiences that Lead Professional Women to Opt Out of the Workforce

There are many events and experiences that lead professional women to opt out of the workforce. While many initially believe they will stay in the workforce after they start a family, they often face challenges, both personal as well as professional, that lead them to the opting out

decision. This section discusses these challenges, as well as pertinent theories related to these experiences.

Startling Statistics: Gender Based Challenges

High achieving professional women face a plethora of gender-based challenges in the workplace as it is full of gendered structures and gender biases that create additional challenges for them (Cahusac & Kanji 2013; Stone, 2004; Wood & Eagly, 2010). Recent statistics demonstrate that there are serious disparities across women and men professionals. According to the research firm Catalyst, women held 5.8% of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies. They held 20.2% of board seats for the Fortune 500 companies. Worldwide, women held only 12% of the world's board seats in 2015 (Catalyst, 2017), and 33% of global businesses had no women in senior management roles, a number which has not changed since 2011. In the United States, while women were nearly half (46.8%) of the labor force, only 39.2% were managers in 2015. Among all senior roles in 2016, 23% were held by women; however, the percentage of US businesses with no women at all in senior roles rose to its highest level since 2011 at 31%. In S & P 500 Companies, the higher up the corporate ladder, the rarer are women. Figure 2.1 shows the pyramid of women in S&P 500 companies, and provides a visual of how the number of women decreases at higher levels of management.



Figure 2.1. Women in S&P 500 Companies. (Catalyst, Women in Management, 2017, <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-management>)

As the figure demonstrates, while women comprise 44.3% of employees in S&P 500 companies, the numbers decrease as managerial expertise climbs. Thirty six percent of women were first and mid-level managers, while 25% were executive and senior level managers, with only 9.5% of top earners and 5% of CEOs being women. Many women are in the workforce, with 56.8% of all women 16 years and over in the labor force in 2016, and 61.5% of all mothers with children under the age of three working in the labor force (Catalyst, 2017)

Gender Pay Gap

Inequality extends to a gender pay gap. Globally, women earn 77% of what men earn (Catalyst, 2017). In the United States, women make 22 percent less than men, even controlling for race and ethnicity, education, experience, and location (Gould, Kroeger, Blado & Essrow, 2017; United States Government Accountability Office, 2009). According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, women are almost half of the workforce and receive more college and graduate degrees than men, yet they continue to earn considerably less than men. Jobs predominantly done by women pay less on average than jobs performed by men (Hegewisch & Williams-Baron, 2017). The three largest occupations for women – teachers, nurses and administrative assistants – together employ 13.3 percent of all women in the United States. There

is also a gender wage gap within occupations. Women earn less than men in all the most common occupations for men (Hegewisch & Williams-Baron, 2017). Women are paid less than their male colleagues even in women-dominated fields. The average wage for a woman pre-school and kindergarten teacher is \$14.42, whereas a man's average wage is \$16.33. Women with advanced degrees are still paid less than men with bachelor's degrees. The average wage for a woman with an advanced degree is \$34.95/hour whereas a man's average with a 4-year degree is \$37.13/hour (Gould, Kroeger, Blado & Essrow, 2017). This wage gap varies, depending on the professional level. The wage differential between men and women with hourly positions is less than the wage differential between men and women executives. Women with the highest skill and experience levels suffer the greatest financial penalties.

The reasons for the gender pay gap are complex and multi-dimensional. An article in *The New York Times* has a title that speaks volumes: "The Gender Pay Gap is Largely Because of Motherhood" (Miller, 2017). While this sounds fairly straightforward, the events that lead up to this have many facets. She argues that when men and women finish school and start working, they're paid fairly equally, but a gender pay gap soon appears and continues over the next twenty years. Life happens and the roles of women and family expectations take a toll on their careers. By midcareer, many professional women lose confidence and ambition, according to Bain and Company (2014). In addition, the more hours women spend on housework, the more their salaries decrease (Blau & Kahn, 2000). These women accumulate less work experience than men and have less incentives to invest in formal education and training. As long as women are still primarily responsible for childcare, the gender wage gap will likely continue. In May 2017, two studies emerged regarding the gender pay gap. The first, conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, studied both the data from the 2000 Census of the United States and the

Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics data to understand how much of the increase in the gender earnings gap comes from shifts between men and women versus within organizations. For both the college educated and non-college educated, the gender wage gap is closely related to marriage (Barth, Pekkala, Olivetti, 2017). In addition, the gap expands to even those who are married with young children and who are college educated and work in sectors known to penalize shorter hours and time off (Goldin, Pekkala, Olivetti, Barth, 2017). The other study also used the Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics database linked to the 2000 Census to explore these gaps. Greater demand for work amenities such as flexibility and less internal advancement for mothers also contribute to this gap. The gap widens as men shift into higher paying firms and organizations, whereas women tend not to advance their earnings within their firms. Typically, the greater the women's responsibilities, the greater exists the gender wage gap (Goldein, Pekkala, Olivetti, Barth, 2017).

Social Role Theory

Social role theory helps to explain why, historically, men and women have taken on different roles. This theory recognizes the historical division of labor between women, who often assumed responsibilities at home, and men, who typically assumed responsibilities outside the home (Eagly, 1987). It is based on the content of gender roles and their importance in promoting sex differences in behavior (Eagly, 1987, 1995; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000). As a result, expectations of men and women became governed by the stereotypes of their social roles (Eagly, 1987, 1997; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000). People associate women with predominately communal qualities whereas men are imbued with agentic qualities. Communal characteristics reflect a concern with the welfare of others, such as being affectionate, sensitive, and gentle. Agentic qualities include demonstrating assertion, control and confident tendencies,

such as being assertive, aggressive, ambitious, dominant, and independent (Eagly, 1995, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000). Through socialization processes, each gender learns different qualities while young which facilitate their later social roles. Gender roles might affect the course of action that individuals choose in adulthood.

Role Congruity Theory

Consideration of social role theory in the workplace led to role congruity theory. A role congruity theory of prejudice towards female leaders extends the social role theory of sex differences and similarities. Gender roles spill over into the workplace (Gutek & Morasch, 1982), and people blend the gender role with the leader role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory assumes that both gender roles and leader roles influence leadership styles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). Women who are effective leaders tend to violate standards for their gender when they portray male-stereotypical agentic attributes and do not demonstrate stereotypical communal attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As a result, people hold expectations of traits that a leader should have, and these traits are the agentic qualities that men stereotypically hold. Role congruity theory is a way of explaining why leadership has been predominantly male. While women have increased their presence in supervisory and middle management positions – a glass ceiling has existed, which is a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from higher level leadership positions (Mattis, 2004). In a study that focused on the attributes of “good” and “bad” leadership, the results indicated that these prejudices are real, as both men and women associate leadership with masculinity. The findings indicated that both male and female subordinates preferred a male leader, as female bosses they don’t like are “bossy.” They want female leaders who meet both the agentic

requirements of leadership and the communal requirements of femininity (Sing, Nadim & Ezzedeem, 2010).

Gender Identity

Consistent with social role theory, gender identities may be formed early in life. Gender identity is defined as an individuals' beliefs about the extent to which they possess psychological traits that are associated with gender stereotypes for each sex, with "masculine" traits for men and "feminine" traits for women (Kite, Deaux & Haines; 2008, Powell & Butterfield, 2003). Powell and Butterfield (2012) examined both men and women's aspirations to top management positions (which provides an indication of who might later opt out), and the researchers discovered that individuals with a gender identity of high masculinity were more likely to aspire to top management roles, regardless of their gender. Women with a gender identity of high masculinity, including women and mothers, are more likely to aspire to top management than individuals with a gender identity of low masculinity (Powell & Butterfield, 2012). Along these lines, in a review of his earlier research, Schein discusses a "think manager – think male" belief. When individuals consider what managers represent, they think of men and not of women. While this study focuses on women in leadership in the United States, Schein indicates that this belief is a global phenomenon and that there are also strong gender management stereotypes across Chinese, Japanese, British, and German, and U.S. studies (Schein, 2001).

Successful Women are Less Liked

There are numerous studies conducted within the last decade that demonstrate the same results – women experience prejudice in masculine organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). These prejudices are consistent with the social role theory discussed above. Prejudice can arise from the

characteristics people perceive as members of a social group and the requirements of the social roles that group members occupy. A potential for prejudice exists when individuals hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes required for success in certain classes of social roles. Thus they may be viewed unfavorably if they violate gender roles. The research conducted by Eagly and Karau (2002) found prejudice against female leaders in two forms. Women leaders are perceived less favorably than men for taking on leadership roles. When women demonstrate the behavior necessary to be successful in leadership roles, they are perceived less favorably than men exhibiting the same behavior. Women are also perceived to have less authority (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). Their leadership style is more likely to be transformational than men, according to a meta-analysis of 45 studies (Eagly, Johannessen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). In a different study of 242 participants in three experimental studies investigating reactions to a woman's success in a male gender-typed role, when women were acknowledged to have been successful, they were also less well liked than men (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004). As a result, attitudes toward women are less positive than those toward men in the same roles. Women also suffer disadvantages from prejudicial evaluations of their competence as leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003). This prejudice creates additional challenges for women becoming leaders. Being disliked can have career-affecting outcomes (Jones, 2012).

Lack of Leadership Development Opportunities

These prejudices can lead to women having fewer leadership development opportunities, thus leading to few future career opportunities (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). Women may lack the culture fit and therefore be excluded from informal networks (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Relatedly, these gender stereotypes can prompt biases, which can negatively impact the success

of women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004). These forms of gender bias in the culture and in organizations interfere with the leadership development of women (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). In a different study that compared matched samples of 69 female executives and 69 male executives, women reported that they were less likely than successful men to receive mentoring, a critical aid in advancement for many (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Obtaining on-the-job organizational development experiences is critical to advancement (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). If women do not have the opportunities to develop as leaders, they will be further disadvantaged in terms of success in the workplace (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). The journey for a woman to succeed in leadership roles can be termed a labyrinth with walls all around. Passage through the labyrinth involves a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Fewer Benefits

In addition to being in fewer leadership roles, facing gender biases, being less well-liked, and receiving relatively few leadership development opportunities, women also report that they receive fewer benefits than men and face greater penalties for taking time off. In a study where Lyness and Thompson (1997) compared career and work experiences of executive women and men, women received fewer stock options and had fewer international mobility opportunities than men. In a different study of 11,815 managers in a financial services organization, individuals who took a leave of absence, regardless of the reasons, which included family, were given fewer promotions and smaller salary increases. Leaves of absence also had a significant, negative relationship to performance ratings (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). Women were more likely to have additional responsibilities at home, including children and elderly parent responsibilities, so were more likely to need to take a leave, thus impacting their career in a

negative way (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001). An additional study of 26,359 managers in a financial services organization demonstrated that managers who had taken family leaves had higher voluntary turnover rates than managers who had not taken leaves (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001). All of these factors lead women to become frustrated in the workplace, and if they are not happy in the workplace, they are more likely to leave (Powell & Butterfield, 2012). As a result, these challenges in the workplace that women face have contributed to the “opt out revolution”

Subtle Barriers

In a large-scale national survey of Fortune 1000 CEO’s and the highest ranking women in the organizations, respondent were asked to identify key career strategies for how they made it to the top and the barriers women faced. The results indicated women they had to develop a working style that men were comfortable with in a male dominated environment. They stated that male stereotyping and preconceptions of women were the biggest barriers for women. In addition, corporate culture, deeply embedded in the organizations, was a barrier as the playing field was not level. In addition, if the CEO and top leaders of the organization were not on board with equity for women, the women faced even more challenges of breaking the glass ceiling (Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998).

The Opt Out Phenomenon

As a result of challenges that women face in the workforce, many choose to leave their organizations. In 2003, *New York Times* writer Belkin, coined the phrase, “The Opt-Out Revolution,” which sparked over a decade of media coverage and research telling the story of women who choose to leave the workforce or alter their careers after having children. She described a local Starbucks that may look like the 1950s from the outside, with mothers drinking coffee and watching their toddlers, but today they are educated with MBAs. She discussed a

woman's definition of success, which today consists of words like "satisfaction, balance, and sanity," replacing a time when a woman's definition of success was her apple-pie recipe, her husband's promotion, or her well-turned-out children. She argued that it was not just that the workplace has failed women, but that women were rejecting the workplace. Instead they were choosing different priorities. Belkin asks, "Why don't women get to the top?" And she answers, "They choose not to" (Belkin, 2003).

Two years later, the *New York Times* conducted a series of interviews with women students at Yale and other elite colleges, who largely echoed Belkin's understanding of the opt out revolution. Many women at elite colleges planned to work until they had children, and then planned to put their careers aside to raise children. Some planned on being stay at home moms, at least until their children were in school, and then work part-time. One woman stated, "Women have been given full-time working career opportunities and encouragement with no social changes to support it" (Story, 2005). Others stated that they were raised with a parent who stayed home with them and it helped them go far.

Critics of the Opt Out Revolution

Critics claim that Belkin's "Opt Out Revolution," article focused on a small, elite sample of women who could afford to quit their careers. This information was omitted from the article, which also failed to mention that many women still wanted to rise through the career ranks (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The media tends to focus on the highly educated professionals who have the choice of opting out. Typically, the women who were considered part of the opt out revolution were white, college-educated, married mothers (Stone & Hernandez, 2012; Kuperberg & Stone, 2008).

These women are only a small fraction of the workforce – as most women cannot afford to simply quit their jobs. A high school educated mother who quits her low-paying job because she can no longer afford childcare or a single mother who is laid off and unable to find a job is not positioned by the media as “opting out” (Williams, 2009). In 2012, less than 8 percent of U.S. women held these high-level white-collar jobs, while 27% of US women held low-wage or blue-collar jobs (Stone & Hernandez, 2012).

Reasons Women Opt Out of the Workforce

Sociologist Stone interviewed married women who were formally out of the labor force and who, prior to having children, had been employed in professional fields. In attempting to explain why women exited the workforce, women’s decisions are often seen as a woman’s choice of home over career. Stone found a moderate to high degree of ambivalence about the decision to quit their jobs among the women, and for many it was agonizing. Quitting to go home was weighed against a women’s sense of identity with their careers and the investments they had made in those careers (Stone, 2007). Stone divides the reasons for opting out into family pulls and workplace pushes.

Family Pulls

Family pulls are one reason why women opt out of the workforce (Stone & Hernandez, 2012). Mothers who drop out of their profession often have a story to tell. Some have the drive to succeed but have an unsupportive spouse, a child with special needs, or a parent who needs special care (Mason & Ekman, 2007). Many women state that the pulls of babies and family are a reason they opt out. While some women continue to work after the birth of their first child, the needs of preschoolers and school-age children also play a role in their decision to quit (Stone & Hernandez, 2012). They often believe a parent’s care is necessary for the development of the

children. Husbands, or the absence of the husbands, are another family pull. While the women may be married, some women feel as though they function as a single parent, as they are expected to raise the children and manage the household while the husbands delve deeper into their own careers. In addition, many women were significantly out earned by their husbands or perceived their future earnings potential as lower (Stone & Hernandez, 2012). Women married to men with greater resources left for a variety of reasons, but one factor was the number of hours that their husbands worked. When husbands work fifty or more hours per week, wives with children are 44 percent more likely to quit their jobs than wives with children whose husbands work less (Cha, 2010). In a 2007 study of well-educated professional women who had left the paid workforce, 60 percent cited their husbands as a critical factor in the decision. They listed their husband's lack of participation in childcare and other domestic tasks and the expectation that wives take on those roles (Stone, 2007).

Workplace Pushes

Many women perceive that they are pushed out of the workplace (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). The challenges women face that were discussed in the earlier section of this chapter are each of the components that can lead some women to feel pushed out. Reasons women initially opt out include frustration, thwarted ambition, and having a stalled career (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett *et al.*, 2010). Some of these mothers believe they are pushed out due to hegemonic masculine cultures where long hours and socializing in the evenings are the norm. They believe they must hide being mothers to avoid penalties. If they work less, they feel they are sidelined to lower-status roles which involve both less status and less money. Unless they mimic successful men, they do not look the part for success in organizations (Cahusac & Kanji, 2013). They opt out of fast-track careers when facing inflexible career paths and long

workweeks (Stone & Hernandez, 2012). The women opting out have responded to obstacles to the integration of work and family, and have not made a free choice among various options (Stone & Hernandez, 2012). In many cases, women are not choosing to leave highly successful careers but instead are being pushed out by inflexible, male dominated work organizations.

In addition to the women who are pushed out entirely from the workforce, there is a group of women, not often covered by the media and research, who leave professional careers to pursue alternative work. These women take the ‘scenic route’ (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett, et al. 2010). They look for meaning in their work, control over their work, and redefine success in order to do so. They rethink the meaning of a career and work/life balance. They are pushed out of workplaces and careers that do not give them opportunities for fulfilling and meaningful work and control over their lives (Wilhoit, 2014).

In another study, the authors explain the opt-out phenomenon from an organizational development perspective – that when women do not get critical development opportunities on the job, they are less likely to pursue the top jobs (Hoobler, Lemmon & Wayne, 2014). This research concluded that managers perceive female subordinates as lower in career motivation, and therefore do not give them challenging work opportunities, training opportunities and career encouragement. When employees lack organizational development, they exhibit withdrawal behaviors, and hold lower managerial career aspirations.

Additional Reasons They Are Leaving the Traditional Workforce

According to a study conducted by the United States Department of Labor on why highly achieved women leave the traditional workforce, the authors stated that there are four reasons why they leave the workforce: 1) predisposition, or those who had planned to leave the workforce at certain milestones, including having a child; 2) entrepreneurial opportunity, or

those who had great ideas for a business within their field; 3) satisfaction with their job but wanted to control their time and pursue non-career obligations or interests, or wanted to ‘make a difference’ to either their family or community; and 4) frustration with the workplace culture and their prospects for obtaining more flexibility (Clarke & Reed, 2007). The study found that workplace dissatisfaction which was rooted in culture and tradition was a reason they chose to leave. They felt that little was done to adapt to their needs or style of working, and there was little flexibility. All of these problems were perceived to be deeply rooted in the organization’s culture and traditions (Clarke & Reed, 2007).

Recent Discussions on Opting Out

There have been noteworthy opting out discussions in recent years which are worth mentioning. A few are worth including because they add to the discussion and currency of the conversation regarding high performing women in the workforce. Following up on a 2010 TEDTalk by Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook, on the ways women are held back and hold themselves back, she wrote a book titled “Lean In” (2013). Sandberg’s message was to not leave before you leave (Sandberg, 2013, 2014). She claims that, without even realizing it, women stop reaching for new opportunities even before they get pregnant. By the time they have a baby, they are in a different place in their career than if they had leaned in prior to that time. By not finding ways to stretch themselves, they find themselves less fulfilled, less utilized, and more likely to leave their jobs. She believes there is an ambition gap such that women do not dream big enough. She says not to ask if women can do it all, but rather what can women do that is most important to themselves and their families. Stone describes this phenomenon as the difference between how men and women view yellow lights. Typically, when the light changes to yellow, women treat it as a caution and slow down, whereas men often accelerate. With regard to their

careers, women and men see children and family as a yellow light, so the women slow down and the men speed up (Stone, 2007).

A different, highly discussed conversation was initiated by an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* in July/August, 2012. Slaughter, the President and CEO of the think tank New America, and former dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, and state department official, wrote the much talked about article, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All." In the article, she offered suggestions for what needs to change to enable women to be both mothers and have careers. She writes in response to Sandberg's message to Lean In, as well as to the message that young women can have it all, because she believed that it was incredibly difficult to perform a demanding job and be the kind of parent many women want to be. She believed that at some point, women may have it all at the same time, but not right now. Having it all depends on the type of job one has. She told stories of high profile women who barely see their children, and do not know how to combine professional success and satisfaction with a real commitment to family. She adds to the opt-out logic that women are underrepresented in certain industries because of inflexible schedules, travel, and pressure to be in the office.

Critics, even in current conversations, wrestle with many of the same issues as was the case ten years ago. Leaning in or out, or having it all versus not having it all, is primarily focused on upper middle class women who have the financial resources to have a choice – do they want their career to be their priority, or do they want their family to be the priority? These women often have sufficient financial resources to start their own businesses, create flexible schedules, or hire full-time nannies (Williams, 2009). Bennets, in her book, *The Feminine Mistake: Are We Giving Up Too Much?*, encourages women to stay actively connected to the workforce throughout their adult lives and to take advantage of help and support. She makes the analogy to

home and car insurance, that women should think of careers as both investments and insurance policies (Bennets, 2009). While opting out is a choice that is not for all women, those that do often later attempt to reenter the workforce. Many of them had worked in “all-or-nothing” careers that afforded them little control over their schedules, with little flexibility, forcing over half of them in Stone’s study to quit. Lack of flexibility, dissatisfaction with the job and organization, coupled with family demands, were enough for highly competent and skilled professional women to opt out.

Experiences While Professional Women are Opted Out of the Workforce

While there is substantial research about why women opt out of the workplace, there is significantly less research about what happens to these women after they opt out. From a research perspective, it seems like they can enter a ‘black hole’, never to be heard from again. Stone is the primary researcher who has explored what happens to these women once they opt out. Many of these women experience a loss of working identity when they left the workforce. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Fondas summed up how little we know about this phase of women’s lives eloquently as she wrote,

While about one in three moms opts out of the labor force, we don’t know how many of them are pushed out by long hours and inflexible workplaces. We know even less about the factors that keep them out, including unavailable and unwilling dads, as well as things like children’s behavior and needs. This helps explain why the opt out story never quite ends (Fondas, 2013).

Stone’s qualitative study explored women’s reasons for quitting, the nature of their lives at home, and their plans for the future. She interviewed fifty-four former professional women who were now at-home moms. They worked in both male-dominated high-prestige professions as well as mixed or transitional fields, and traditionally female-dominated professions. During this period of opting out, her research showed the following. While they were opted out, they cared for their children and managed a household. In many cases, they volunteered at a school,

church or community, pursued hobbies, cared for elders, continued their education, and pursued hobbies and explored entrepreneurship (see also Clarke and Reed, 2007). Some perceived the glass as half-full, becoming the mothers they had always wanted to be, and enjoying a chance to be fully engaged in their children's lives (Stone, 2007). Others perceived their experiences during opting out as half-empty. They had regrets about leaving the workforce and they experienced difficulty embracing their new role. Their relationships with their partners changed, as well as their responsibilities not only with their children but also with their household duties. They begin to undergo a transformational process whereby identities are transformed as women reexamine themselves, their surroundings, and their society (Miller, 1996).

Working Identity

Herminia Ibarra introduced the term, “working identity” or how we see ourselves in our professional roles, what we convey about ourselves to others, and ultimately how we live our working lives” (2003, p.1). Her research revolves around career reinvention, and how our identities can be in flux as individuals transition to the next phases of their professional lives. Figure 2.2 demonstrates Identities in Transition and how the reinventing process unfolds (Ibarra, 2003).

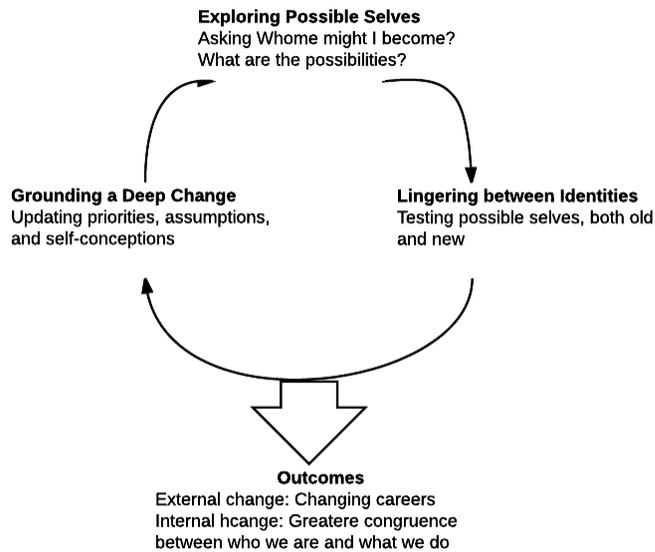


Figure 2.2. Identities in transition. How the reinventing process unfolds (Ibarra, 2003, p. 12)

This figure shows how the reinvention process unfolds. In order to transform into a new sense of self, it is important to understand alternative selves. The women who opted out of the workforce most likely took their decision very seriously, and needed to understand the pros and cons of their decision. They explored their possible selves, lingered between identities and likely strived towards growing a deep change by updating priorities, assumptions and self-beliefs. In some cases, their changing careers went from being in a former profession and they changed to being a stay at home parent and/or somebody’s mom. In other cases, they transformed from being in a position prior to opting out to creating a new working identity that allowed them to explore their interests or hobbies or entrepreneurship, while maintaining the flexibility they needed. They would spend a good deal of time lingering between identities, oscillating between their old roles and the future possible selves (Ibarra, 2003). Many of the women who opt out felt as if they lost their professional identity, making some women feel as though they had no

identity at all, and made some even question their personal value. In addition, some felt like their new role could be perceived as highly devalued (Stone, 2007). Also according to Stone, when some women were asked, “What do you do?” many would answer what they used to do in their professional life before stating that they currently stay at home.

Ibarra also lays out actions that promote successful change in a working identity. Figure 2.3 demonstrates these identities in practice.

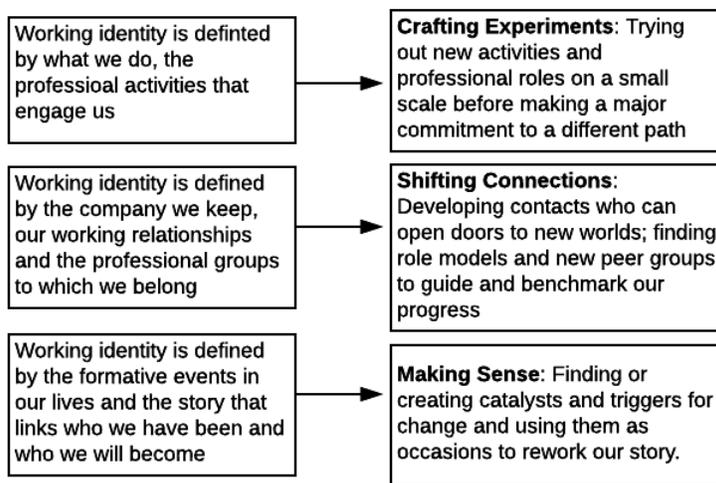


Figure 2.3. Identities in practice. Actions that promote successful change. (Ibarra, 2003, p. 18)

The women who opted out of the workforce, in most cases, underwent these transformations in coming to terms with their new sense of working identity and sense of self. They crafted experiments while trying out new activities, such as getting involved in their children’s schools, volunteering on various boards, or pursuing their personal interests and hobbies (Stone, 2007). While many women felt isolated soon after opting out, they eventually reached out to others, shifting connections and developing new contacts and relationships that they previously did not have. Eventually they would make sense of the experiences, putting a frame around the experience, interpreting current events, reinterpreting past events, and creating

stories that linked them together. In terms of a working identity, they made sense of the changes and weaved the past with present experiences to form a sense of their future selves. The women who opted out assessed the pluses and minuses of their new lives and worked towards creating a new identity. Stone states that the loss of professional identity was the most prevalent and most pressing problem they faced when they opted out (2007). In many cases, they clung to their former working identities instead of forming a new one.

Cocooning

Stone states, “Time at home was a cocoon, from which most women emerged different than they entered it” (2007, p.205). The women they were when they opted out were no longer the same women they were when they became ready, if ever, to merge back into the workforce. Many women got sidetracked for significant periods of time, recognizing that their husbands’ lack of ability and involvement in the family and household chores made it difficult to imagine reentering the workforce. But many were able to turn their time out of the workforce into a positive as they reinvented themselves, their priorities, and in some cases, their careers. They believed that they went through a process of analysis to determine what was right for them, and concluded that cultural definitions of ‘what’s right’ are unclear. They improvised more innovative ways of discovering identities that allowed more complex selves to emerge. Much can be learned about the experiences of the women who stay at home. We can catch a glimpse into their current world, a glimpse into their former organizations and workplace conditions that she left, and a glimpse into what they are looking for if and when they decide to reenter the workforce. In many cases, they began exploring converting a hobby, passion or expertise into a business, and no longer had to choose between “work in the office” or “not work at all.”

However, they often lose momentum and earning power when they leave and return to the workforce.

Experiences of Career Reentry After Opting Out

While there is a decent amount of research about why women opt out of the workforce, there is significantly less research on their experiences after they opt out. If and when they decide to return to the workforce, there is also minimal research on career return among women professionals (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). While many scholars and practitioners present different viewpoints on the opt out phenomenon, they consistently believe that opting-out is harmful to women's careers (Williams, 2009).

Hewlett (2002a), one of the leading researchers on career reentry, who used the terms "off ramping" and "on ramping" to refer to opting out of the workforce and reentering the workforce, states "The career highway has all kind of 'off-ramps' but very little in the way of 'on ramps.' We need to figure out a way a professional woman can rejoin her career after having taken significant time off" (2002a, p.9). These mothers, ready to find work again, find doors shut (Wallace, 2013). They lose their momentum and earning power when they leave and attempt return to the workforce. They are now competing with women and men who have current experience, and no major gaps in their resumes. Belkin, who wrote the "Opt out revolution" and now works at *The Huffington Post*, states when describing the experiences of women who want to reenter the workforce by saying the biggest lesson from the women who opted out and are having trouble opting back in is "not always having an eye on their return" (Belkin, 2013). She suggests that women keep their hand in by working part-time, consulting, or trying harder to find a job with more flexibility. She also states that now this is about men, as well as women, as men often also feel pulled between job and family. Lastly, she believes the workplace needs to

continue to change, creating more flexibility and accepting career stops and starts, pauses and recalibrations (Belkin, 2013).

Ten years after Belkin's *The Opt Out Revolution*, the newest byline is "The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In" (Warner, 2013). In the article, Warner cites the work of Stone, Hewlett and Belkin. In addition, she interviewed 22 women who had opted back into the workforce. Some of the super elite, those with the highest credentials and most elite backgrounds, found jobs easily, though they were generally paid less and were in less prestigious positions. The women who spent time fundraising for a Manhattan private school had an easier time finding a job than the suburban swim team mom, or a women who had divorced. Most opted out of the workforce longer than they had intended. But their biggest challenge was not the salary differential, but instead their sense of personal change. They had lost their lack of self-confidence and realized that not everything was in their control. She also noted that there were a striking number of divorces while the women were opted out. Since there was no control group, the research could not prove whether this was due to the fact that women in their thirties and forties often get divorced, or if this was related to being opted out of the workforce. While Stone's new book is not released yet, she revealed that she has revisited her original study. She finds that "the longer they're home, the more they continue the trajectory toward something different." The women were also troubled by the "gender-role traditionalism" that crept into their marriages, as the dynamic changed after they opted out (Warner, 2013).

One prominent study on opting out and career reentry was a mixed methods study titled "Off-Ramps and On-Ramps Revisited," conducted by the non-profit think tank, the Center for Work-Life Policy (Hewlett, Sherbin, & Forster, 2010). Hewlett and her team examined why highly educated and qualified women opt out, or off ramp from the workforce. More important,

she examined a woman's career reentry experience, or "on ramping," and provided valuable information regarding the challenges facing women who have reentered the workforce after a break. This study was repeated in 2009 after the original 2004 study titled, "Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success," that was published in the Harvard Business Review (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). The results were similar, even though the economy in 2009 was worse than in 2004. The 2009 study included 3,420 highly qualified respondents, including 2,728 women and 692 men. Follow-ups were included with virtual brainstorming sessions, traditional focus groups and on-on-one interviews.

Career Reentry Statistics

The results of the 2009 study indicate the difficulties of career reentry after opting out (Hewlett, Sherbin, & Forster, 2010). Ninety three percent of the highly qualified women who interrupted their careers planned on resuming them. The average age a women took an off-ramp was 31 years, during the child-bearing years. Forty percent reentered the workforce and found full-time jobs, 23% found part-time jobs, and 7% became self-employed. A full 30% of off-rampers did not return to the workforce. Only 74 percent of the women who off-ramped managed to get any kind of job, and only 40 percent managed to get a full-time mainstream job. The rest took part-time jobs or became self-employed. On average, these women were only out of the workforce for 2.7 years. In addition, women lost an average of 14 percent of their earning power when they off-ramped and, in business sectors, off-ramping cost them even more. If a woman spent three or more years out of the workforce, she lost an average of 46 percent of her earnings compared to women who never off ramped. Twenty six percent of women lost some or all of their management responsibilities, 22 percent had to accept a lesser job title. They lost 16% of their earning power. Women trying to reenter the workforce were told they are overqualified,

the hours would be too rigid, there is resume gap stigma, or there is female age bias. The number one reason women chose to reenter the workforce was the satisfaction of a career, followed by income desires and needs. Highly qualified women valued non-monetary rewards as what they wanted most out of work, compared to compensation as the top priority for men (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett, et al., 2010). In the United States Department of Labor study cited previously, most women did not have an interest in returning to the traditional workforce. Instead, they sought to pursue other opportunities or even return to school to find a job that would allow them to manage the demands of their lives and feel satisfaction (Clarke & Reed, 2007). They had fears of being sucked in and losing control of their lives if they went back to the traditional workforce. In the same study, women interviewed who had been out of the workforce for five or more years to raise children were planning on reentering the workforce, but few had a timeline or a specific plan. They did not understand how they fit into today's workplace and feared losing personal control.

Reentering the workforce can be discouraging. In late 2004 and early 2005, two Wharton researchers surveyed 130 women executives who had stepped out of the workforce for at least two years and either already returned or were trying to return. Sixty percent had left their jobs within the last five years and 18% within the last 10 years. Sixty percent had reentered the workforce and 32% were seeking employment. The women indicated that they wanted to find a job for the intellectual challenge and stimulation of being back in the workforce, along with economic support. The study found 50% of the women were frustrated about job-hunt and 18% said the experience was depressing. Suggestions for easing this process were to keep up with the competition by keeping skills up to date, taking on small consulting jobs, and maintaining networking relationships (McGrath, Driscoll, & Gross, 2005).

Transition to New Careers

The limited research on professional women's career reentry after opting out found many women redirecting away from former careers (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). This behavior was based on their negative experiences in family inflexible occupations, skill depreciation and perceived age discrimination. A CNN article titled "Moms 'opting in' to find work doors shut" (Wallace, 2013) describes the experiences that women have reentering. Even if they wanted to reenter the workforce, many of the original positions they had been in were no longer an option, even if they had wanted to reenter their former career or organization. In addition, they had new constraints at home, so drifted towards different, lower paid, and lower status careers (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). They were forced to invent new patterns of family life and approaches to careers (Gersick & Kram, 2002). In a recent interview study of 54 at home mothers who decided to reenter the workforce after opting out, a the majority planned to pursue female dominated professions, and very few planned to work for their previous employers, switching from traditional male dominated or mixed gender to traditionally female dominated professions (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; McGrath et al 2005). They faced skill depreciation, perceived age discrimination, and had new constraints such as involvement in mothering and community work. As a result, they chose care-oriented professions that were lower paid and provided lower status. These careers are sometimes called "Second tier careers" which is a term for the lower status careers that women often choose when reentering the workforce (Mason & Ekman, 2007). A second tier career has a less demanding, slower track. Often it has lower status and pays less, with little chance for advancement. Women who reenter in the second tier are often caught in career limbo. They cannot manage a high pressure, high workload career, and a family at the same time, but they are not on the fast track. However, they will likely be actively engaged in their children's lives while

maintaining a professional identity. The second tier is both lamented and celebrated by the women working in it (Mason & Ekman, 2007).

In a study of the career trajectories of professional women who had attended a professional updating course, it was found that over half shifted to new professions even though the workshop was designed to refresh skills (Shaw & Taylor, 1999). In the Hewlett study discussed above, only 5% wanted to return to their former employers (Hewlett, 2009). In a different study conducted by Stone and Hernandez (2012), two-thirds of women who opted out planned to return to work yet most did not plan to return to their former employers; many chose to freelance or train for new professions. They also often switched from the corporate to the social service sector and often preferred part-time over full-time work (Healy, 1999). Reentering the workforce is not an easy process, and is not successful for everyone. Belkin states when describing the career reentry process, “You can’t just hope it’s going to happen or you are not going to be as successful” (2013). Women who reenter the workforce often change their careers and change their expectations, often looking for jobs that pay less but are flexible, allowing them to juggle both work and family.

Current Government Policies and Organizational Initiatives

Challenges that women face in the workforce after having children are often deeply rooted in culture, both the workplace culture and that of the United States. Understanding both current government policies as well as organizational initiatives centered around retaining high achieving professional women and supporting families are important to understand the current picture of the workforce. Both organizational and government policies can either help or make it more difficult for women to stay in the workforce. This section discusses key government initiatives that support working mothers and families, organization initiatives that support

working mothers, and includes a brief description of millennials, the fastest growing generation currently in the workforce.

Within the United States Department Labor are many agencies that provide support and enforce policies specifically for women and families. The Americans with Disabilities Act offers protections to pregnant women. The FMLA, or Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), is a United States federal law requiring covered employees to provide employees with job protected and unpaid leave for qualified medical and family reasons. This was part of President Bill Clinton's agenda while he was president. The FMLA gives eligible employees the ability to take up to twelve work-weeks of unpaid leave during any twelve month period for pregnancy, care of a newborn child, adoption, personal health condition or a health condition of a parent, spouse or child. Since then, there have been multiple updates to the FMLA, which included the 2015 Department of Labor's expansion of the definition of family by interpreting the definition of "spouse" to cover same-sex and common-law marriages. In 2010, the expansion of family definition clarified that the predominant caretaker of the children may also qualify for FMLA, even if they are not the biological parents. Various states have also made updates to FMLA (Department of Labor, 2015). In addition, over fifty years ago, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were instituted to make discrimination illegal, though a gender earnings gap remains.

Females in government have increased the presence of women's leaders. Hillary Rodham Clinton, a well-known woman U.S. politician, helped to make a dent in the glass ceiling. In 2016, she was the first woman nominated by a major party for the Presidency of the United States. While she did not win, her concession speech addressed opportunities for women as well as shattering the glass ceiling. She said the following:

And to all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams... Now I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday someone will, and hopefully sooner than we might think right now (Clinton, 2016).

While Hillary Rodham Clinton was the first woman presidential nominee of a major party, another key woman figure also had a major role. In 2007, the first woman was elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. Currently, in the 115th United States Congress, the House of Representatives includes 19.1% women, and the senate consists of 21% women. Four current governors are women. Women hold 24.8% of U.S. state legislators positions, which is more than quintuple the number since 1971 (Catalyst, 2017).

The current administration of newly elected President Donald Trump, while only in office for a few months thus far, has made some changes, both favorable and unfavorable to women. In February 2017, President Trump pledged the launch of the United States Canada Council for the Advancement of Women Business Leaders-Female Entrepreneurs, which intends to discuss, create, and implement support for women in the workplace (Mallow, 2017). Working alongside his daughter, Ivanka Trump, the President stated that this initiative would focus on retaining women in the business world, supporting women who work and have families, and helping female entrepreneurs gain better access to capital (Malloy, 2017). While only time will tell if these initiatives will come to fruition, the public statements are certainly a step in the right direction.

On a less positive note, President Trump recently made some policy changes to Equal Pay Day that are less favorable to women. Equal Pay Day was first observed in 1996 by the National Committee on Pay Equity and, in 2014, former President Obama created an executive order to further fair pay and safe workplaces (Department of Labor, 2014). The purpose was to eliminate wage discrimination and to achieve pay equity. In 2014, former President Obama

created an executive order to create fair pay and safe workplaces. However, in March 2017, just days before Equal Pay Day (April 4, 2017), President Trump signed an executive order which included lifting a mandate on paycheck transparency, or requiring employers to reveal salary information. This had been one of the only ways to ensure companies were being transparent about equal pay for women and men (O'Hara, 2017). The Fair Pay order required federal contractors to submit salary information to the government, which would make salary gaps between men and women visible. The next four years will tell if future government policies and changes will be generally positive or a negative for women in the workplace.

Current Organization Initiatives

While understanding government policy and infrastructure that support women is important, equally important is understanding how organizations operate and support women. For over thirty years, *Working Mother* magazine has conducted research and collected data on the workforce policies of United States companies in order to create the top 100 best companies list for working mothers (Working Mother, 2016). For the list, companies were invited to answer more than 400 questions on leave policies, workforce representation, benefits, childcare, advancement programs, and flexibility policies. Additional weight was given to the organizations that had a strong representation of women, advancement programs, and flex options. By examining these companies, a benchmark of standards and policies was reflected and can be a positive example for other organizations. Over two million people in sixteen industries were represented in these top 100 companies. Twenty seven percent of the corporate executives were women, up from twenty three percent in 2012, while forty three percent held managerial positions. Women made up a third of the top twenty percent of earners. All of the companies on the list offered fully paid maternity leave, with the average being 9 weeks, with the top ten

offering 11 weeks of fully paid maternity leave. Ninety seven percent of these companies offered paid adoption leave, and ninety six percent of them offered paid paternity leave, in contrast to about twenty percent of them offering these benefits in 2012. Eighty percent of these companies offered flextime, fifty nine percent offered telecommuting, and twenty two percent offered compressed work schedules. Management/leadership training, networking groups, career counseling and mentoring for women were also prevalent.

According to *Working Mother's* 2016 list, the top ten companies are: A.T. Kearney, Accenture, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, McKinsey & Co., PricewaterhouseCoopers, Prudential Financial, and WellStar Health System. The consulting company, Deloitte, hosts an annual Deloitte Women's Leadership Launch, a conference that invites female MBA and master's degree candidates to network with senior executives and meet experts in the industry. They also offer development initiatives which offer coaching and education to employees. Another consulting company, McKinsey & Company, recently doubled the number of women on its board, ramped up its mentoring sponsorship and leadership development programs for female partners, and expanded recruiting initiatives to bring in more senior women. At Ernst and Young, more than 3,500 leaders have taken a Pledge of Parity, vowing to help female employees gain access to the same opportunities as male employees. IBM has a women CEO, sponsors STEM camps for young girls, hosts an online community for women in IT and engineering, and maintains initiatives that target and train technical women at midcareer. Wellstar, a health system in Georgia, offers flexible work arrangements that are used by eighty percent of employees, offers job sharing, and telecommuting. They also offer new parents up to thirty-six weeks of job-protected time, offer on-site childcare facilities and

subsidized backup care, and have a women CEO. PricewaterhouseCoopers also offers a working mothers support group.

These companies provide examples of how organizations can evolve to offer more generous benefits. Retaining women is a way to institute these policies. According to Subha Barry, vice president at Working Mother Media, “It’s not just women asking for it, men are asking for it too” (Vasel, 2016). Specifically, millennial men are demanding these changes.

Millennials impact on policy

To understand policy, the Millennial generation is an important group to consider. More than a million Millennials are becoming moms each year (Livingston, 2017). Millennials are defined as those born between 1982 and 2004. They are the “Babies on Board” of the early Reagan years, the “Have You Hugged Your Child Today?” six graders of the early Clinton years, and the teens of the Columbine shootings (Howe and Srauss, 2000). In 2015, Millennial women accounted for 82% of births, according to the Pew Research Center analysis of the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey data (Livingston, 2017). By 2020, 86 million Millennials will be in the workplace, which will comprise 40% of the total working population (Asghar, 2014). These numbers are large, and Millennial women’s desires for a workplace should impact future organization recommendations.

“The Millennial generation is pushing organizations to the work world many of them want,” according to a senior executive at Price Waterhouse Cooper (Finn & Donovan, 2013). Flexible workplace arrangements are frequently cited by Millennials as an important factor when looking for work. Over 1/3 of human resource professionals report that new college graduates said flexibility to balance work and life issues was a top priority for them (Livingston, 2017). It may be a lose-lose situation for these Millennial women to opt out of the workforce, as they will

likely have a hard time reentering the workforce, and organizations could lose valuable employees who are costly to replace. In 2013, the London Business School, the University of Southern California, and PwC, Price Waterhouse Coopers, studied the difference between Millennial employees and their non-Millennial counterparts by generating 44,000 responses to web based surveys, holding online conversations with 1,000 Millennials, and administering 300 individual interviews and 30 focus groups. Key results indicated that 71% of Millennials do not believe excessive work demands are worth the sacrifices to their personal life, 64% of Millennials would like to have the option to work from home, and 66% would like to shift their work hours. In addition, certain environmental and work practices drive an emotional connection to a workplace. These include balance and workload, engaging work, people and teams, and competitive pay. Flexibility is so important that 21% of female employees and 15% of men would give up some of their pay to have a more flexible work environment (Finn, Donovan, 2013). In a separate recent study based on the views of 8000 Millennials in 30 countries who work full-time with college degrees and work in the private-sector, conducted by the consulting firm Deloitte, flexibility in the workplace again was listed as one of their greatest desires. They want to work at locations that are not at the primary site and choose the times they work. While work life balance had carried more weight among women, this was a component important to both men and women (Deloitte, 2017). Due to the fact that more than a million Millennials are becoming new mothers each year and that by 2020 the millennial generation is projected to comprise 40% of the labor force, understanding what is important to the Millennial is an important component to retaining mothers in the workplace and preventing them from ever opting out (Livingston, 2017).

Summary

This review synthesized relevant information on career reentry after opting out, as well as the major events and forces that lead up to this phenomenon. This chapter was broken up into five sections. First, the theoretical framework of the study, the Kaleidoscope Career Model, was discussed. Second, third and fourth, the predominant research questions were explored as 1) experiences that led up to opting out of the workforce, 2) experiences while opted out of the workforce, and 3) experiences of career reentry were explored. Lastly, current government and organizational initiatives were discussed, along the Millennial generation, as both government and organizations, as well as the people who comprise the workforce have an influence on the current landscape. There are many challenges that professional women face in the workplace that lead to limited opportunities and limited advancement, and ultimately career dissatisfaction. When these women have children, all too often they encounter inflexible schedules and additional barriers. They experience workplace pushes and family pulls that lead them to opt out of the workplace. Once they opt out, all too often they lose their working identity and undergo a transformation process, cocooning, to eventually emerge slightly different, with different career needs and expectations. Once they decide to reenter the workforce, they utilize their networks to reach out and explore opportunities. They face lower salaries, discrimination, and barriers to reenter. They often reinvent their careers and prioritize flexibility.

While there is some research on the challenges that high achieving professional women face in the workforce along with why women opt out, there are only a handful of studies that discuss what happens once they opt out, and only a few discussing the career reentry process after opting out. However, this circumstance is changing to an extent. An interesting observation when writing this dissertation is that a few years ago, during the dissertation proposal phase, few

articles and research existed on career reentry after opting out. However, in the past few years and recent months in 2017, there is more discussion on career reentry, as the women who were part of Belkin's 2003 Opt Out Revolution are now reattempting to enter the workforce.

After opting out, they often had to renegotiate relationships with their partners, their employers, themselves, and the workplace. When they decided to reenter the workforce, for those who could successfully reenter, many gave up status and salary for a flexible schedule. As a whole, the women felt they were making individual responses to societal problems.

Chapter 4 turns to a discussion of the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

The method section serves the epicentric role in the dissertation (Smagorinsky, 2008), providing a point of origin for the other sections of the dissertation. More directly, defining the methodology and methods used in this study demonstrates how I, the researcher, worked through the study. Methodology is defined as a way of thinking about studying social phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), while methods are defined as techniques and procedures for gathering and analyzing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The sections which follow cover research design, setting and participants, data collection, situational analysis of data, an explanation of how this analysis varies from Clarke's situational analysis, and a discussion of trustworthiness.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach, which is appropriate for the research questions. Qualitative research “crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters. It is a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions that surround the term qualitative research” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pg. 2). Qualitative research is also a means for exploring and understanding individuals or groups in relation to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). The process includes identifying emerging questions, data collection and analysis, and the researcher interpreting the data. Lincoln and Guba state that flexibility should be built into the process so the research can “unfold, cascade, roll and emerge” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research allows researchers to better understand the core experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed and to discover rather than test hypotheses. Qualitative research involves a fluid, evolving, and dynamic approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Throughout this chapter and in the actual study, as a qualitative researcher, I strived to 1) view social phenomena holistically, 2) systematically reflect on who I am in the inquiry, 3) be sensitive to how I shaped the study, and 4) use complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Throughout the research, I served as the key instrument, collecting data, observing behavior or interviewing participants (Creswell, 2009).

Multiple Case Study Design

The research uses a multiple case study design. This type of research design has a plan and a system of organization where individual cases are studied and then analyzed alongside each other (Stake, 2006). All of the cases were similar throughout; however, there were differences in the participant's responses and individual experiences. The phenomenon that was studied involves the experiences of high achieving professional women who had reentered the workforce after opting out. I, the researcher, strived to attend to both the individual pieces and the whole. I looked at each interview as a case and then analyzed them alongside each other.

Robert Stake (2006) associated various terms with the multiple case study analysis research design. He termed the group of cases that comprised the phenomenon a "quintain." Some of the other terms he used include: "cases," "findings," "factors," "themes," "assertions, and "the analyst." The study is conducted to understand the "quintain." After cross-case analysis, the researchers make assertions about the quintain. The themes indicate primary information about the "quintain" that the researcher seeks. The "findings" originate with people studying the "cases." After cross-case analysis, the researcher makes "assertions" about the "quintain" which comprise the "findings." Throughout Stake's work, he uses examples of worksheets that take on a chart-like format to help organize and draw out key information. I

created some of Stake's worksheets initially to help identify themes among the cases and uncover rich results.

Given this research used the Kaleidoscope Career Model as the theoretical framework to understand the career reentry experiences of high achieving professional women after opting out, the multiple case study design provided is appropriate. By first looking at the cases individually and understanding the stories the interviewees have to tell, the cases are then grouped into a phenomenon, or "quintain." By then analyzing each case alongside multiple case studies, similarities and differences were revealed to better understand the phenomenon.

This multicase study was organized around three major research questions and one sub question. Studies work best when a limited set of answerable research questions are asked, the method produces data that serve as evidence for the claims, the results are presented in relation to the questions, and the discussion follows from the analysis (Smagorinsky, 2008). The first two research questions are not explored as fully as research question three. Those initial questions are necessary to tell the whole story, but the primary focus is on the experiences of career entry after opting out. As stated in Chapter One, these include:

Research Question #1: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce?

Research Question #2: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women while they were opted out.

Research Question #3: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women when they return to the workplace after opting out?

Research Question #3a: How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge factor into the experiences of career reentry?

Later in this Chapter, Situational Analysis is discussed, which informs multicase study analysis via grounded theory with a postmodern twist (Clarke, 2005).

Setting and Participants

According to Marshall and Rossman, choosing an appropriate setting, site population and phenomenon of interest is critical to the design of the study and serves as a guide for the researcher (2006). While the phenomenon of interest has already been discussed, the participants and setting have not. I, the researcher, live in a community in Denver, Colorado, called Stapleton. This master-planned community is family friendly, and has over 19,000 residents, eleven schools, six swimming pools, a library, and over 150 shops and restaurants. Within this community is the Stapleton Mom's Group, which is where I identified the participants. I am a member of this electronic email forum, website, and Facebook group. The group was started by a Stapleton mom as an email listserv in 2006 to help mothers connect with other mothers. There are over 2,000 people on the list. Members of the Stapleton Mom's Group reside in Stapleton and nearby communities, and they must be mothers. The group is somewhat diverse, as is the Stapleton community. Home prices in the neighborhood range from low income housing to million dollar and above homes.

There are advantages and disadvantages to being a member of the Stapleton Mom's Group. When choosing research in my own setting, the following areas to be aware of included: 1) expectations and biases I hold based on familiarity, 2) the transition from a more familiar role within the setting, and the risk of uncovering potentially damaging knowledge, and 3) concerns with closeness and closure (Alvesson, 2003). However, having closeness to the phenomenon and the people provided subjective understandings that increased the quality of the data (Toma, 2000). Other positive aspects of the setting included ease of access to participants, reduced time

expenditure for data collection, low transit time to research subjects, and the potential to build trusting relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Well-developed sampling decisions are critical for a study's soundness (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Purposeful sampling was used in this study. The sample was selected in ways that provided the broadest range of information. This sample was expanded until redundancy with respect to information was reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Although participant occupation and employer varied, all of the participants met the following criteria:

- All participants were mothers who had previously opted out of the workforce after having children.
- All participants were high achieving professional women, as defined in Chapter One.
- Prior to opting out, all participants were in professional careers.
- All participants had reentered their careers within the last year.
- All participants were working at least 24 hours/week in an organization within the United States.
- All participants agreed to member checking, which helped to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The sample size depended on several factors (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). To justify a sample, the possible samples and relevant variables must be known, which is nearly impossible. A compromise was to include a sample with reasonable variation in the phenomenon, settings, or people (Dobbert, 1982). The number of participants was here determined *ex post* when I found saturation of participant types (Bowen, 2008). Initially, about thirty people expressed interest in participating in the study. After talking to them further, many did not meet my criteria and I was

left with about twelve potential participants. A few additional people stopped responding or they were not available to speak with me. The final number of participants was eight. Before reaching out to participants, approval had to be given by Colorado State University's Internal Review Board. Included in the appendices are the recruitment flyer (Appendix A), recruitment plan (Appendix B), original Facebook recruitment post (Appendix C), pre-screen questions (Appendix D), as well as the CSU participant consent form (Appendix E). These documents were constructed before data were collected.

Data Collection

A combination of individual interviews, life histories, a follow up survey, and focus groups were used to generate the data. First, the interview procedure allowed participants to provide open-ended responses to a variety of guiding questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Conversational interviews were conducted instead of standard interviews in order to create a more personal environment with enriching conversations. Conversational interviewing is an approach used by research interviews to generate verbal data through talking about specified topics with research participants in an informal and conversational way (Roulston, 2008). Because the interview participants were essentially neighbors and peers, creating a friendly, informal environment, and conversation allowed meaningful discussions. Included in Appendix F is the list of initial interview questions. A semi-structured approach was used. Face-to-face audio-recorded interviews were conducted and used as the method for data collection. There was no time limit on the interviews. A neutral location was selected which was accommodating to both the participant and the researcher. In most instances, this meant Starbucks. I purchased coffee for the participants and attempted to make them feel comfortable. As a fellow mother who had opted out and was considering opting back in, an element of trust was immediately

established. The participants were given the opportunity to review the notes to ensure accuracy of the conversations.

Another consideration when conducting qualitative interviews is confidentiality (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) that in the present context, involved assurances that no individual other than the author could be identified by reading this work. In addition, data collection requires sensitivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), to have insight, to be tuned in to, and to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in the data. To sensitively determine how to use knowledge and experience enabled me to respond effectively to what was in the data. I worked with the data as I determined the evolution until I reached a point that unveiled “That is what they are telling me.”

Second, life histories were gathered by eras, as described in Appendix G. Life history eras include early family life, pre-kindergarten-12th grade, college, and career. The purpose of the life history was to discern what was important to the individual and what made them who they are. Charlotte Linde defines a life story as “all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime” (p. 21). She says that the stories should meet the following two criteria: 1) the stories and associated discourse units have a point about the speaker, not a point about the world, and 2) the stories and associated discourse units have extended reportability and are tellable over the course of a long period of time (Linde, 1993). By gathering the life stories of the participants, their sense of self was further unveiled, including who they were and how they got that way.

I educated the individual participants about the researchers’ role. In part, this education involved describing the activities in the setting, telling the participants what I was interested in learning about, and sharing the possible uses of any information provided. According to Marshall

and Rossman (2006), a successful research study depends on the interpersonal skills of the researcher, including the capacity to build trust, maintain good relations, respect norms of reciprocity, and be sensitive to ethical issues. Being a part of the participant's community helped to establish initial trust. I listened to each participant and was sensitive to her needs. In addition, I used a plan for the exit strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I explained what the finished product would look like, and explained that the research relationship was temporary. While the research is now over, I have maintained a relationship with the participants by keeping in touch. Some are still in their jobs they had when interviewed. Some are looking for new positions.

Third, in line with the Kaleidoscope Career Model theoretical framework of the study, the primary instrument used to measure the participants' priorities on the model's parameters was distributed. The KCSI, Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory, provided in Appendix H, gave the participants a better understanding of the parameters that affected the decision making process about their careers. These parameters were authenticity, balance, and challenge. While the main approach of this study is qualitative, the KCSI was given to the participants at the end of each interview. The inventory was distributed last so the results of the inventory would not sway or anchor the qualitative data. The purpose of administering the KCSI was to enrich the interviews with supplemental information, and provide a further understanding of the career parameters that drove the participant's work motivation. The instrument was designed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2006). They used the findings from five prior studies, including both quantitative and qualitative research. Initially, focus groups were planned as follow-ups to the individual interviews; as the goal of a focus group is to "elicit responses from the participants, free from the direct influence of the interviewer" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p.8) however, once the data were examined and analyzed, I believed saturation had been

achieved so the focus groups would be redundant. Participants were emailed afterwards to clarify demographic data about themselves.

Data Analysis

Situational analysis was used to analyze the data. This section defines situational analysis and demonstrates how and what one gains by using this type of analysis. Situational analysis is a relatively new qualitative research method. While grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, and has since been elaborated upon by scholars including Charmaz, situational analysis was created by Clarke, who studied grounded theory with Strauss for over twenty years (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015). Clarke developed situational analysis to address what she saw as shortcomings of grounded theory, which included its positivist tendencies, a lack of reflexivity, oversimplification instead of addressing differences, and a lack of analysis of power (Clarke, 2005). Situational analysis addresses these issues by acknowledging the embodiment and situatedness of the researcher, grounding qualitative analysis in the inquiry, paying attention to key differences, complexities and taking into consideration nonhuman elements. In situational analysis, the situation of inquiry itself broadly becomes the key unit of analysis (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015).

While Strauss created social and world maps, Clarke introduced situational maps and positional maps (Clarke, 2005). Situational analysis supplements traditional grounded theory and provides alternative approaches to both data gathering and analysis/interpretation. It produces and analyzes interview and ethnographic data and also promotes the analysis of narrative, visual and historical discourse materials (Clarke, 2005). According to Clarke, situational maps involve three main approaches:

1. Situational maps: Lay out the major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of inquiry and provoke analysis of relations among them;
2. Social worlds/arenas maps: Lay out the collective actors, key nonhuman elements, and the arena(s) of commitment and discourse within which they are engaged in ongoing negotiation and meso-level interpretations of the situation;
3. Positional maps: Lay out the major positions taken, and not taken, in the data vis-à-vis particular axes of difference, concern, and controversy issues in the situation of inquiry.

Situational analysis is compared to grounded theory in Table 3.1. The benefits of situational analysis include: enhanced reflexivity of the researcher, moving beyond the interviews to include analyses of discourses, helping silences speak by analyzing absent positions, including nonhuman elements and their relations to the situation, and pursuing analyses. Situational analysis can be done with a variety of discursive materials including interview, ethnographic, historical, and narrative discourses (Clarke, Friese & Washburn, 2015). Like traditional grounded theory, situational analysis relies on coding, theoretical sampling, seeking saturation, and memoing.

When deciding between situational analysis and narrative approaches, situational analysis was selected for the following reasons. Because maps are visual representations, they may provide a fresh perspective. Maps are an excellent device to materialize questions (Clarke, 2005). They are a tool that opens up knowledge spaces, and one can move around in maps more quickly and easily than in narrative text. This frame of mind works well with how I operate and think, which was a significant factor in the decision to choose situational analysis. I am very

usual in my thinking and processing and work best by doing. By creating and working with the maps, using markers and transparencies, I was able to synthesize the data and find relationships I might not otherwise have discovered.

Table 3.1

Differences between Traditional Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis (Clarke, 2005, p.32)

TRADITIONAL GROUNDED THEORY	SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS
Positivist/realist	Constructionist/relativist
Master narrative	Modest contribution
“Knowing subjects”: Interview and ethnographic data	“Knowing subjects” and extant discourses: Interview, ethnographic, narrative, visual, and historical discourse data
Universal truths and generalizations	Partial perspectives and situated knowledge
Simplification; difference as “negative cases”	Range of variation; differences and complexities as analytically central
Researcher as tabula rosa (blank slate)	Researcher as knowledgeable about theory and substantive area
Literature review after analysis well under way/complete	Thorough literature review prior to start of project design
Project planning	Intensive and ongoing project design
Intensive grounded theory coding	Intensive grounded theory coding and situational maps and analysis
Theoretical sampling	Theoretical sampling
Theoretical sensitivity a goal	Theoretical sensitivity a goal
One basic social process and sub processes	Multiple possible social processes and sub processes possible
Substantive theory	Situational maps and analyses, social worlds/arenas maps and analyses, positional discourse maps and analyses
Formal theory	Substantive theorizing, Sensitizing concepts and theorizing
Authority of author as expert	Accountability of author as reflexive vs. research processes and products

Clarke describes situational analysis as an interpretive qualitative method. Clarke views situational analysis as the operationalization of grounded theory after the postmodern turn. She defines the postmodern turn as all scientific and lay knowledges that are understood as socially and culturally produced. All knowledges are understood by major segments of the scholarly worlds and beyond as situated knowledges (Clarke, 2005). She claims that situational analysis theory in tandem with interactionist grounded theory is about the goodness of fit between the symbolic interactionist theory, constructionist grounded theory and situational analysis, as methodological approaches in terms of ontology and epistemology. Using a package, like above, uses the work involved in learning the theory and the practices and how to articulate them (Clarke, Friese & Washburn, 2015). She states that over the past 20 or so years, grounded theorists have widened their theoretical lenses around the postmodern turn, shifting to more fully developed constructionist framings, which Clarke seeks to further develop.

Coding

Coding, as defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) involves “deriving and developing concepts from data,” (p. 68). As said by Charmaz (2014), coding is “the pivotal link between collecting and developing an emergent theory to explain these data” (p. 113). According to Clarke (2005), when using situational analysis, basic grounded theory coding of the narrative materials should be conducted first. Therefore, basic coding was used to initially understand the data and understand the phenomenon. Unlike qualitative researchers who apply preconceived categories or codes to the data, qualitative codes followed what I found in the data. This was performed somewhat organically, making sense of the narrative stories. When going through the data, I created tentative labels for chunks of data and then loosely used axial coding, identifying relationships among the open codes. This process helped to analyze the emerging data. Analysis

of what the data were about, and what was going on, helped to ground me in the discourse which allowed me to create the initial situational maps. Questions asked, using Clarke's (2005) guidance, were: “What are the discourses in the broader situation,” “Who is involved in producing these discourses, “What material things- nonhuman elements are involved?” “Where are there implicated/silent actors?” (p. 187). When creating the maps, dimensionality was captured through axial coding, “a type of coding that treats a category as an axis around which the researcher delineates relationships and specifies the dimensions of the category (Clarke, 2005). Figure 3.1 demonstrates this approach.

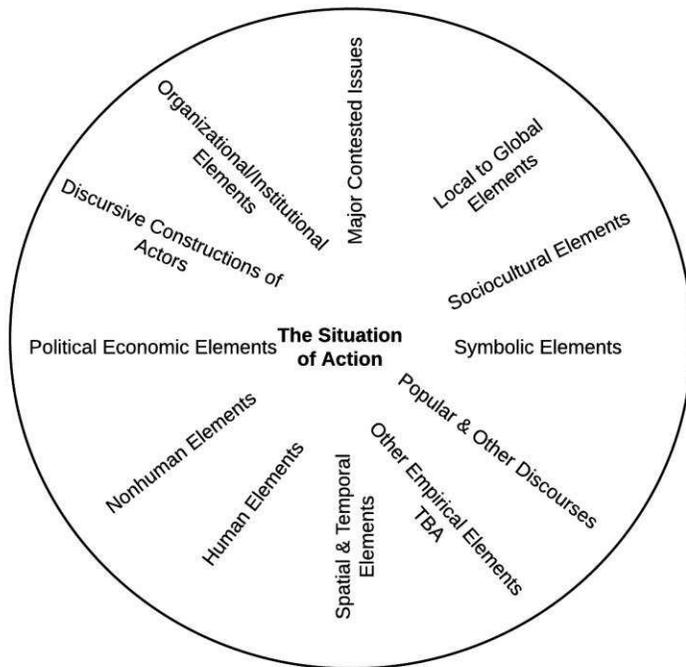


Figure 3.1. Clarke’s situational matrix. (Clarke, 2005, p. 73).

According to Clarke, a difference between grounded theory coding and situational analysis is that in the latter, “the goal is not preserving or re-representing the ‘truth’ as expressed by the narratives or quotes, instead the goal is to analyze or produce ‘a truth’ or possible ‘truths’

– distinctive analytic understandings, interpretations and representations of a particular social phenomenon” (pg. 193). In addition, the analysis centers on social phenomena.

When reviewing the data, the relevant human and nonhuman, material, and symbolic/discursive elements of a particular situation were considered. Figure 3.2 lists possible elements to include in the coding as well in maps.

<p>Individual Human Elements/Actors Key individuals and significant people in the situation</p> <p>Collective Human Elements/Actors Particular groups; specific organizations</p>	<p>Nonhuman Elements/Actants Technologies; material infrastructures, specialized information and/or knowledges; material “things”</p> <p>Implicated/Silent Actors/Actants As found in the situation</p>
<p>Discursive Constructions of Individual and/or Collective Human Actants As found in the situation</p> <p>Political/Economic Elements The state; particular industry/ies; local/regional/global orders; political parties</p> <p>Temporal Elements Historical, seasonal, crisis and/or trajectory aspects</p> <p>Major Issues/Debates (usually contested) As found in the situation</p>	<p>Discursive Construction of Nonhuman Actants As found in the situation</p> <p>Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements Religion; race; sexuality; gender; ethnicity; nationality; logos; icons, other visuals</p> <p>Spatial Elements Spaces in the situation, geographical aspects, local, regional, national, global spatial issues</p> <p>Related Discourses (Historical, narrative, and/or visual)</p>
<p>Other Kinds of Elements As found in the situation</p>	

Figure 3.2. Clarke’s suggested elements to be used for mapping. (Clarke, 2005, p.90)

In positional maps, positions are not correlated or associated with persons or groups or institutions. Instead, positions on these maps are positions in discourses (Clarke, 2005).

Researcher’s Perspective of Situational Analysis

While the general framework for the present analysis and Clarke’s approach are similar, it was useful to create an adapted version of situational analysis. Clarke’s research is in the hard sciences, whereas this dissertation is a work of social science. This difference created some need to adapt the original process for present purposes. Below are examples of both Clarke’s maps as

well as those generated in this research. Differences between them are highlighted, and modifications explained.

Messy Situational Map

Clarke (2005) argues that there are many elements that may comprise abstract working situational maps. What appears in the situational map is based on the situation of inquiry, and many of these elements will likely not appear from maps from other research (Clarke, 2005). Writing out anything that seems important allows the researcher to initially analyze the data. Expanding categories or items, and adding and deleting helps to create an understanding of the data. These categories were listed in Table 3.2 above. Figure 3.3 provides a sample of Clarke's messy situational map.



Figure 3.3. Abstract messy situational map. (Clark, 2005, p. 88)

As can be seen, Clarke's messy situational map is full of various discourses, key events, human and non human elements, issues and ideas. They are not placed in any particular order. They are pulled out of the narrative data in attempt to make sense of the information. Below is an example of a messy situational map used in this dissertation.

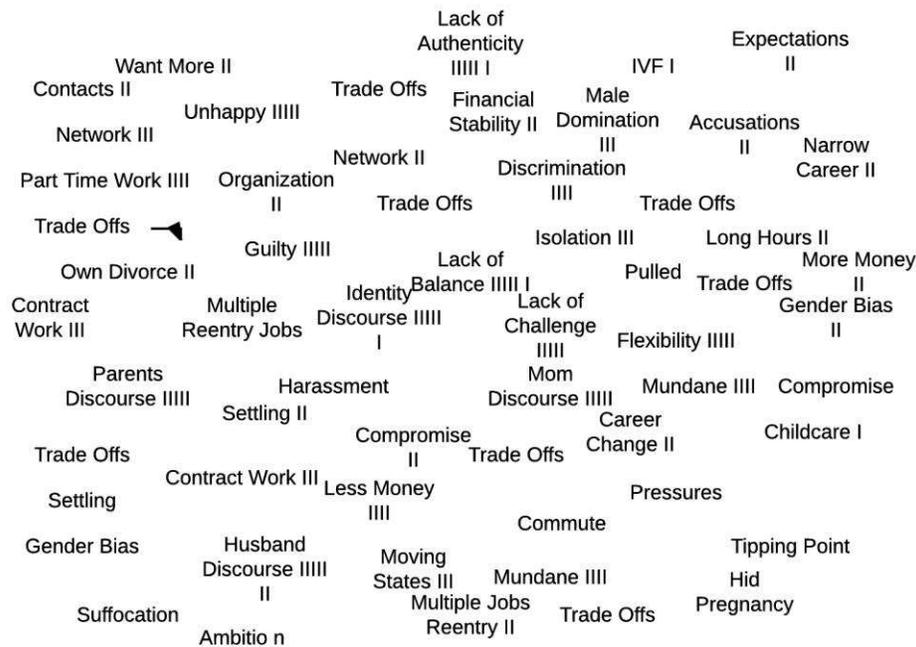


Figure 3.4. Researcher’s meta messy situational map.

While the initial messy situational maps for this research were hand written on transparencies using colored transparency markers, and the lines were not straight, these were transferred onto the computer to create a better visual for the dissertation. As can be seen, like Clarke, elements include various human and non-human elements, emotions, key events, and hot issues, among others. A difference is that I created tallies to get a better sense of how many of the eight individuals reported the element.

Ordered Situational Maps

Ordered situational maps provide a neatness to the messiness of the messy situational maps (Clarke, 2005). Having both messy and orderly versions available to work with simultaneously allows further analysis to help ensure that a relation has not been overlooked. Below is an example of one of Clarke’s ordered situational maps.

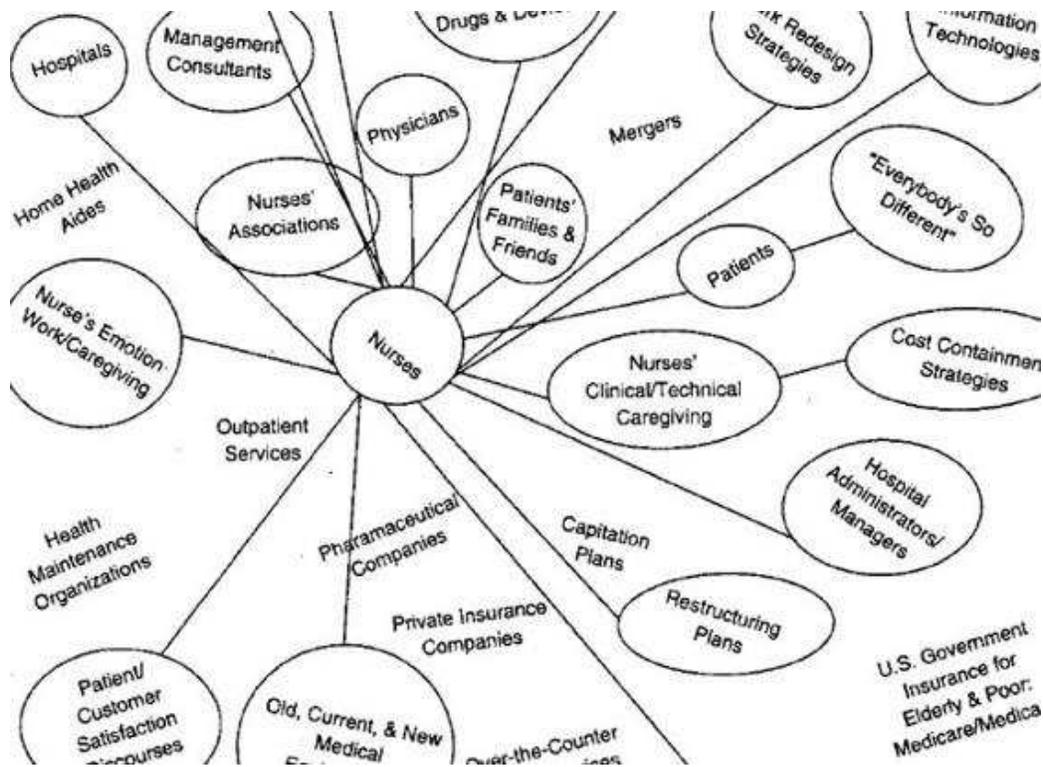


Figure 3.5. Example of Clarke's ordered situational map. (Clark, 2005, p.104)

Clarke's ordered version shows relationships among the various elements, which allows for a relational analysis based on the map. Each element can be considered individually and in relation to other elements on the map, to visually represent the relations discovered. The maps can diagram relations by circling certain elements and connecting them. While Clarke suggests making photocopies to work with these maps, instead transparencies and colored markers were used to examine the different relationships. Below is an example of my meta situational map.

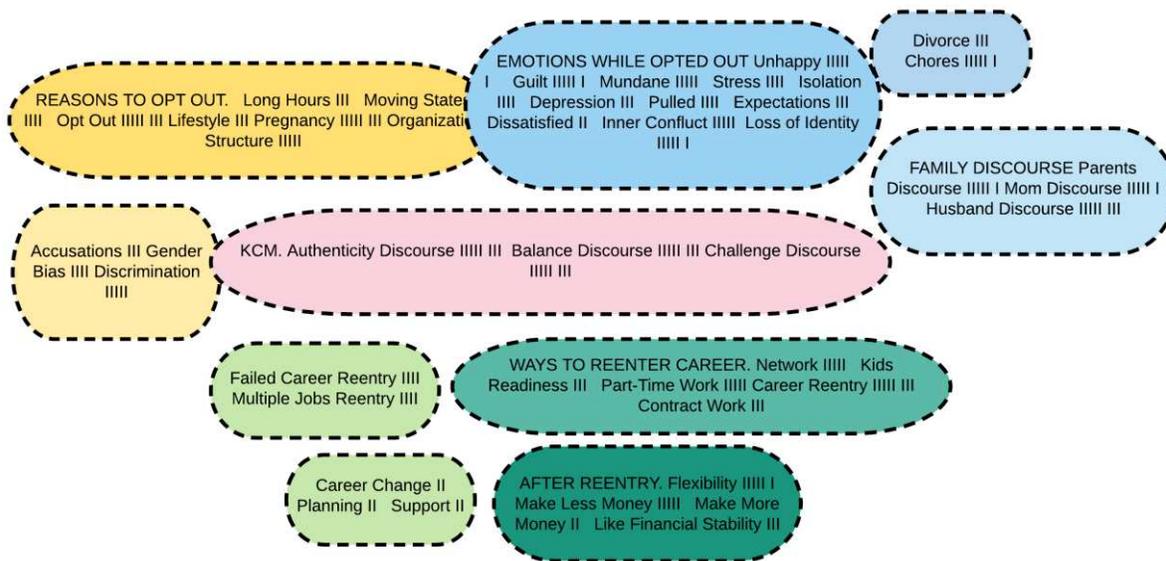


Figure 3.6. Researcher’s meta situational map.

First, individual ordered situational maps were created and laid on top of each other as well as side by side, and color markers were used to help understand the relationships. The next step in the relational analysis was to create a meta situational analysis. Similar elements were grouped together and color-coded by category. In addition, tallies were used to understand how prevalent the elements were among the eight participants. For example, all of the elements as to why women opted out of the workforce are coded in orange. Blue consists of the experiences of women while they were opted out of the workforce. Green consists of the experiences of women when they tried to reenter the workforce. Pink consists of the theoretical framework, and how the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge played a part in the phenomenon. According to Clarke (2005), situational maps should be completed until saturation is reached. The researcher should work “with your maps many times, tinkered, added, deleted, [and] reorganized” (p. 108). Therefore, multiple drafts of these maps were created until I believed the data were saturated.

Social World/Arenas Map

According to Clarke (2005), to make a social worlds/arenas map, “one enters into the situation of interest and tries to make collective sociological sense out of it” (p. 110). Below is an example of one of Clarke’s abstract social world maps. Each circle is a different arena in which a different concept is explored. She suggests thinking about the focuses of the arenas, which social worlds are active or absent, topics in the arena’s discourses, or any surprising silences in the discourses.

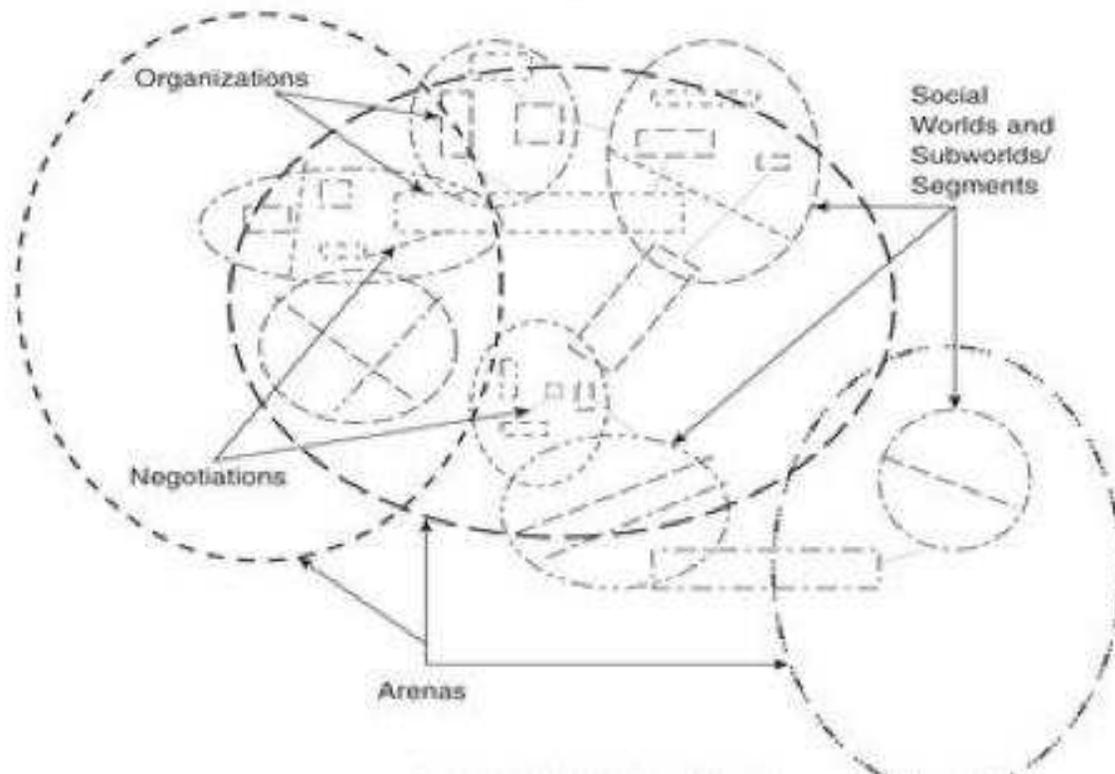


Figure 3.7. Clarke’s social worlds/arenas map. (Clarke, 2005, p.111).

As a result of the different situational arenas maps and how I made sense of the information, three major arenas appeared, or ways in which the research made sense. The three arenas were: 1) Decision to opt out, 2) Experiences while opted out, and 3) Experiences reentering the workforce after opting out. The way the data were broken down into these three

maps was critical to the research, as they influenced the organization of results and synthesis of the data. As in the previous maps, tallies were used as an indicator of how prevalent these elements were among the eight participants. Below are the meta social worlds/arenas maps that represent the three phenomena.

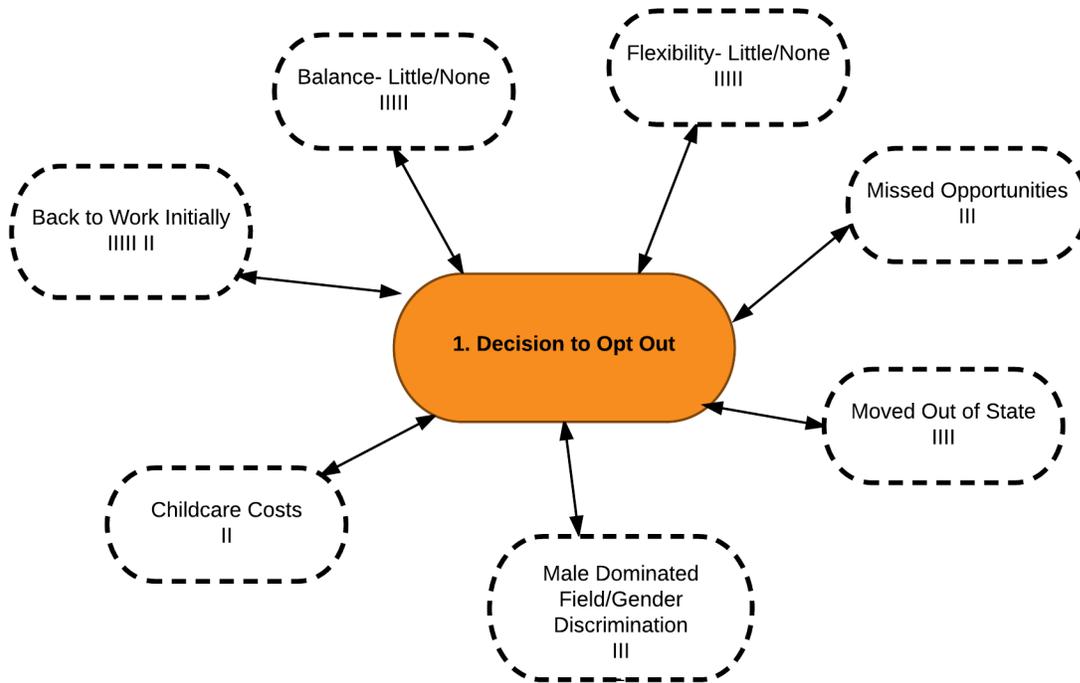


Figure 3.8. Researcher's social worlds/arena map of decision to opt out.

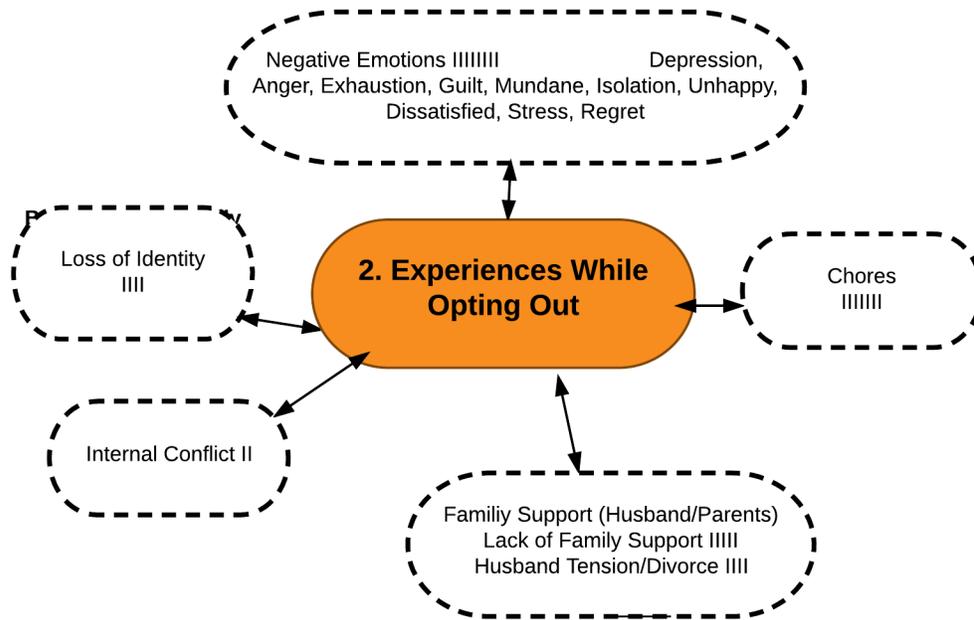


Figure 3.9. Researcher’s social worlds/arena map of experiences while opting out.

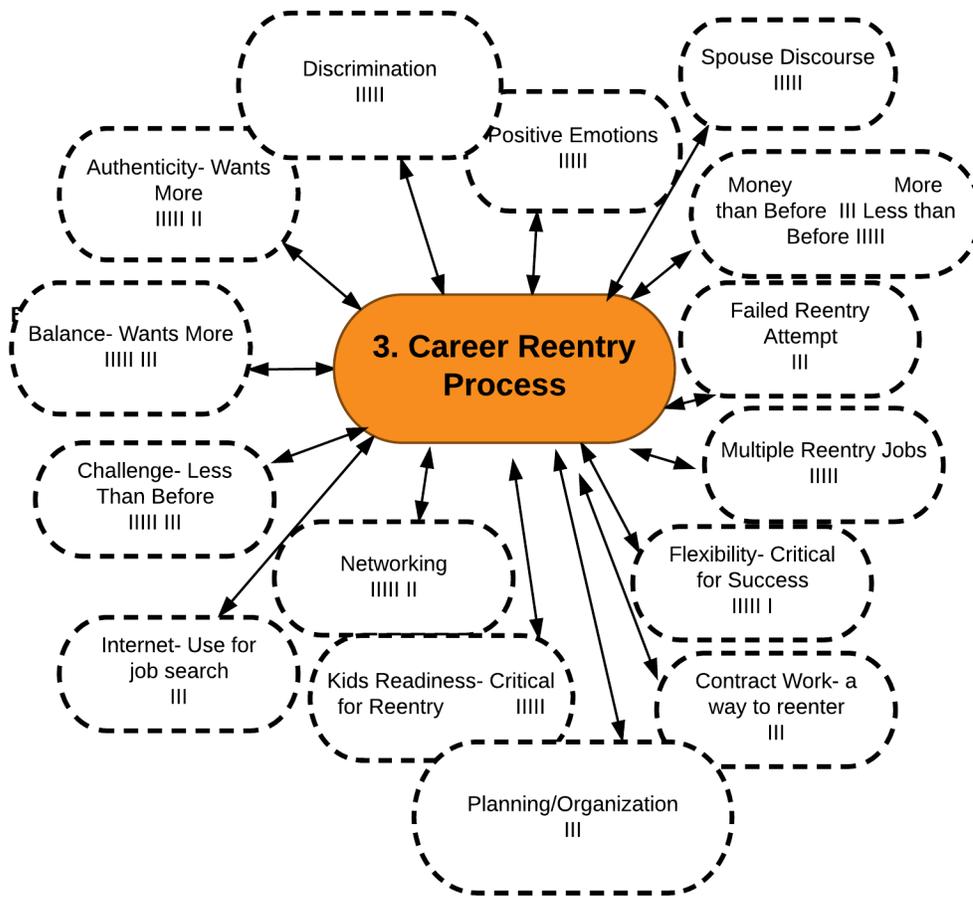


Figure 3.10. Researcher’s social worlds/arena map of career reentry process.

According to Clarke, an adequate positional map should meet the criterion of saturation, in which case no new issues, axes, or major positions are appearing in the data (Clarke, 2005). These maps are somewhat procedural and formal, as they are a systematic way of examining the data, yet they can reveal positions and paths that are both taken and not taken in the data. Figure 3.11 shows an example of a typical Clarke style positional map.

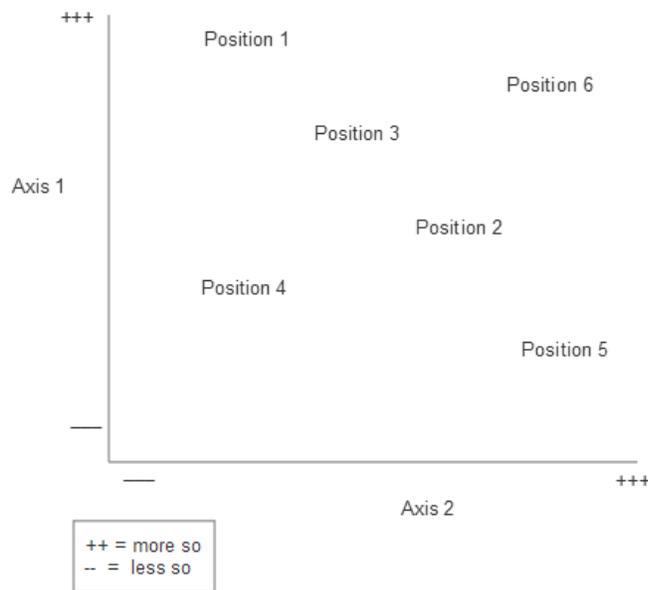


Figure 3.11. Example positional map. (Clarke, 2005, p. 129).

Two distinct subject matters are placed on the x and y axes. Various positions, or viewpoints are located on the map. These represent different positions on the two axes. Below is an example of a positional map from the present study. This map looks at Discrimination and the Career Reentry Process. Locations follow from the positions the participants reported, as analyzed in the social world and situational maps. To help understand these maps and maintain the positions, the positions they experienced or represented were written out. If somebody did not experience a position, Clarke’s practice was followed by including “Missing position in data.” For example, when looking at the lower right position, there was nobody interviewed who attempted to reenter the workforce multiple times who did not experience any or very little discrimination. Therefore, “Missing position in data,” describes the location. On the contrary, the upper right quadrant includes a description because one or more participants faced discrimination when they made multiple attempts to reenter the workforce.

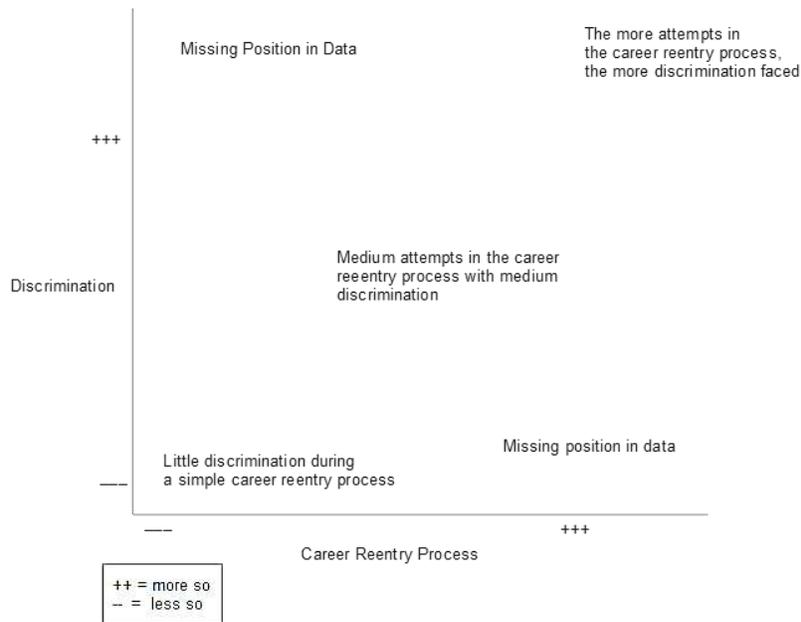


Figure 3.12. Positional map of discrimination and the career reentry process using Clarke’s recommendations.

While Clarke recommends using “Missing position in data” as listed above in Figure 3.12, for this dissertation, I chose to slightly vary her positional maps best practice. I eliminated “Missing position in data” because I felt it restricted the map. When thinking of these positional maps as spaces of actualization, if the situation changed, she might be in a different space, in a different variation of how that happened. There are reasons these women were in these spaces, and I did not want to confine them into a box. In addition, like I tallied the number of people and/or human and non human elements in both the situational maps and social worlds/arena maps, I tallied the number of people who held a similar position to provide a better indication of the number of people who held the positions. Figure 3.13 is an example of a positional map that I used.



Figure 3.13. Positional map of discrimination and the career reentry process

Clarke states that the researcher should continue creating and revising positional maps until saturation is reached. While this process was tedious, creating positional maps of the major relationships and positions from the participants helped to better understand the results and the phenomena being studied. These maps helped to reveal additional relationships and positions that may not have otherwise been as richly connected.

Trustworthiness

The “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues discussed as validity and reliability” (Seale, 1999, p. 266). In both quantitative and qualitative research, validity and reliability are essential to research quality. Because a large number of journal articles and book chapters start with Lincoln and Guba’s construction of trustworthiness criteria from the 1985 book, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, there will be an emphasis on their trustworthiness criteria in this

section. However, since situational analysis is more closely aligned with postmodern/poststructural epistemologies (Clarke, 2005), a variety of scholarly insights will be included.

Lincoln & Guba's Criteria for Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba, the terms “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability” are the qualitative equivalents for the quantitative terms “internal validity,” “external validity,” “reliability,” and “objectivity” (1985, p. 300). This section provides a description of these terms, outlines trustworthiness criteria from other scholars, and describes how I intended to uphold trustworthiness to maintain appropriate scientific rigor in the current study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that there are five major techniques to help ensure that credible findings and interpretations will be produced. Some of these activities include: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement is the investment of time to learn the culture and build trust. The inquirer should be open to many influences – including the mutual shapers and contextual factors that impact the phenomenon. Prolonged engagement provides depth to the inquiry. Relatedly, the inquirer should describe the processes for how a detailed exploration will be carried out. This practice calls for an aura of skepticism and being aware of the danger of premature closure. Lincoln and Guba warn against achieving a focus too soon. Triangulation is the third technique for improving credibility. Triangulation is defined as the incorporation of multiple methods of data collection, and can include multiple types of data collection techniques, multiple data sources, multiple investigators, or multiple theoretical perspectives (Glesne, 2011).

Transferability involves a thick description of the phenomena with purposeful sampling. A thick description is a term for description that goes beyond bare reporting, or a thin description, and instead describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action (Denzin, 1989). It is the researcher's role to provide the data that makes transferability judgments possible.

To ensure dependability, the inquirer takes on the role of an auditor. The researcher is expected to examine the process of the inquiry to ensure the dependability of the inquiry. The inquirer also examines the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is also referred to as reliability. Gibbs (2007) suggests the following reliability procedures: 1) check transcripts to ensure they do not contain obvious mistakes, 2) ensure there is no shift in the meaning of the codes during the coding process, and 3) cross-check the codes.

Techniques for establishing confirmability include keeping a reflexive journal, triangulation, and performing a confirmability audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The reflexive journal is a diary in which the investigator records information about self and method. This diary may provide information about being the human instrument (Spradley, 1979).

Other Researcher's Criteria for Trustworthiness

Creswell describes eight procedures often used in qualitative research that contribute to trustworthiness. While some of the criteria are the same as Lincoln and Guba's, there are differences as well. The eight items are: 1) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, 2) triangulation, 3) peer review and debriefing, 4) negative case analysis, 5) clarification of researcher bias, 6) member checking, 7) rich, thick description, and 8) external audit.

Table 3.2 provides eight alternative criteria for excellent qualitative research, as detailed by Sarah Tracy, (2010, p. 838).

Table 3.2
Eight Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes
Sincerity	The study is characterized by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges
Credibility	The research is marked by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description • Triangulation • Multivocality
Resonance	Member reflections The research influences, affects or moves particular readers through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations
Significant contribution	Transferable findings The research provides a significant contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptually • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Ethical	The research considers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural ethics • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics
Meaningful coherence	The study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations with each other

Grounded theory scholars Corbin and Strauss (2008) write regarding the evaluation of qualitative research:

I feel paralyzed, unsure of where to begin, or what to write. As I search the literature, I find that evaluation is necessary but there is little consensus about what evaluation should consist of. Are we judging for “validity” or would it be better to use terms like “rigor”...”trustworthiness,”...or”goodness,”...or something called “integrity”... when referring to qualitative evaluation (p.297)

In fact, Tracey argues that qualitative researchers should not be so tied to epistemology or ontology that several common end goals of good qualitative research cannot be achieved. Whether the methodology is postpositivist, critical, interpretive or poststructural, research reflexivity along with other practices can apply to a number of paradigms, and need not be bound to only one type of research. Regardless of the specific terminology employed, maintaining a commitment to ensuring quality research will aid in creating a meaningful research study that aids in providing significant contributions.

Researcher's Commitment to Trustworthiness

I, the researcher, strived to conduct a trustworthy study. Using the scholarly foundations of trustworthiness described above, I did the following. First, since I was already part of the community under study, I was already immersed in the culture. This created some advantages due to prolonged engagement, but may also infuse the research with biases created by my prior position as an active member of the community. I strove not to arrive at a focus early in the analysis to counter any biases. Second, the strongest counter to any biases was found in triangulation. That is, I explicitly compared and contrasted my prior beliefs with the results of the life histories, interviews, and KCSI questionnaire to counter these biases. Third, I attempted to make the results transferable by thoroughly and thickly describing the results. A thick description goes beyond the bare reporting which helps to provide an understanding of the experiences instead of abstract generalizations. Fourth, I followed dependability procedures as I worked in a consistent, reliable manner. Fifth, I maintained a journal to identify reflexivity in my biases, as well as values and personal background that could have shaped my interpretations during the course of the study (Creswell, 2009). With respect to method, the journal provides information about methodological decisions made and the reasons for making them. I documented the steps in the process that I took, keeping everything transparent (Spradley, 1979). Fifth, I used member checking, as I shared the results with the research participants to make sure their lives appropriately represented them. Sixth, I used an external audit. With my doctoral committee, I provided them field notes, quotes, and situational analysis maps and results, in order to generate efforts to receive objective feedback on the process. Seventh, I was aware of my own research bias as I reflected on my own subjectivity and monitored my bias in the research. Eighth, as each a portion of data collection and the analysis was completed, I confirmed

and disconfirmed cases to serve as additional examples that lended further support, richness, and depth to patterns emerging in the data analysis. The purpose of this approach is to develop a richer, more in depth understanding of the phenomenon (Ha, 1987). All of these actions that I took contributed to my research trustworthiness and verisimilitude, or sense of authenticity in the research.

Summary

This chapter described the research methods used to conduct the study. The research design section included a description of a qualitative study, a summary of multiple case study analysis, and research questions. Next, setting and participants and data collection were covered, which highlighted the importance of conducting semi-structured interviews, gathering life histories, and distributing the KCSI. The data analysis section discussed Clarke's situational analysis process and detailed how the present situational analysis that I used varied from Clarke's while still utilizing her core concepts. Last, a review of how trustworthiness was included. Research results are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings of the experiences of high achieving professional women who opted out and their personal stories of career reentry after opting out. Descriptive data is presented first, followed by findings organized around the research questions. Common themes of their stories are unveiled and results presented to yield the story of the composite woman. A unique combination of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's use of portraiture is used when sharing the experiences of the composite woman along with Clarke's recommended use of positional maps. The convergence of narrative and analysis is presented, while maintaining its standard of authenticity and the recognition of the use of self as the main research instrument for documenting and interpreting perspectives (Lightfoot, 1997). When telling the story of the composite woman, relevant outliers are included as variation from the composite. These different positions are also unveiled with select positional maps. Names are not listed to maintain anonymity of the participants. Purposeful quotes are layered in, adding in key points to tell the story. As mentioned in previous chapters, the primary focus of the analysis is on the experiences of high achieving professional women when they return to the workplace after opting out. However, in order to fully understand their experience, the experiences of high achieving professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce, and the experiences of high achieving professional women while opted out are discussed prior to their experiences reentering the workforce. Last, since the theoretical framework of the dissertation is the Kaleidoscope Career Model, the results of the KCSI, Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory is discussed.

Profile of the Participants

Understanding the profile of the participants helps to understand not only the study, but also the people whose stories unfold into the composite woman. The participants were those who I had access to in the Stapleton Mom's group. As suggested by demographic characteristics presented in Table 4.1, these women are professionals from upper middle class backgrounds. Eight participants were chosen so they could be studied in great detail and depth. They were chosen because they met the initial criteria of being professionals who had opted out of the workplace after having kids and had successfully reentered the workplace. Therefore, all of them have at least one child. They were all married at the time of opting out of the workplace. However, three of them either were divorced or were in the process of getting divorced by the time of career reentry. At the time of opting out, two of them were lawyers, two were investment bankers, two were in management, one was a college professor, and another was a social worker. All but one had advanced degrees, and half of them had graduated from at least one Ivy League school. They all lived in the same Denver neighborhood community, though all of them had lived in other states at some point. All were United States citizens who were English speaking.

In addition, half of the women opted out of the workforce for less than five years prior to career reentry and the other half opted out for more than five years. All of the women had family incomes greater than \$150,000 at time of opting out. All eight women opted out when they were in their thirties.

Table 4.1
Demographics of the Participants (8 participants)

Characteristics	% of sample	Characteristics	% of sample
Female	100%	Profession at time of opting out:	
Caucasian	100%	Lawyer	25%
Married at time of opting out	100%	Investment Banker	25%
Married at career reentry	62%	Management	25%
Ivy league education	50%	University Professor	8%
Graduate degree or higher	88%	Social Worker	8%
Years opted out <5	50%		
Years opted out >5	50%		
Family Income > \$150,000	100%		

The findings are presented next. The results are organized around the research questions:

Research Question #1: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce?

Research Question #2: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women while they were opted out.

Research Question #3: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women when they return to the workplace after opting out?

Research Question #3a: How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge factor into their experiences of career reentry?

Figure 4.1 is presented along with research questions 1-3, to present a visual framing of what is being discussed.

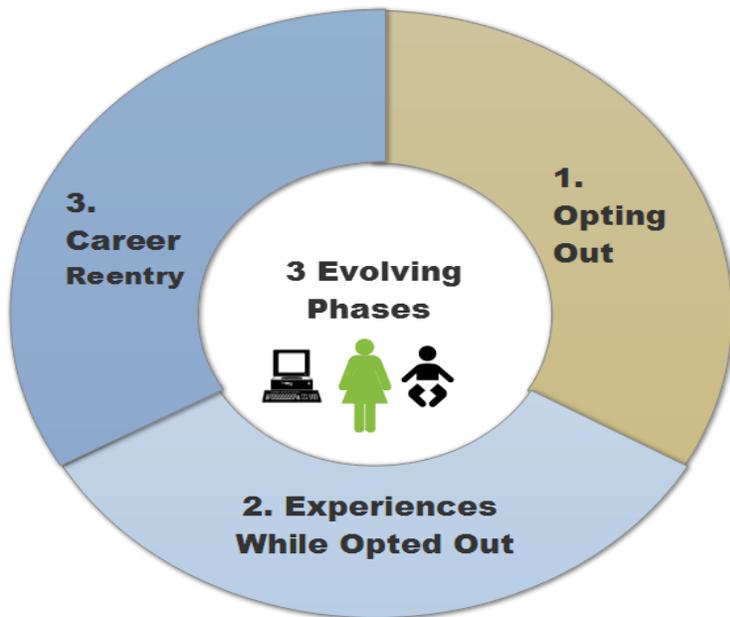


Figure 4.1. Phases of the women’s experiences being studied.

Part One: Experiences of High Achieving Professional Women Who Opted Out After Having Kids

The following findings answer the first research question: What were the experiences of high achieving professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce? I, as the researcher, sought to understand this initially. While the main focus of my research was to understand the experiences of career reentry of professional women after opting out, I needed to understand why they initially opted out. When I met with the women, after I explained the study, I initially asked them why they opted out. Their answers, analyzed through the situational analysis maps, are detailed below as the composite woman. While outlier experiences are peppered throughout, the majority of the composite woman’s experiences are similar.

Went Back to Work Initially But Flexibility Became an Issue

The opting out phase was not simple. The composite woman went back to work initially after having a child. In some cases, it wasn't until she was juggling multiple children and working that she decided to opt out. Whether it was after one child or more, a lack of flexibility became a major issue. She had a hard time keeping up with the demands of both work and family: "Even though my husband and I were both working full time, the kids were 80% of my responsibility. I had no balance." She worked long hours and had little flexibility in her position. She missed opportunities at work. Either she had to step down and take a less challenging role in a lesser position or she could not take opportunities because of the juggling act. She said, "I had an hour commute each direction. My life felt skewed. I worked on Saturdays. I felt guilt. I didn't want to be the best in my field anymore. I didn't go to as many professional events. I made trade-offs." She continued by saying "I felt like the default parent." The composite woman was told by others that she could do it all. This quote describes a reality of so many:

After a three month maternity, I went back to work. Going back to work was tough. I heard feedback like 'You can do it. You can have high bar challenges and be a mom and fashionable in the industry.' The reality was more like 'My mom takes care of my son and my son doesn't like me.' It took me awhile to realize this wasn't going to work. I couldn't meet expectations at work or at home. I was arguing with my spouse. The pressure was high. I was sleep deprived and was experiencing criticism from my boss.

To further understand the positions of the women on flexibility, below is a positional map (Figure 4.2).

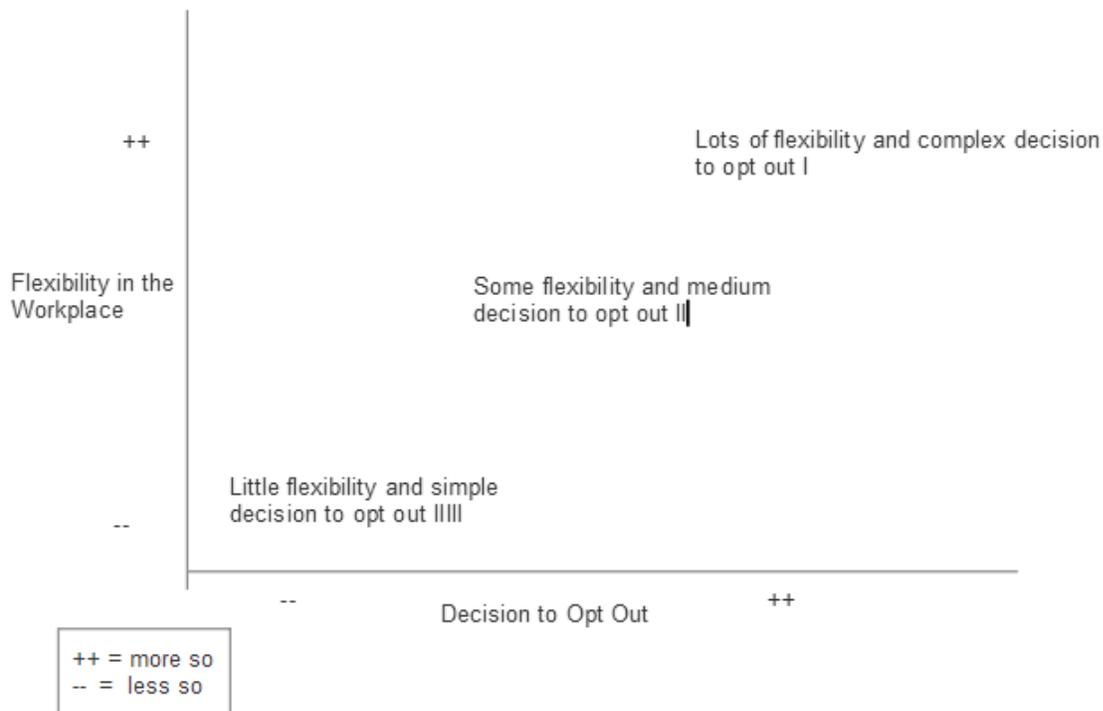


Figure 4.2. Positional map of decision to opt out and flexibility.

This positional map demonstrates the various positions the eight women took with regards to flexibility and the decision to opt out. When a woman had little flexibility in the workplace, she had a relatively simple decision to opt out. The majority of them, five out of eight, had little flexibility that led to a more simple decision to opt out. One woman had lots of flexibility and had a more complex decision to opt out due to her husband being offered a job out of state and the expensive costs of childcare. Her reasons for opting out had nothing to do with flexibility.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination was very real. In many cases, the successful women in the organization were either child-free or had multiple nannies. Some even hid their pregnancy as long as possible for fear of getting penalized. One woman stated, “When I got pregnant, I hid my

pregnancy until 20 weeks, until after bonuses were given out. I didn't want to get penalized."

Another knew she would not have the same position when she came back from maternity leave, as changes began to happen soon after the organization learned she was pregnant. She said,

Three months before I had my first baby, my company hired a new person. I knew they were hiring him to take my job. At the same time, another man was promoted to a role that I should have gotten... I knew there wasn't going to be a spot for me to come back to after maternity leave.

A phrase heard over and over was "Women judge women harsher than men do." The penalties for women were not just for pregnant women but also for those who were mothers. One woman stated,

After attending an Ivy League school, I worked in the financial industry. I watched the men get promoted and the women didn't. I confronted my boss about it after then promoted a man who was less qualified than I was. So I started my own company in the industry. Eventually I chose a new career.

Figure 4.3 is a positional map of the relationship between the decision to opt out and discrimination, and shows the various positions the women held.

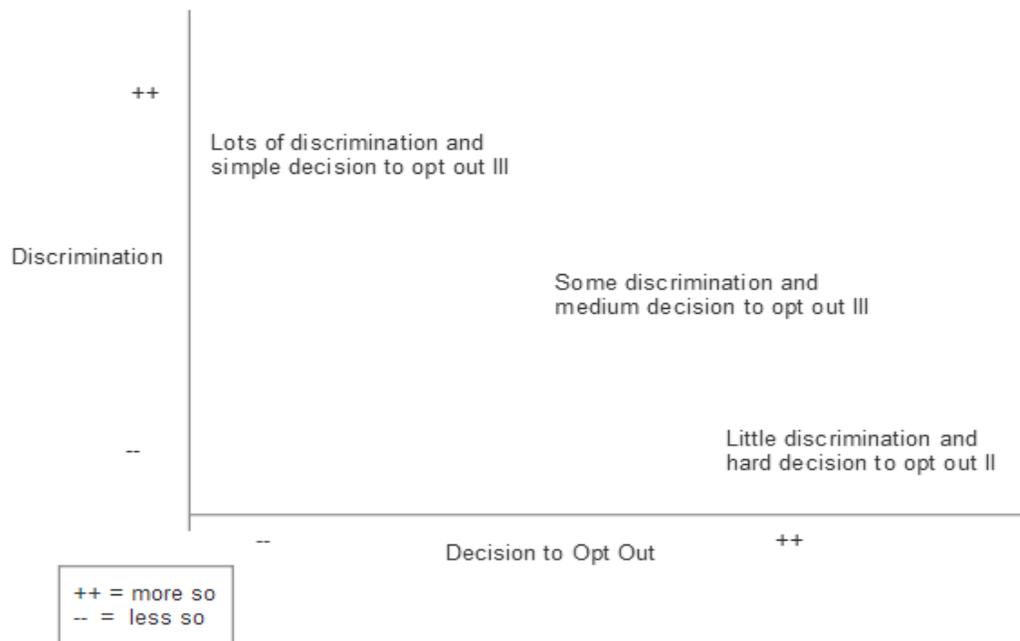


Figure 4.3. Positional map of decision to opt out and discrimination.

The various positions of the women link discrimination and the decision to opt out. Here we see that women who experienced substantial discrimination had a relatively simpler decision to opt out, women facing medium discrimination had a decision of medium difficulty to opt out, while the woman who experienced little discrimination had a harder decision to opt out. Three women experienced a lot of discrimination and therefore this led to a simpler decision to opt out, three women experienced some discrimination, and there was a factor in their decision to opt out, and two women faced minimal discrimination. Although the opt out decision is complex and many components play into the decision, this map only considers discrimination and the decision to opt out.

Organizational Structural Issues

The structure of the organizations that the composite woman worked for did not facilitate work/life balance. Jobs had long hours and offered little flexibility. Even at an organization that

is ranked as a top company for working mothers, women were sitting in the bathroom pumping. She states, “I went back to work twelve weeks after my first child. I took a role with less demand and less money. I gave up breastfeeding quickly. Assistants would sit in the bathroom breastfeeding.”

Benefits that organizations offered to new mothers looked good on paper but could not be used without penalty. In multiple instances, women hid their pregnancies for fear of retribution. In one example, she essentially was told that, after maternity leave, she would not have a job. Her organization did not offer childcare or subsidies to help cover the costs of childcare. She stated,

Childcare options were awful. There was no daycare nearby. I wanted to cut back from full-time work to part-time but paying for a nanny and sending my other kids to preschool was way too much money. I would have been working to pay someone else to take care of my kids. So I quit.

Authenticity as a Factor in Opting Out

The lack of authenticity in her life caused her to rethink her working options. After going back to work, she felt like she was no longer true to herself and her priorities. She now had a child or children in addition to her previous responsibilities. The composite woman reached a breaking point in the path she was headed down which did not feel authentic to herself, her family, or her position. She “felt like I was missing the key moments of my family and I missed being there. I did not feel right.” She said to herself, “Oh my god. I need to stop for awhile.” In another instance, she stated, “I want to enjoy my family. A job will be there later. I got so busy and stressed that I was not enjoying my life.” Family situations beyond having children can also disrupt authenticity. In one instance, shortly after her first child was born, she said “My father died. This changed my core and forced me to look at what was most important in my life. Suddenly, achieving that promotion did not seem so important.”

Balance as a Factor in Opting Out

After having a child, balance became a struggle to meet the demands of work and the responsibilities of home. In the majority of cases, lack of balance was a tipping point that caused her to decide to opt out of the workforce. The composite woman is told that she can do it all, but in reality this is far from the truth. Mistakes are made at work, children are raised by others, and Mom is stretched beyond thin. She says,

Everyone said I could do it, working full time and being a mom. It hit home when a co-worker said ‘My son doesn’t recognize me and cries...’ And when thinking about it, I realized my boss had three nannies. Was this how I wanted to live my life?...I needed to take a pause and reboot.

She says that when she went back to work she was told “You can do it. You can achieve high bar challenges at work and be a mom and be fashionable and be up in the industry.” Initially, she believed she could attempt to do everything at work just as well as she could do before, all the while, relieving the nanny when she got home and being a full-time mom in the evenings and over the weekends. She tried to leave at a decent time, and had to stay up late working after the baby was asleep. She was getting very little sleep and starting making mistakes at work. She grew frustrated with her husband who she believed wasn’t pulling his fair share. The lack of balance caused her to be on the brink of exhaustion. She felt like she had no choice but to opt out.

Challenge as a Factor in Opting Out

Challenge, either too much or too little, acted as a catalyst to the composite woman opting out of the workforce. She stated, “I couldn’t keep up with the demands of my job anymore. The challenges that were required of me at work and the demands of my life at home caused me to be stretched too thin.” In many cases, her husband’s position was equally if not more demanding, and most of the parenting fell on her and hired help. Suddenly, she says “I

didn't want to be the best in my field anymore. I had too much guilt." As a result, in some cases she transferred from a full-time job to a less stressful full-time job or a part-time job. However, this transition also created issues. The lack of challenge and mental stimulation caused her to wonder why she was working. She states, "When I returned from maternity, I moved to a less demanding job that required less hours. I was so bored and unstimulated. I made less money. After awhile, I asked, "Why am I doing this? I missed the challenge of my old position but knew I could never go back."

Figure 4.4 is a positional map representing various positions on Challenge and Authenticity. When one had little challenge at work, such as the women who switched to part-time or less demanding jobs after having a child, she felt like she was not being authentic to herself. On the flip side, if she had too much challenge at work, she was not being authentic to herself, as she was sacrificing part of herself that needed to be with her family. In the positional map missing positions in data, no one felt authentic when she had too little or too much challenge. The majority of people had too much challenge at work, and thus were not feeling authentic to themselves.

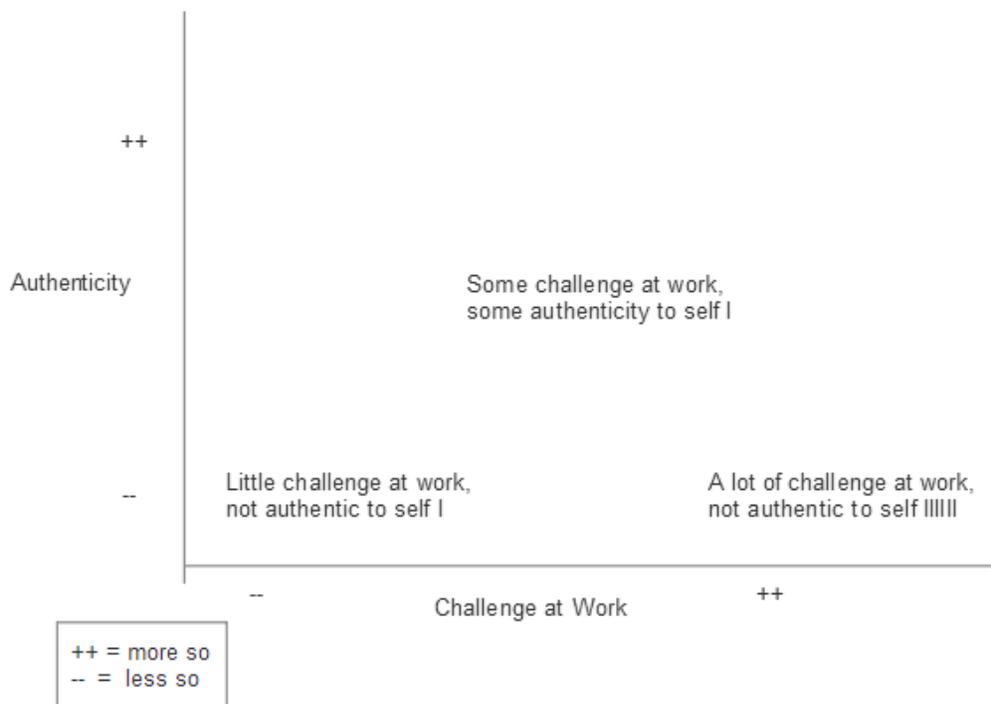


Figure 4.4. Positional map of decision to opt out, challenge, and authenticity.

Part Two: Experiences of Highly Successful Career Women While They Are Opted Out

The following discussion addresses the second research question: What are the experiences of high achieving professional women while they were opted out? As with research question one, this issue is explored to better understand the phenomenon of reentering the workforce after opting out. This issue is explored with less depth than the third research question, although all key components are discussed. The findings are again cast in terms of the composite woman, with outliers peppered throughout.

Negative Emotions While Opted Out

The composite woman experienced negative emotions while opted out of the workforce. Her emotions ranged from anger, exhaustion, guilt, and isolation, to unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and stress. She says, “I was not happy as a full-time mom. I was not gratified. I felt like I was

suffocating. I was looking for something else.” She has many doubts about the choice she made to opt out. She thinks, “When I first opted out, I thought ‘What did I do? This is not what I expected. This is absolutely awful.’” She felt conflicted. She knew that she should be enjoying her time at home with her kids, yet part of her wanted to be back at work. Sometimes she couldn’t see past the negative that she was facing. During her time opted out, fully immersed in her home life, she lost her identity. She no longer had that sense of self that she had gained when she had a professional identity. Instead, her identity got lost in the lives of her family members. She says, “I never saw myself as a stay at home mom. Who did I become? I was so unhappy.” She described her time by saying “I missed work and lost my definition of self. I felt self-conscious and embarrassed that I was a stay at home mom.” She did not envision her life as a stay at home mom. While she had received validation and success at work, at home she did not enjoy or was not good at mundane chores and housework. She felt removed from the outside world. She says,

I felt isolated and I wouldn’t do it again. I never felt like I fit in with the other moms. I hated being known as my daughter’s mom, instead of being known by my own name. I felt isolated and I had no support. I felt like I lost myself.

She felt like she had a lack of family support. Her husband did not understand the negative emotion that she experienced. Instead, he thought that she should be grateful for the opportunity to stay home with the children. She did not enjoy the household duties that primarily fell on her. She usually did not have family nearby to help with the kids or be a resource or friend. Part of her conflict was from growing up; in many cases she did not want to live a life like her mother and wanted to make choices that were different than her mom’s. Partly because she became unhappy while opting out, and partly due to other factors, she experienced conflict and tension with her husband and, in numerous instances, opting out led to divorce. In multiple instances, she encountered depression, ranging from mild to severe. She says, “My husband

developed a life and I struggled. I felt alone and isolated. I became depressed. Eventually, I got divorced.” She believes being at home is harder than being at work. She states, “At home, my kids were always fighting. In my marriage, my husband expected home cooked meals and a clean house. I had to deal with potty training. It was stressful and exhausting. I didn’t go to graduate school for this.”

Getting Involved in the Community While Opted Out

Although the composite woman experiences many negative emotions while opted out, she found and created many positive experiences as well. A few times, she moved to a different community, one that was full of kids and people like themselves. Creating friends and having social activities with other stay at home moms created a sense of self and belongingness. Getting involved in the community was another way she could create positive experiences for herself. In one instance, she created a Mom’s group where she brought together hundreds of neighbors for social and community activities. Little did she know that networking with these women would produce a job lead for career reentry. Creating this group “felt like an accomplishment.” If she had work of some sort while opted out, whether it was creating a mom’s group or finding part-time contract work, this helped with overall satisfaction. She says, “While I opted out, I felt that I was in control. This was for me and it felt good.”

She says,

After awhile, I felt like I needed something more. I needed more than house projects. Checklists were not enough of an accomplishment. I began volunteering at my child’s school. This helped a lot.

Figure 4.5 is a positional map showing the various positions regarding levels of positive emotion and levels of involvement in the community. The more the women got involved in the community, interacting with others and being productive, the more they experienced positive emotions.

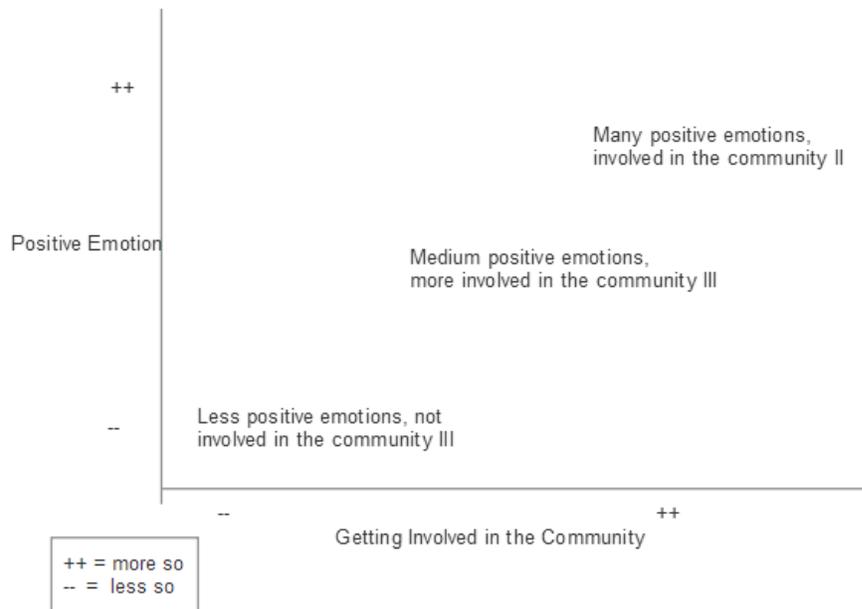


Figure 4.5. Positional map of positive emotion and community involvement.

Part Three: Experiences of High Achieving Professional Women When They Return to the Workforce After Opting Out

The following findings answer the third research question: What are the experiences of highly successful career women when they return to the workplace after opting out? This question is discussed in greater detail, as this is the primary phenomenon being studied.

This phenomenon is addressed in three sections: 1) decision to reenter the workforce, 2) experiences reentering the workforce, and 3) experiences in the workforce once she got a position, as shown in Figure 4.6.

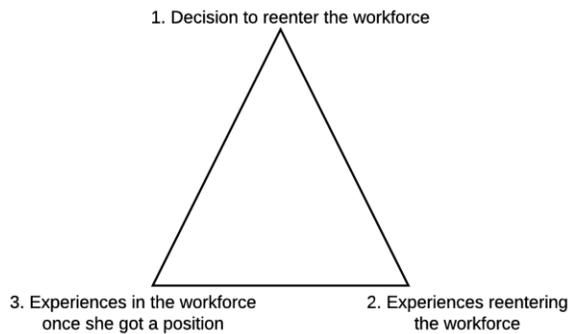


Figure 4.6. Career reentry experiences.

Decision to Reenter the Workforce

In nearly every case, the decision to reenter the workforce represented a culmination of events and experiences after a period of opting out. Overall, the composite woman was not happy or satisfied being a stay at home mom. She felt like a piece of her was missing. While not every stay at home mom feels like this, perhaps the composite woman felt unsatisfied because she had a thriving career prior to opting out and she felt like she was now missing something. Once she began to venture out of her home, through volunteering in her children’s school, creating a social club, or keeping a foot in the door by doing intermittent part-time contract work, she began to feel the desire to reenter the workforce. Her kids were often older, at least in preschool or elementary school, before she felt comfortable exploring paid opportunities outside of the home. She said, “When I felt comfortable that my kids were ready, I started thinking about reentering my career...Eventually, I came to the realization that I needed to go back to work.” She took her time reentering the workforce once she internally decided that she was ready. She said “When I started thinking about going back to work, I searched jobs on the internet for 36 months. I was thinking about what would I want to do. I felt ready. My youngest son was in preschool.” She also wanted to regain the financial independence she once had. She did not like

being financially dependent on her spouse. She “decided to go back to work to improve the financial quality of life.” Figure 4.7 demonstrates the various positions of the women regarding their decision to reenter the workforce and their level of personal readiness.

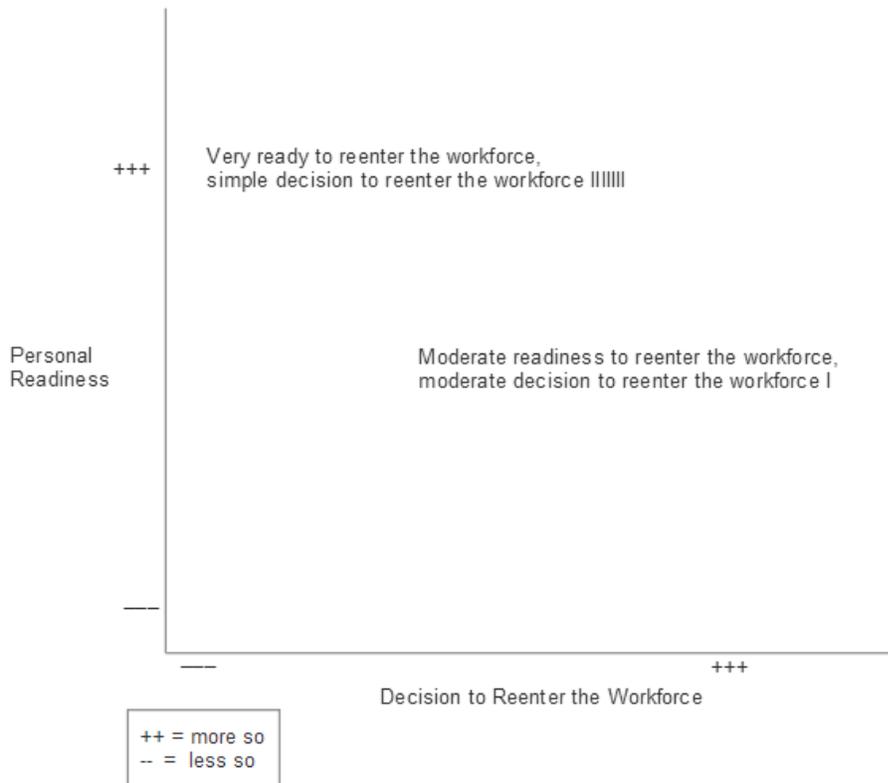


Figure 4.7. Positional map of decision to reenter and personal readiness.

Figure 4.7 indicates that the higher her personal readiness, the easier the decision was to reenter the workforce. Nearly all of the women were very ready to reenter the workforce and therefore had a simple decision to reenter the workforce. The individual who was only moderately ready was the one who had an ideal lawyer job presented to her, slightly before she was ready to go back to work.

Experiences Reentering the Workforce

Once the decision was made to reenter the workforce, in most cases career reentry was not an easy or quick process. It is important to note the professions prior to opting out as compared to professions after returning to the workforce. Five of the eight participants stayed in their previous full time professions. There were two lawyers who went back to full-time law, one investment banker who went back to full-time investment banker, one individual in investment banking who went back to the same profession, as well as one social worker. The remaining three had some differences. One woman went from being a full-time professor prior to opting out and went to a part-time adjunct professor. Another woman changed careers entirely, switching from full-time investment banking to full-time social work. The last individual prior to opting out was in construction management. After she returned to the workforce, she went back to construction management but instead took a job in the same industry in non-management.

Typically, the norm for reentering the workforce was a slow and tedious process. The outlier exception was getting a higher paying job from a friend, the norm was a slow and tedious process. Positions she interviewed for had lower salaries and mediocre titles. The composite woman described her reentry experiences by stating:

When I decided to start working again, I did a lot of networking. I went to mompreneurs lunches and kept up my contacts. One job offered me a salary way too low. At another interview, I felt subtle discrimination with my age and how I looked. I kept feeling jabs that people don't say to your face.

Networking. Networking played a major role in reentering. She leveraged old contacts and put herself out there to make new contacts. Internet research and job search played a large part. If she was lucky, she was given interviews. However, most of the time she submitted many applications and never heard anything. In some cases, she gave up reentering the workforce after a frustrating experience. The outlier was that she utilized her contacts and she got a job quickly.

However, in most cases, she realized that she would not be able to get the type of position she held previously and grew tired of paying for babysitters every time she had a job interview.

I tried reentering my career six months after my second child was born. Networking was difficult. I had to get a sitter every time someone wanted to meet for coffee. I didn't want to go back into the type of job I was in before. The economy dried up. I decided I wouldn't bother.

Figure 4.8 exhibits the various positions of the women's experiences reentering the workforce and networking.

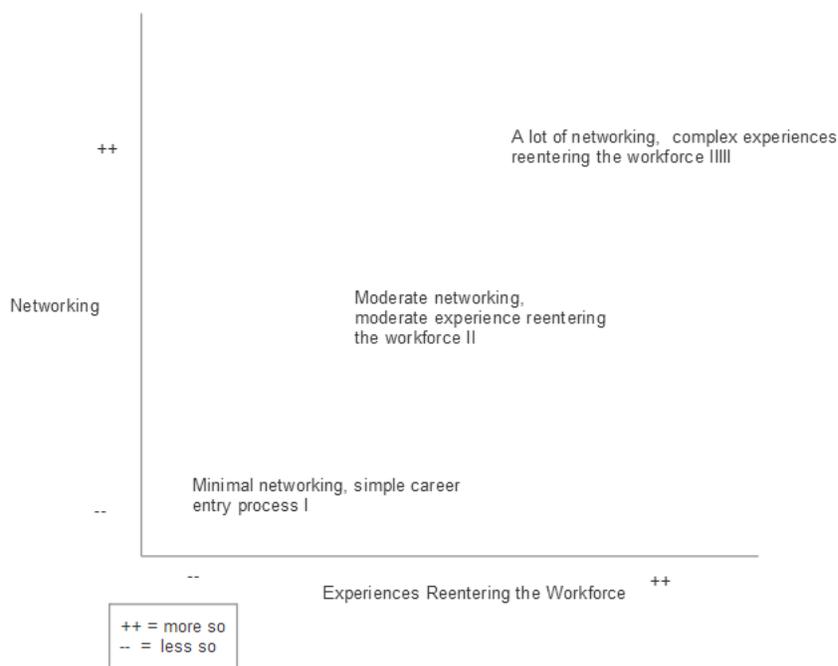


Figure 4.8. Positional map of experiences reentering the workforce and networking.

The results of this positional map indicate that nearly all of the women had to network, to some degree, in order to successfully reenter the workforce. However, the amount of networking varied, impacting the experiences reentering the workforce. The lawyer who essentially had the job handed to her from a friend in an exercise class was the exception. Most had to do a lot of networking and still had a hard time reentering the workforce.

Discrimination. In many cases, she faced subtle discrimination based on age, looks, and stage of life. Many employers did not want to take a chance on a highly skilled worker who had chosen to take time away from the workforce, regardless of the reasons. In other cases, the discrimination was more blunt. She was told “I can’t hire you. You were out of the workforce for too long.” She was also told, “You have too much to juggle. You don’t fit the part.” Figure 4.9 demonstrates various positions women held with regards to discrimination and experiences reentering the workforce.

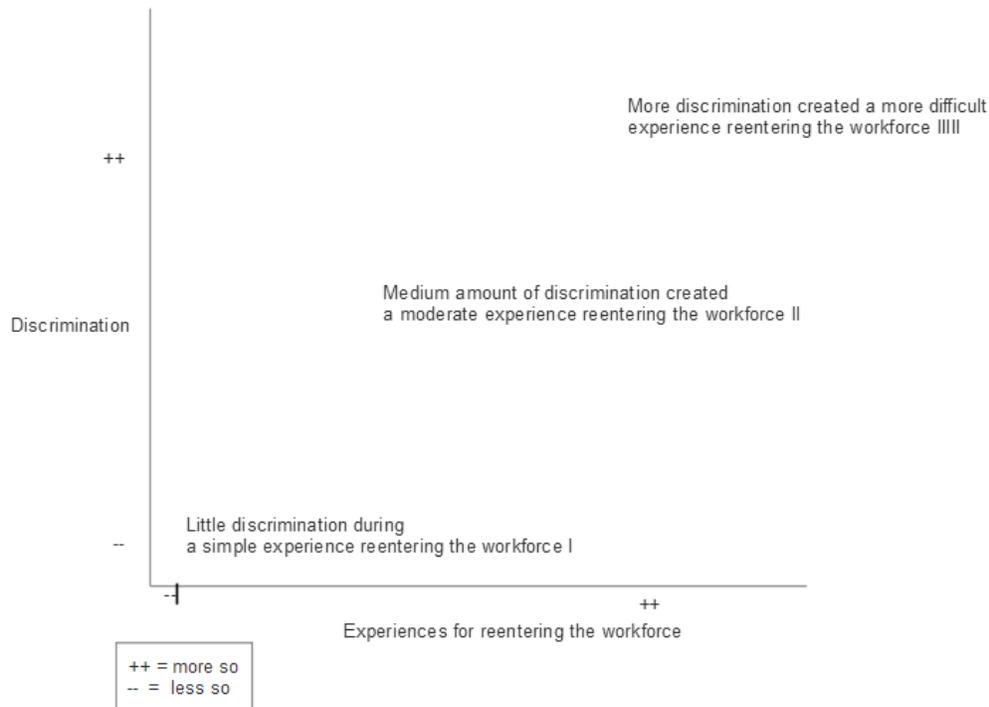


Figure 4.9. Positional map of experiences reentering the workforce and discrimination.

While not all the women experienced discrimination when reentering the workforce, many experienced varying levels of discrimination, making their experiences reentering the workforce more difficult. The majority of them experienced a medium to high amount of

discrimination reentering the workforce. This could be discrimination based on having opted out and underlying biases surrounding that, around physical components and stereotypes.

Experiences Once She Held a Position and Had Reentered the Workforce

Participants in this study only included women who had successfully reentered their careers. Therefore, the women making up the composite woman eventually viewed themselves as having successfully opted back in. However, in most cases, the process to get there was a long one. When the composite woman got her first reentry job, in some cases it was easy, but in others successful reentry followed a long and arduous process.

Unhealthy work environments. Even these successful positions come with their challenges. She stated, “My first job after reentering the workforce didn’t work out. There were accusations. I was really hurt. My boss made accusations like ‘Sounds like you’re not ready to go back to work as a mom.’” This was very frustrating, especially since she felt the situation had nothing to do with her being ready or not ready to be back at work. She found that often what was said on paper about the position and the company during the interview regarding flexibility and balance was not true. In another case, she was sexually harassed when she went back to work. She stated, “When I got back into my industry, my older, married boss asked me out on a date. I decided that role wasn’t a good fit.”

Lower salaries. The composite woman took a financial hit when reentering the workforce, and even years thereafter. Often, she gave up looking for a salaried position, even though her salary had been in the six figures prior to opting out. Instead, she looked for part-time contract work as a way to getting her foot back in the door. Years later, she was still taking a financial hit. In one instance, the job she took reentering the workforce was a part-time, hourly contract job. She was an Ivy League educated, six-figure salary individual in a private business

organization prior to opting out. But she viewed the job as a way to get back into the workforce, slowly at her pace. “I sent out about 10 resumes and I got a call about an hourly job with no benefits. This was a far cry from my executive title and salary I had before. I took the job because it offered a flexible schedule. Eventually I took a different job. The key was flexibility.” The composite woman received a lower salary when she went back to work. She stated, “When I went back to work, I took a 25% pay cut. But I got flexibility.” In another case, she said, “Over time I took on more roles and three years after I reentered the workforce, I took a full time job. My pay is \$20,000 less than my job when I opted out 10 years.” Below is a positional map demonstrating the various positions on salary.

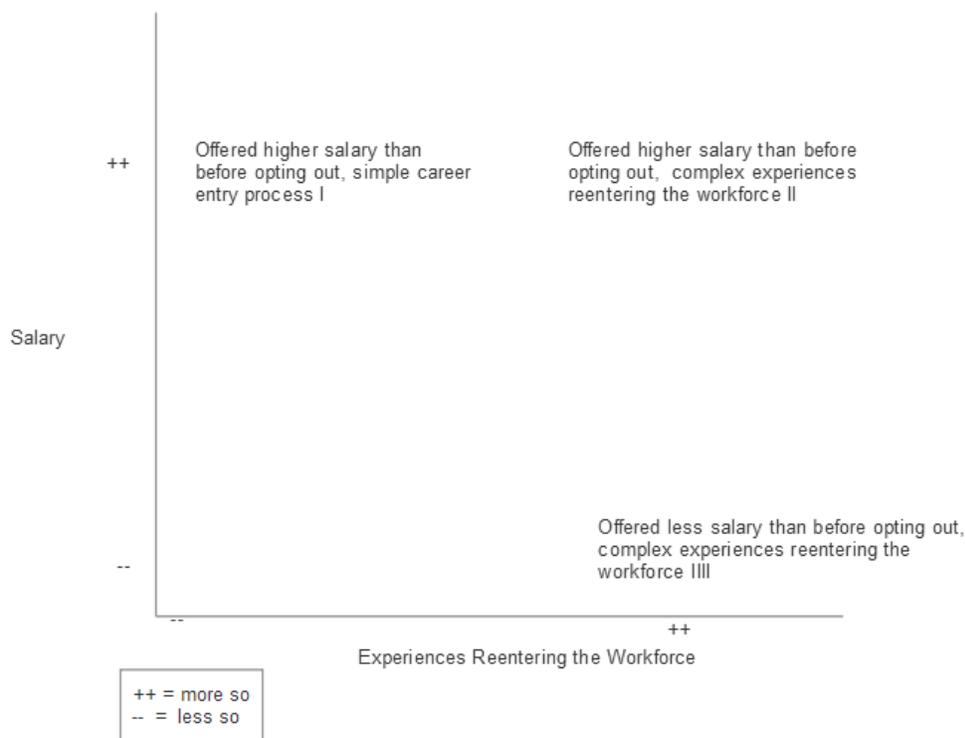


Figure 4.10. Positional map of experiences reentering the workforce and salary.

The positional map (Figure 4.10) shows there were various positions on salary and experiences reentering the workforce. Most women were offered less salary than they earned

prior to opting out and had varying experiences, simple and more complex, when reentering the workforce. A few fortunate women were offered more than they were made before. One woman was offered more than before because a great opportunity fell in her lap. Another earned more than before because she got a masters degree while opted out, and this helped boost her salary.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a pivotal life parameter, and involves striving to be genuine, to be true to oneself (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). As a result, authenticity drives people to realign their inner values and outward behaviors, both at home and at work. She realized that she cannot have it all and was willing to give up an element of challenge for being authentic to herself in a flexible position that created some sort of balance in her life. Some careers and positions are not conducive to being authentic to oneself. As a result, career changes were sometimes necessary. In one instance, she stated, “My profession has penalized me for having opted out and now wanting balance...I feel like the stepsister of the group, like I never quite fit in. I may be looking for a career change that better fits with the life that I want.” Others felt like they remained authentic to themselves without changing professions, instead they managed their expectations and priorities. She described her job by stating:

My current job is not my dream job, but it works with my life and offers flexibility. My job does not showcase my strengths, but I like the flexibility. A month ago I got called for an interview for my dream job, but I had to turn down the interview. I didn't want to compromise my family.

She believed that she was being mostly authentic to herself and her family. She says “I walk the line at home and at work. I pretend that my job is just as important, but mostly my kids come first.”

Balance

While most people are familiar with the term “work-life balance,” the phrase “work-life integration” is becoming more popular (Ritlop, 2016). Because the boundaries between one’s professional and personal life are often blurred, with technology so readily available, there are often no breaks. Regardless of the terminology, finding a way to balance personal and professional life is the struggle. The composite woman stated, “Balance is attainable but I can’t hold onto it for very long. This morning I was up at 4:30am with my son.” She continued, “Balance is a constant struggle and juggle. Sometimes balance is present, sometimes it is not.” The composite woman stated, “When I went back to work, I couldn’t get everything done. Everything started slipping. I forgot stuff at my daughter’s school, I forgot doctor’s appointments, I didn’t have time for friends.” This created additional stress on her as well as her family. In many cases, household chores and child rearing were still viewed as her responsibility, just like they were while she had opted out. This expectation placed additional stress on the marital relationship. She stated, “Even now that I entered the workforce, my balance is falling apart. I’m bitter at my husband because he doesn’t help out. He doesn’t feel value at home so he immerses himself at work.” In some cases, the stress became so great that the marriage disintegrated. She stated, “And I still did all the housework and chores. We had issues of labor. I was the primary breadwinner and my husband felt emasculated. We have since divorced.” The importance of shared household responsibilities is evident, as shown in the breakdown of marriages of the composite woman. She stated, “Balance is still a day to day struggle. It’s as good as it’s going to get.” In other situations, she says “sometimes I feel like I have balance. I go to work and then pick my kids up from school and take them to their activities. It’s a great

feeling. But then if someone gets sick, things fall apart.” Figure 4.11 is a positional map showing the relationship between authenticity and balance.

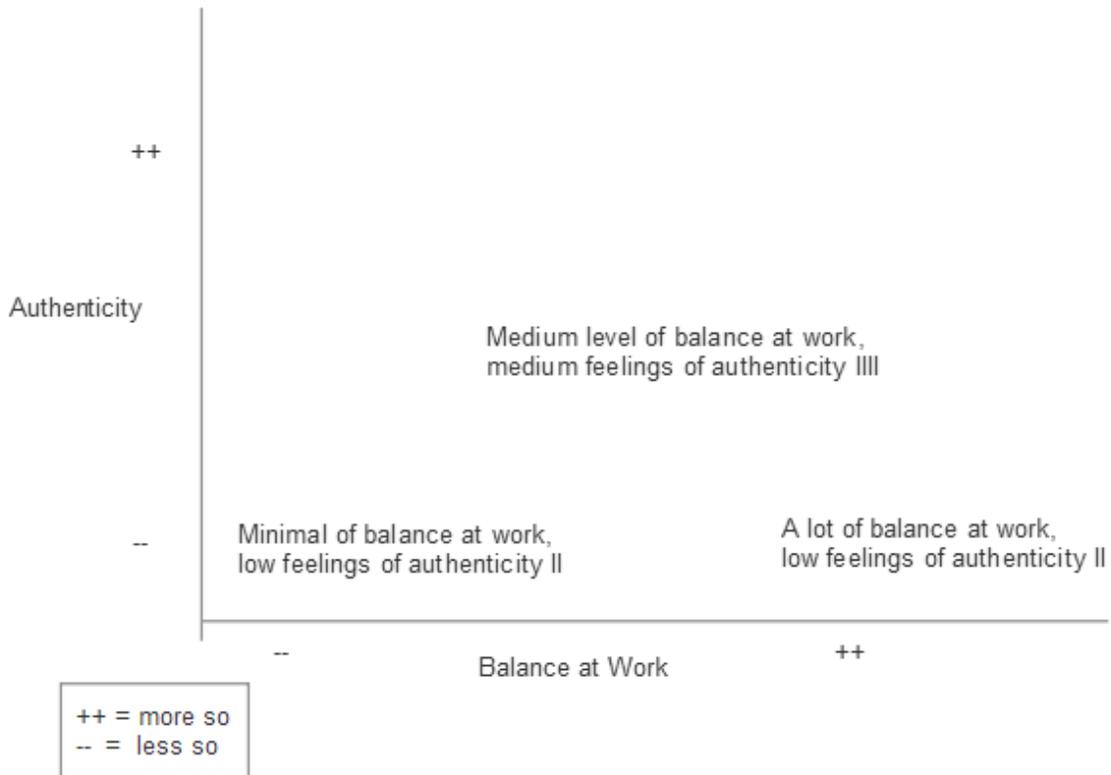


Figure 4.11. Positional map of career reentry, authenticity, and balance.

This positional map indicates the varying positions on balance at work and authenticity. Note that no one felt that they had attained a high level of balance and authenticity. Those that had a lot of balance at work but low feelings of authenticity were bored at work. While they had plenty of time at work, they felt like they were not being true to themselves because they did not have challenge and could do more. In addition, one of these individuals had a lot of balance, but was thinking about a career change because she wasn't being given the opportunities that she felt she deserved and earned. Those that had a minimal amount of balance of work had low authenticity and felt like they were not being true to themselves. The largest group of women had

medium levels of balance and medium feelings of authenticity, though in conversation, nearly all indicated that they wanted more balance and more authenticity.

Challenge

Having challenge at work is a way to obtain validation, develop and grow, have an impact, and establish and exercise expertise (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). In many instances, the composite woman placed challenge as the lowest priority in order to be authentic to herself and her family. She stated, “sometimes I don’t feel utilized at work. I sacrifice challenge for balance.” And continued as she said “I have less drive now. I am at the right level of challenge for my life right now. I will not advance anytime soon but that is okay. I enjoy being home with my family.” In addition, she stated, “I am not as focused and invested as I used to be. It is hard to compartmentalize work and family. My job does not showcase my strengths but now I have independence and flexibility which is more important.”

According to Mainiero and Sullivan, this pattern of sacrificing challenge for balance is common for mid-career women. For men in the breadwinner’s role, challenge continues to be at the forefront but, in many cases, unless women with children have a stay at home dad or a treasured care caretaker, balance moves to the forefront (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

Factors Critical for Successful Reentry After Opting Out

The composite woman stated that planning and organizing are critical to being successful in working and raising a family. She stated, “I had to change my mindset. I knew that I would miss my kids but I knew I needed to go back to work. I had to organize my life in order to make this work.” She also believed that having realistic expectations in a position are necessary. She may be mentally unstimulated or decide not to pursue her dream job, but she can go home and spend time with her family. She realized that she will have good days and bad days, both at work

and with her family, but if she is having more good days than bad ones, she is doing pretty good. Communication with her partner and shared family responsibilities are necessary for things not to fall apart. She has regained positive emotions that she had lost during her opting out period. She regained her sense of self and likes to feel like she is supporting herself as well as her family. She is emotionally happier. She realizes that she can continue to grow her career as her children become less dependent on her. Finding the right workplace often takes more than one position and/or company after reentering the workplace, but finding meaningful work in an organization that values individuals is critical. She states, “I feel torn. I can’t always go to parties and do home things that I miss. If I have passion at work in a meaningful role, I am home less. Finding the right workplace is key and there are certain industries I stay away from.” In addition, she realized that she might not get the perfect job right away. Figure 4.12 is the positional map for experiences in the workforce after reentry and the number of jobs reentering the workforce until satisfaction is achieved.

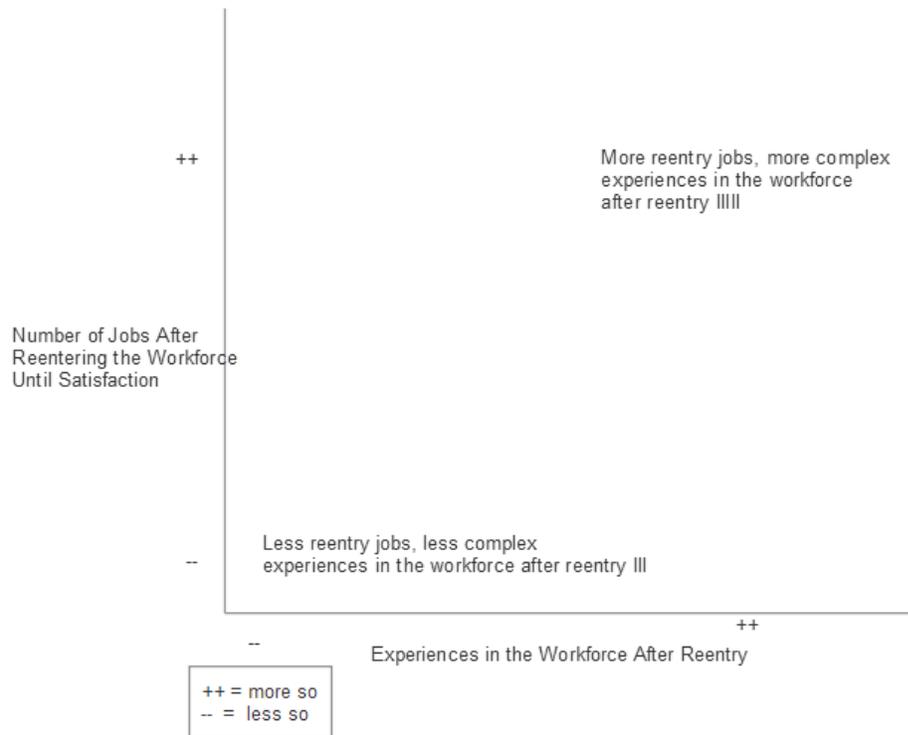


Figure 4.12. Positional map of workforce experiences after reentry, and number of jobs to achieve satisfaction.

This positional map shows only two positions with regards to the number of jobs after reentering the workforce until satisfaction, and experiences in the workforce after reentry. Either the women reentered the workforce and reached satisfaction in a minimal number of jobs after reentry, or had to take a number of jobs in a more complex work experience in the workforce after reentry.

Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory Results

To answer the last research question 3a: “How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge factor into their experiences of career reentry?” the KCSI, or Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory was given to the participants after their interview was completed. When they finished answering the questions,

they self-scored their results and I held a discussion with each participant. In nearly all cases, she agreed with the results. This inventory was given to further understand the experiences of the women and what they were focusing on most at that moment in time.

The Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory consists of thirty statements. Each statement was followed by a phrase ranked 1 to 5, ranging from 1, which represented the statement, “This does not describe me at all,” up to 5, which represents the statement, “This describes me very well.” The thirty statements were geared to indicate a focus on authenticity, balance, or challenge. There were ten statements for each kaleidoscope parameter. Responses greater than thirty five represented one’s considerable motivation to fulfill that aspect of the kaleidoscope parameter at the current point in time.

As mentioned previously, the parameters were authenticity, balance, and challenge, as shown below in Figure 4.13.



Figure 4.13. Kaleidoscope Career Model. [Mainiero & Sullivan from the KCSI]

The composite results are included in Figure 4.14.

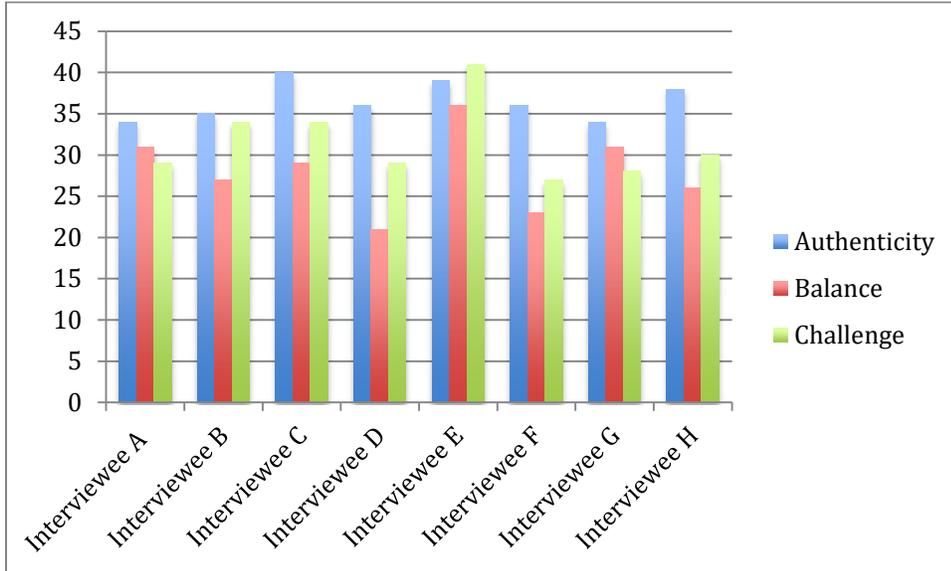


Figure 4.14. Kaleidoscope Career Self Assessment Inventory (KCSI) results.

The results, shown in figure 4.14, indicate that authenticity was the parameter most strongly desired to be fulfilled. All but one participant scored highest on this one. Considering that the women had already successfully reentered the workforce and had, to some degree, figured out the balance piece already, it makes sense that they would be seeking to fulfill authenticity. As mentioned previously, authenticity in this context is defined as values being aligned across the individual’s external behaviors and the values of the employing organization (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007; Sullivan, et al., 2009). When thinking about authenticity, one participant stated, “When I went back to work part time, it didn’t feel like I was doing authentic work. Finding a role that fits you well make me more authentic.”

The second parameter most desired to be fulfilled was challenge. Perhaps because the majority of women stated that they sacrificed balance for challenge, this left a desire for them to still be challenged. Challenge was defined as a need for stimulating work as well as career advancement (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007; Sullivan, et al., 2009). However, in most cases

the difference between challenge and balance was minimal, and these scores were mostly less than thirty-five, which was the targeted number that indicated a considerable desire to fulfill the parameter. One participant stated, “I feel like I’m not showcasing my strengths. I miss pieces of my old job prior to having kids. I have some challenge but not enough.” Another stated, “Sometimes I don’t feel utilized at work. I sacrifice challenge for balance.” In most cases, balance was the lowest score. One participant stated that she had given up on balance, which is why she thought balance was scored the lowest. She felt like authenticity was something that she could achieve, while balance could never be achieved for long periods. “Sometimes balance feels attainable. Other times, balance falls apart.” In addition, balance and authenticity are dynamic. Most people’s definition of balance and authenticity are slightly different. When people talk about authenticity, they are also talking about balance. If they wanted more authenticity, they likely wanted more balance. In addition, if they wanted more balance, they likely wanted more balance.

When comparing the KCSI results to the positional maps, as well as the stories the women shared, the information builds and tells a different story. Nearly all of the women in conversation said that they would like more balance, yet in most cases, the results of the KCSI give balance the lowest score. When asked about this, they indicated that balance did not seem attainable. Mainiero and Sullivan describe strategies for balance by stating “Sometimes the spinners have five, ten, or fifteen plates in motion, all in balance. Other times, it seems impossible for them to keep just a few plates spinning. And sometimes the plates crash to the floor” (Mainiero & Sullivan, 200, p. 192). Like the plates spinning, sometimes they can juggle balance, and sometimes balance comes crashing down. According to the Career Reentry Process Social World Map, eight out of eight of them wanted more balance. Even though some of them

indicated that they had some balance at work, they wanted more. However, the results of the KCSI indicate that most of the women were primarily seeking authenticity. This is solidified in the Career Reentry Process Social World Map, seven out of eight of them want more authenticity. On the KCSI, the Challenge results fell in the middle, yet all of the women indicated that they have less challenge in their jobs than prior to opting out. Many of these women indicated that they were okay with having less challenge as long as they made up for this deficiency in either authenticity or balance. The parameters are fluid and dynamic in their lives. While not the main focus of the study, the KCSI results adds an additional layer of depth to the stories being unfolded, where unspoken stances in some cases revealed themselves in these KCSI results.

Summary

Clear themes emerged from the analysis. They reveal an understanding of why these high achieving professional women opted out of the workforce, how they experienced life while they were opted out, and unveiled their experiences when they returned to the workforce after opting out. More attention was devoted to their experiences when they returned to the workforce, as that is the primary focus of this study. This last phenomenon was divided into three parts: 1) decision to reenter the workforce, 2) experiences reentering the workforce, and 3) experiences in the workforce once she got a position. Last, the results of the Kaleidoscope Careers Self Assessment Inventory were revealed, providing additional information about where the participants currently stood in terms of the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters. Throughout this chapter, the parameters of Kaleidoscope Career Model theoretical framework, authenticity, balance, and challenge, were presented as the priorities of the women often changed, like a kaleidoscope that rotates to form patterns. The findings were presented in a unique way, telling the combined

stories of the composite woman, peppering in outliers and unique instances along the way. In addition, following Clarke's situational analysis recommendations, selective positional maps were included to display various positions of the women. These women have unique and rich stories to tell. They did not initially choose to opt out of the workforce and most went right back to work after having children. However, the workplace pushes and family pulls, as described in Chapter 2, left them feeling that they had no choice but to opt out. While they were out of the workforce, many lost a sense of their former selves and became quite unhappy. In part, they pulled themselves out of those negative experiences by getting involved in the community, through volunteering or through social networks. Eventually they all decided that they wanted to reenter the workforce. In most cases, they faced discrimination, lower salaries, and a difficult time regaining entry. In most cases, they sacrificed challenge for balance in an effort to maintain some sort of authenticity. She stated, "Taking off three years with my kids has set me back thirty years." These women were penalized for taking time off to raise their young families, but the stories they shared, and their recommendations for how to reenter the workforce, can be embraced by all. Chapter 5 discusses these findings and provides recommendations for both policy change and future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The goal of the study was to explore the career reentry experiences of high achieving professional women who had previously opted out. To achieve this goal, I sought out professional women who viewed themselves of having successfully reentered the workforce after opting out. The women were members of the Denver, Colorado neighborhood Stapleton Mom's Group, which is a 4,700 acre neighborhood in Denver with a population hovering 20,000 that consists primarily of Caucasian families with homes that range from Denver designated affordable housing to million plus dollar homes. Most families are upper middle class professionals. As the researcher, I posted in the mom's neighborhood community sites that I am part of, seeking participants who fit my criteria. A wide variety of participants expressed interest, and through careful pre screening and continued interest, I met face to face with eight professional women and conducted both a life history interview and an interview that asked them about three distinct periods in their lives: 1) why they opted out, 2) experiences while they were opted out, and 3) experiences reentering the workforce. Last, I gave them the Kaleidoscope Career Self Assessment Inventory (KCSI) to better understand the career parameters that drove their reentry.

Summary of the Study

The theoretical framework used was the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM). This model resulted from the research of Mainiero and Sullivan who wrote, *The Opt Out Revolt. Why People are Leaving Companies to Create Kaleidoscope Careers* (2006). The book was based on the experiences of over 3,000 U.S. professional workers, both men and women, as reported through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. They discovered that career progression was like a

kaleidoscope, with changing patterns reflecting different aspects of their lives at the time. The parameters that evolved from this research were:

- 1) *Authenticity*. Values are aligned with the individual's external behaviors and the values of the employing organization.
- 2) *Balance*. The individual strives to reach equilibrium between work and non-work (e. g. family, friends, elderly relatives, personal interests) demands.
- 3) *Challenge*. A need for stimulating work as well as career advancement. (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, 2007; Sullivan, et al., 2009)

These three parameters helped frame the research questions of this study and guided the interview questions.

While more of a focus of this dissertation centered on the experiences of highly successful women when they returned to the workplace after opting out, it was important to understand the events and experiences that led up this point, which required understanding why the women opted out and their experiences while they were opted out. The research questions for this study were:

Research Question #1: What are the experiences of highly successful career women that led them to opt out of the workforce?

Research Question #2: What are the experiences of highly successful career women while they were opted out.

Research Question #3: What are the experiences of highly successful career women when they return to the workplace after opting out?

Research Question #3a: How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge factor into their experiences of career reentry?

Once the data to answer the research questions were collected, Clarke's situational analysis was used to analyze the data. Situational analysis is an interpretive qualitative method and was developed from grounded theory (Clarke, 2005). Three types of maps were created to analyze the data: 1) situational maps, 2) social world maps, and 3) positional maps. While some of these maps are included in the dissertation itself, many are included in an appendix. There are two types of situational maps: abstract situational maps and ordered/working maps. The abstract, or messy, situational map can represent hot issues, discourses, ideas/concepts, human elements, non-human elements, human elements, social groups, spatial aspects or organizations. These items were placed in no particular order. The ordered maps then took these concepts and grouped similar ideas together, linking them. While I created both abstract and ordered situational maps, I followed my own unique process that made sense for my data. I created a meta situational map that reflected all of the major discourses and tallied the number of participants who reflected that position. That gave me a better sense of how strongly the viewpoint came across from the participants. When summarizing the maps, I used the perspective of the composite woman, reflecting the general viewpoint of the women, and I peppered outliers in where appropriate. Regarding social world maps, modifications were made to best represent the data. The social world maps were broken up into three distinct phases, 1) Decision to opt out, 2) Experiences while opting out, and 3) Experiences reentering the workforce. This best told the story broken out by phase. The positional maps that I created were the in the same format as Clarke's positional maps, as they provided a systematic way of examining various positions participants took on the data (Clarke, 2010).

The results of the study are reflected through the voice of the composite woman. She tells the story of what led to her opting out, her experiences while opted out, as well as her decision to

reenter the workforce, her attempts to reenter the workforce, and her experiences once she had successfully reentered the workforce. Lastly, the results of the eight participants who took the Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory indicated that the composite woman had considerable motivation to fulfill this aspect of her kaleidoscope at this point in time. While the study looks at the experiences of eight women in great detail, it cannot represent the experiences of women in general. However, understanding the experiences of these professional women who successfully reentered the workforce after opting out gives us a representation of experiences that some may have.

To help answer research question #1, “What are the experiences of highly successful career women that led them to opt out of the workforce?” situational maps, social world maps and positional maps were applied. Nearly all of the women went back to work initially after their first child, thinking they could manage a career and maintain a positive quality of life at home. Some were able to maintain this situation while they just had a first child but faced great difficulty after having more than one child, and the majority faced great difficulty in as little as a few weeks after they returned to work. One woman came back to work and discovered that her previous job and responsibilities were changed. Another woman quickly realized that she would have to take a position of lesser responsibility in order to attempt balance, which inevitably caused boredom and lack of stimulation at work. Another kept her previous position but realized she could not devote herself fully to her job and her children. This was due to the fact that she was surrounded by co-workers who either did not have children or had multiple nannies raising the children. One professional even worked in a “best company for working mothers” organization, and found administrative assistants pumping in the bathrooms. In some cases, childcare was very expensive and, in other cases, they found themselves moving states to support

their husband's careers and then unable to find a job that would provide the balance and flexibility they needed. At home, she also found her spouse was doing significantly less housework and childcare than she was. Regardless of the specifics, these women had little balance, little flexibility, made trade offs at work and home, and eventually made the decision that trying to juggle it all was just not worth it.

Situational, social world, and positional maps were also used to shed light on the second research question: "What are the experiences of highly successful career women while they were opted out?" For the composite woman, this was a dark time sprinkled with moments of joy. She had a difficult time switching from being a professional to being a stay at home mom. She questioned her identity and didn't like being referred to as someone's mom, instead of by her own name. She lost her sense of who she was. She experienced many negative emotions including feelings of isolation, and depression. Three of the women even became clinically depressed while opting out. In multiple instances, their marriages crumbled too. There was an imbalance in household duties. She saw her husband with exciting work opportunities while she was busy changing diapers and folding laundry. While she was thankful for her children and enjoyed spending valuable time with them, what helped her get through this time was getting involved with others. Whether volunteering in a school, creating a mom's networking group, or just being social with others going through similar experiences, these are the events that brought her out of that negative space. In many instances, these experiences also helped to create a desire to reenter the workforce.

Results regarding the third research question, "What are the experiences of high achieving professional women when they return to the workplace after opting out?" were broken into three parts. These components were: 1) decision to reenter the workforce, 2) experiences

reentering the workforce, and 3) experiences in the workforce once she got a position. The composite woman decided to reenter the workforce once she felt her kids were ready. Her children were starting preschool or elementary school and they were not nearly as dependent as they once had been. She also felt that she was personally ready and no longer wanted to rely on someone else for financial security. To address the second part of the research question, once she decided to reenter the workforce, she started networking. Networking was key to getting back in the workforce. She experienced some discrimination, and was concerned that once she left the workforce, she would not be invited back in. She was told that she was not a fit for the position or the organization. She often did not get interviews and occasionally gave up and did not try to reenter again until years later. But eventually, she reentered the workforce, often with a lower salary and not the ideal job to start.

The last part of the research question, the experiences in the workforce once she got a position, was revealed through their rich stories and difficult experiences. The composite woman found that her new workplace was not a healthy environment. One woman was told that she was not ready to be back in the workforce, while another was sexually harassed. In many cases, her salary was double-digit percentage points less than what she was making before. One woman reentered the workforce in an hourly job after having a previous six figure managerial position. Another decided that she would have to switch careers entirely because her field was not conducive to working moms. All of the women still struggle with balance, along with being authentic to themselves, while the majority have put challenge on hold for now, being okay with not pursuing their dream job. They also benefit from the financial independence that they had given up while opting out. Struggle with household responsibilities at home is still an obstacle with many, with the women feeling like they still do the majority of household duties.

To further explore the last research question, “How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge factor into their experiences of career reentry?” the Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory, or KCSI was given to the participants to complete while I sat with them. The survey took them about 10 minutes to complete and they scored their results immediately afterwards. There were ten statements for each kaleidoscope parameter of authenticity, balance, and challenge, and the scores represented one’s considerable motivation to fulfill that aspect of the kaleidoscope parameter at the current point in time. The results indicated that most were currently seeking authenticity most strongly. In most cases, balance came in last place. When participants were asked about this, they said that while balance was still an everyday struggle, they felt “balance is as good as it’s going to get.” Therefore, they are currently seeking to fulfill other aspects more. The data from this dissertation closely resembles data from other research studies. The one notable exception involves career change. While there were only eight participants in this study, only one had actively changed careers, from investment banking to social work. One other participant who had previously been a full professor, and then opted out and became an adjunct professor, was considering a career change, though she had not started the process yet. While these women had undergone identity transformations to some degree while opted out, they stayed in their original careers, though types of work in their industry varied to some degree.

Need and Significance of the Research

The results of this study, while only reflective of the eight women in the study, share many similarities to experiences reported in other research on the topic. While more research has been conducted on why women opt out, less has been done on the experiences of women once they opt out, and even less has been conducted on the experiences of reentering the workforce

after opting out. Only a handful of researchers, have attempted to explore the phenomenon or reentry (Hewlett, 2007, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hewlett, et al., 2010; Stone, 2007; Stone & Hernandez, 2012; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). There are encouraging signs that more on this topic is coming to light, with additional research and books that have come out in 2016 and 2017 on leaning in, how companies can retain employees and prevent them from opting out, as well as how to navigate reentering the workplace after opting out. A new book on this exact dissertation subject was released in April 2017 titled, “Back to Work After Baby: How to Plan and Navigate a Mindful Return from Maternity Leave” (Mihalich-Levin, 2017). While not as scholarly as other books, the book nonetheless shows the need and demand for information on the subject. Sheryl Sandberg’s LeanIn.org organization has taken off, and now helps women across the world empower other women to achieve their ambitions, conducting research, creating 32,000 circles of women, including women in 150 countries, and forming partnerships. *Working Mother* magazine continues to emphasize this subject, along with Catalyst, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster workplace inclusion. Researchers Stone, Hewlett, Mainiero and Sullivan continue to place additional emphasis on the topic. Human resource professionals, CEO’s, lobbyists, government policy workers, politicians and others also place relevance on this subject. Much work has been done, but there is a need for much more. There will be a need for continued research on this topic until greater equality and more flexible workplace arrangements are created.

Recommendations for Future Policy and Practice

While chapter two included current government and organizational policies and practice, this section provides recommendations for future organizational and government policies. These recommendations could help prevent some women from opting out initially, so they will not

have to face the challenges and penalties of reentering the workforce after opting out. If employers can retain these talented professional women, and provide a structure and work environment that enables women to stay in the workforce, this creates a win-win situation for all. By reimagining what work life could look like, endless possibilities open up. The Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge can all be attained if more organizations implemented the policies listed below.

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs)

Flexible work arrangement provide balance to employee lives, allowing them to balance their lives and juggle all of the people and obligations in their lives. A full 69 percent of women state that that they would not have off-ramped if their companies had offered flexible work options. These options could include reduced-hour schedules, job sharing, part-time options or brief unpaid sabbaticals (Hewlett, Sherbin & Forster, 2010). Of these women who opted out, 54 percent left without even discussing flexible options with their supervisor. While some organizations will say “We offer flexible schedules for those jobs where it is appropriate,” this is not enough (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Flexible schedules can have many limitations, if not fully implemented and supported by the organizations. Some employers require employees to work the same number of hours each day, instead of letting them balance their work days and hours. And other employers offer a window of time where employees can start and finish their day. While these initiatives are helpful, so much more can be implemented. Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) can come in many forms, including compressed workweeks, telecommuting, and flexible scheduling that allows employees to work outside of core business hours. A recent study by the Society for Human Resource Management indicated that 55% of employees believed that flexibility to balance work and life issues is an important aspect of their

job satisfaction. In addition, 42% would not leave their organization if workplace flexibility was offered (SHRM, 2015). Benefits of flexible work arrangements are not just for the employee. In the same study, 91% of organizations that offered a compressed workweek said this arrangement had some degree of success, while over 80% of organizations who offered telecommuting said it had some degree of success. Thirty two percent of human resources professionals in the same study indicated that the work from home option has reduced absenteeism, and 26% said telecommuting has resulted in increased productivity.

Offer Non-Linear Career Paths

Hewlett calls these non-linear career paths as taking “scenic routes,” with “on ramps,” “off ramps,” and “career stops.” (Hewlett, 2007). Women, and even some men, according to Mainiero and Sullivan (2006),

...evaluate the choices and options available through the lens of the kaleidoscope to determine the best fit among their many relationships and work constraints and opportunities. That women make their decision that marks the best fit at the time, considering how their decisions may affect others. (p.12)

More often than not, women’s career decisions are more relational, and less driven along a linear path consisting of climbing the corporate ladder, working within one industry, acquiring more titles, more status, and more money (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Instead, non-linear careers reconfigure career concepts to incorporate acceptance of individual needs and communal values that resonate with demographic and structural societal changes (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). Non-linear career paths include reimagining the conventional career path, which includes unbundling jobs, job sharing, sharing clients, and redeploying work teams (Hewlett, 2007). In addition, by creating paths for employees to take breaks, such as sabbaticals or unpaid time off, or creating programs to invite employees back to the organization after opting out, will help minimize the penalties many women face.

Increase Employee Development

By focusing on developing employees and providing them additional training, they will gain additional skills to support the organization. By creating more leadership development programs for women, these programs can help them claim and sustain their ambition. All too often, women downsize their expectations for themselves (Yee et al., 2016). Creating mentoring programs and coaching programs gives them greater access to senior leaders, creating windows of learning and observing. Additional development and training on implicit bias as well as metrics training are important to gender equality and diversity and, in tandem with a fair reward system, could help to educate the employee and support company policies that may not have been otherwise implemented. Benefits of leadership development include improved organizational performance, including profitability, effectiveness, productivity, operating revenue per employee, as well as other outcomes that relate directly or indirectly to performance (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Even if all of the appropriate policies are in place, if an employee is not trained properly, what is written on paper simply remains as words and does not translate to action. In addition to employee leadership development, specific training on topics such as bias, gender diversity, objective performance reviews, and anti-discrimination training can help to level the playing field for all employees.

Reward systems Based on Outcomes

A reward system based on outcomes, and not just face time, should be implemented. A focus should be on accountability and results should be the focus (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Employees want to be measured based on the quality of their work, and not how many hours they are in the office every day. In addition, policies should be fair based on outcomes, including policies involving hiring, promotions and reviews. Companies should review their policies in

these areas to ensure there are not any disconnects, and should look for opportunities to reduce bias and ensure that people are being considered equally for hiring, promotions, and reviews.

Accountability for Gender Diversity

Organizations need to make a compelling case to employees as to how gender diversity benefits everyone. This should not just be a policy written in a human resources manual; it should be an issue that is discussed and made transparent. Gender metrics should be revealed to employees to increase awareness (Lee et al., 2016). Currently, many employees do not view gender diversity as a personal priority. Sandberg's LeanIn.org organization and McKinsey & Company partnered to survey 34,000 employees in North America in 132 companies. Results indicated that 78 percent of companies report that gender diversity is a top priority, but only 28 percent of employees say senior leaders regularly engage on this topic. Their data brought forth evidence that gender diversity practices lead to higher levels of engagement. With more engagement, women and men are less likely to leave an organization when stresses such as having children arise. In addition, creating accountability for supporting women would be a motivator for employees to implement policies.

Create Equal Opportunities

Employees who believe they have equal opportunities in an organization have higher levels of employee engagement. Employee engagement can be defined as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employee and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance” (Kahn, 1990, p. 692). If they have higher levels of employee engagement, they are more likely to stay in an organization and not leave when events in their lives cause stress. A fair and objective hiring process, in addition to promotions, can provide employees with the belief that no one has an

advantage over them. While most companies report that they have policies in place to support unbiased practices, reality is often different than what is on paper (Lee et al., 2016). Companies should review their policies for hiring to minimize bias. Promotion policies should also be reviewed to ensure that equal opportunities are being given to all. These reviews should include promotion titles as well as salaries. According to the McKinsey and LeanIn.org survey results, although 91% of companies in their study tracked gender representation by level, only 58% tracked salary differences by gender. Also according to this study, creating both an inclusive work environment, which leverages the strengths of all employees and embraces diverse leadership styles, as well as leader accountability, can facilitate employees believing that they have equal opportunities. Figure 5.1 reveals the components that lead employees to believe that they have equal opportunities.



Figure 5.1. The components of equal opportunity. (Yee et al., 2016)

A Meaningful Culture

Culture should be created to support the ideas of authenticity, balance, and challenge. Organizational culture, as defined by Edgar Schein, includes four elements: structural stability, depth, breadth, and patterning or integration (Schein, 2016). Culture is so deep that group members may be unconscious of it, yet it affects everything about an organization. Creating a meaningful culture that supports the programs it has on paper can have a major impact. That culture should support all employees, including women who would be at risk for opting out, or those who had previously opted out and returned to the workforce. Components such as meaning and purpose, working with high quality colleagues, and giving back to society are all equally important, if not more important than the financial component (Hewlett, 2007). Within this culture, employees should be able to utilize the benefits offered to them without penalty. In the 2016 survey conducted by McKinsey and LeanIn.org, less than 25% of employees take advantage of flexible work schedules, with 61% of that group believing that working part-time will hurt their career, and 42% believe that taking a leave of absence or sabbatical will lead to penalties (Yee et al., 2016). A company that supports authenticity, balance, and challenge is an organization that supports its people, regardless of where their priorities fall at the current point in time of their lives. Figure 5.2 provides the relationship between the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters and culture.

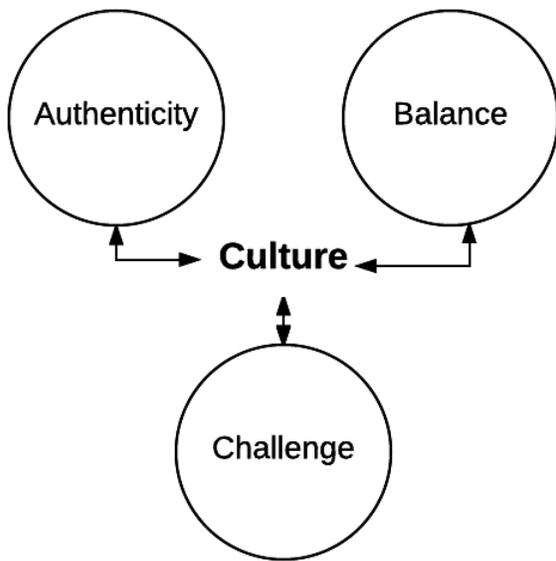


Figure 5.2. The Kaleidoscope Career Model and organizational culture. (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006)

Legislative Policies

While organizational policies impact the employees who work there, legislative policies can impact employees throughout the United States. While current government policies provide some support for women in the workforce, much more can be done. Looking at family benefits in Europe as compared to the United States can provide examples of additional legislative policies that could be implemented in the United States. According to a 2016 study conducted by Glassdoor Economic Research, maternity leave in all EU countries is required to be a minimum of 14 weeks, while the United Kingdom offers 52 weeks, of which 39 weeks are paid at 90 percent. Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Austria, and Denmark all offer 14 weeks at full pay. The United States has no mandated paid maternity leave. General paternity leave is regulated in the EU, with each parent being entitled to a minimum of 16 weeks of leave. Paid sick leave ranges from paid sick leave of 104 weeks paid at 70 percent in the Netherlands, to

France having 26 weeks of sick leave, paid at 50 percent of earnings. The United States has no mandate for paid sick leave.

In the United States, most workplace benefits are not mandated by the government. Instead they are negotiated between the employer and employee. While the United States has a competitive edge due to a free market economy, more can still be done by the United States government. These policies can ultimately keep women in the workplace, and thus never having to reenter the workforce after opting out. One recommendation is to revamp benefits under the FMLA. Paid family leaves, paid sick time, and security rights to a flexible workweek without fear of penalty are all benefits that would support women in the workplace (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Government funded daycare would give some women the opportunity to stay in the workforce without having to opt out because of expensive childcare costs. The Supporting Working Moms Act (SWMA) will be reintroduced in 2017 in the 115th Congress. Since March 23, 2010, the U.S. Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act has covered employers to provide working mothers with basic breastfeeding accommodations, however, these protections only apply to nonexempt employees. A recommendation that will be included in this bill will be to clarify who is covered, including exempt employees (United States Breastfeeding Committee, 2017).

Implementing more state legislation could also benefit women in the workplace. States such as California already provide families and working mothers additional benefits beyond what is mandated by the Federal government (State of California Employee Development Department, 2017). In addition, lobbying groups and community groups can continue to influence local, state and federal government initiatives.

Knowles Career Reentry Models for High Achieving Professional Women

While the previous section included recommendations for future policy and practice as well as models, this section includes the researcher's own models, based on the scholarly research conducted in this study. As a result of this study having three parts and three corresponding main research questions, three models have been developed. Each represents the researcher's recommendations on how these women can best navigate each phase. In addition, positional maps have been created that are reflective of hypothetical positions if organizations would implement these recommendations. Figure 5.3 represents the Knowles model for organizations to keep new mothers in the workplace.

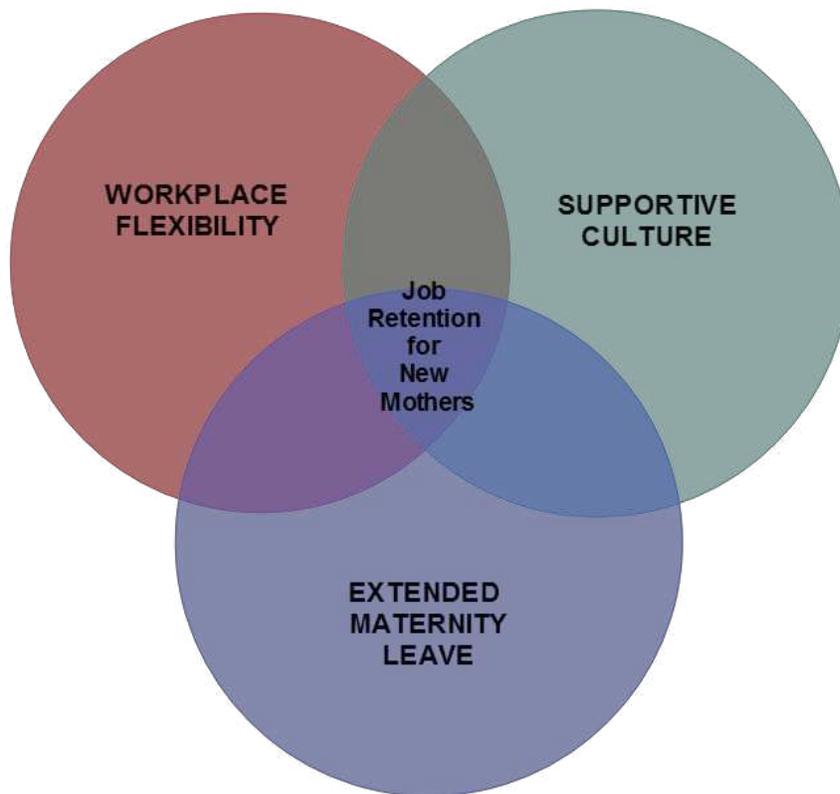


Figure 5.3 Knowles Model to Retain Women in the Workplace After Having Kids

Workplace flexibility, a supportive culture, and an extended maternity leave are three main components that should keep more professional women in the workplace after having children. While some professional women will still inevitably leave, the key for both the organizations and the professional women is to find a way to stay in the workplace. As mentioned previously, workplace flexibility can consist of part-time schedules, job sharing, flexible hours, working from home options, and/or brief unpaid sabbaticals. As long as the work gets done, organizations should be less concerned about face time and more concerned about the quality of work and retention of valuable employees. By allowing them flexible options while maintaining the standards of the work, this should create an effective environment for everyone. Organizations should create a supportive culture that does not provide “lip service” benefits, but instead stands behind what the manuals, policies, visions and mission state. Creating an environment where men and women are truly viewed equally and there are no unspoken biases or discriminations. While this ideal is not easy to achieve, creating human resource policies and creating appropriate training and development courses, as well as having leadership at all levels that believe and support these policies will make a positive impact. Lastly, allowing extended maternity leave, ideally paid but with unpaid as an option, would make a big difference in giving the professional woman and new mother time to bond with the child, heal, and adapt to the major life change of having a new child. The Family and Medical Leave Act does require employers to let a worker to take up to 12 weeks unpaid in a 12 month period to care for a newborn. In contrast, the United Kingdom offers 52 weeks, 39 of which are partially paid, Ireland offers 42 weeks, of which 26 are paid at a flat rate, and Italy offers 22 weeks, at which employees are paid at 80% of earnings (Sahadi, 2016). While the United States has a different type of economy and

government structure than Europe, perhaps this country can take more and active steps in increasing family leave.

If these three components were implemented, not only would less professional women opt out of the workforce after having a child, but the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge would also benefit. Below are two hypothetical positional maps. They indicate how the relationships between authenticity, balance, and challenge could look.

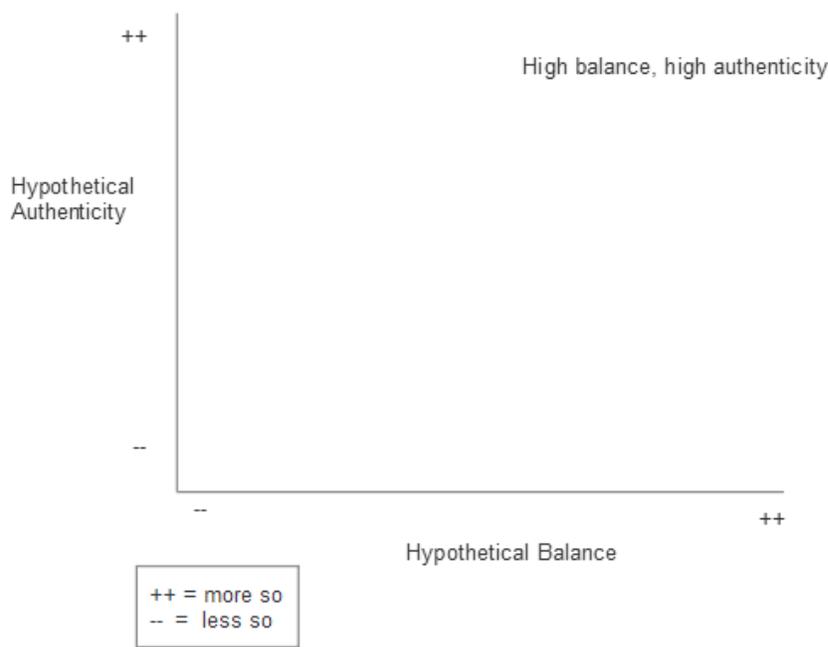


Figure 5.4 Hypothetical Balance and Authenticity positional map

If the position in Figure 5.4 were implemented in organizations across the United States, women could achieve high balance between work and personal life and high authenticity, being true to themselves and their belief systems. Figure 5.5 demonstrates a hypothetical positional map involving challenge and balance.

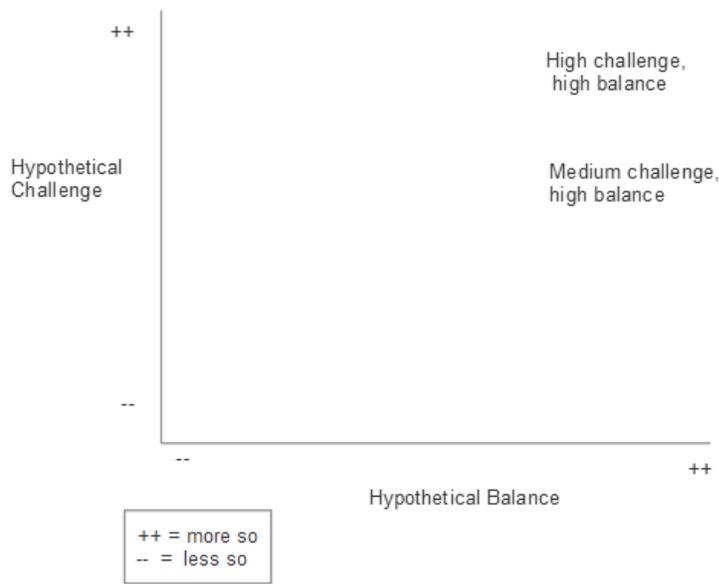


Figure 5.5 Hypothetical Challenge and Balance positional map

If Figure 5.5 was implemented and organizations provided workplace flexibility, supportive culture and extended maternity leave, hypothetically professional women who had a child would stay in the workplace and maintain high balance, and either medium or high levels of challenge. As some people prefer varying levels of challenge at work, both positions are included.

Moving onto the second part of the research study, the experiences of women who opted out of the workforce, if professional women do decide to opt out, Figure 5.6 was created, the Knowles Model of a Positive Experience While Opted Out, to provide suggestions on how to have a positive experience, and not fall into depression and dark times, as many of the women did in this study.

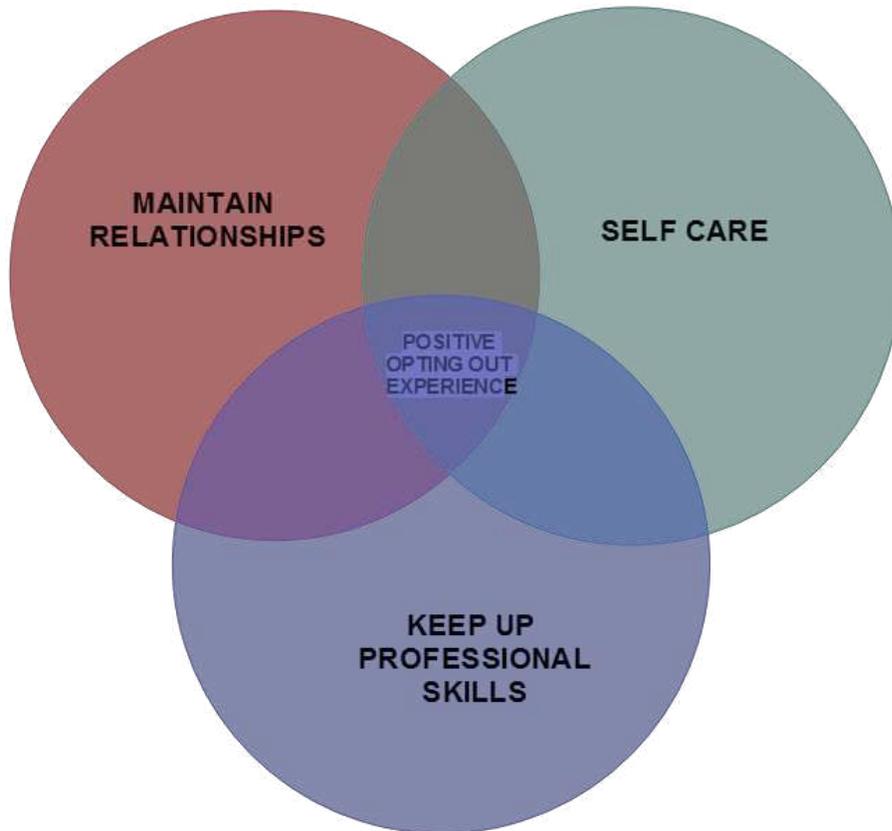


Figure 5.6. Knowles Model of a Positive Experience While Opted Out

Maintaining relationships is an important component of creating a positive experience while opted out. Too many of the women in this study felt isolated, depressed, alone, and resentful of their husbands who still got to go to work. By maintaining and making new relationships with friends, neighbors, family members, and peers, this will help prevent many of the negative thoughts that would otherwise creep into their heads. During this time, some participants got divorced or spousal relationships deteriorated so extra efforts with the spouse could also help. Maintaining relationships can also be done by getting involved in the community, volunteering and creating new relationships, or finding a social group, a mom's group, or a play group. Self care, both physical and emotional, is important to maintain sense of self, and not experience a loss of identity, or the working identity crisis. Making the effort to feel

good about oneself when life has become very different will have a positive impact on well being. Lastly, keeping up professional skills is critical while opted out, if she ever wants to reenter the workforce. Whether this looks like part-time contract work from home, volunteering in the industry, or networking in an industry organization. Skills can easily become out of date. Women from this study got discouraged reentering the workforce and gave up, only to try again a few years later. By keeping up skillsets, women can also think about whether they want to reenter the same field or go into a different field that may require different training. This also occurred in this study, as one woman got a masters degree while opted out, and another kept up networking in her field and was able to successfully reenter.

Once a woman decides to reenter the workforce after opting out, she may face many challenges, both professionally and personally. Figure 5.7, the Knowles Model for Successful Career Reentry after Opting Out provides best practices based upon the feedback of the women in this study who successfully reentered their careers.

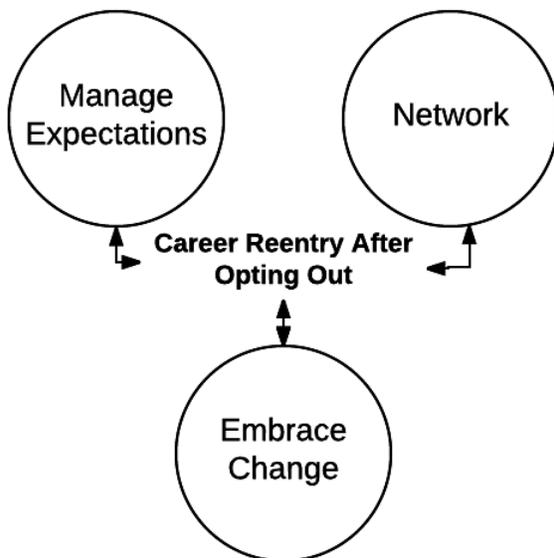


Figure 5.7. Knowles Model for Successful Career Reentry After Opting Out

Managing expectations of oneself and an organization is critical for successful reentry. Realizing that one has been out of the workforce for a period of time, while others never opted out, and thus gained more skills, experience, and possible raises, will set one back. Managing salary expectations is critical. In this study, while there were a few lucky ones who started out earning more, the majority took significant pay cuts from where they were previously. One participant even stated, “Opting out set me back thirty years in my career.” Many women in this study started small – part time with less money or simply less money. Also, managing expectations in terms of career reentry potentially being a slow process and understanding that finding the right job could take multiple attempts can be helpful. While there were a few exceptions in the study, most of the women experienced slow reentry processes, with hiccups along the way. Secondly, networking is a significant part of successful career reentry after opting out. The woman in this study who was lucky enough to get a lawyer position with a higher salary did so by networking with someone in her exercise class. A fellow lawyer was working out with her, told her about the position, recommended her, and she got the job. Another participant got a full-time reentry job after working occasionally doing at home contract work for a company. The company liked her work and they liked her, and when a full-time position opened up, they offered it to her. Networking both in professional and personal settings paid off for some of these participants, and made the reentry process much smoother. Embracing change is the last component that is recommended for successful career reentry. After opting out for a period of time, the change of pace can be dramatic. Switching from changing diapers to fighting a legal dispute could take a bit of transition, both personally and professionally. Within just a few years of being opted out, technology changes and skillsets can too. Embracing change regarding family dynamics could also play a role. If the woman was managing the household while opted out and

is suddenly back in a full-time position, she should be prepared to not only help her kids with the transition, but also her spouse. Matters such as household chores and errands could become an issue as women far too often have a second shift at home, having to take care of the household after work. Finding marital balance is critical for successful reentry. When partners balance housework among each other, relationships will be healthier and there will be more equal balance. Participants who embrace this change and come up with a plan, such as a daily chore list or the outsourcing of help, were much happier during this transition.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study suggests numerous recommendations for future research. Because this topic is so relevant to today's society, more research needs to be done to continue to create awareness and bring about positive change. First, the limitations of this study, as well as the implications of the limitations are worth mentioning. The sample size for this study was small. Due to reliance on the situational analysis methodology, the eight women were studied and analyzed in depth, using situational maps, social world maps, and positional maps. While situational analysis was used to help provide a deep understanding of these women, their stories and experiences only represent their own realities, and cannot be representative of women's career reentry experiences in general. These women of Denver were all Caucasian, highly professional women of upper middle class background. As a result, these women are not a diverse group of women across the country. Recommendations include a mixed methods research study, across a broader population, including different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds. I would still phrase the primary research question on the experiences of professional women reentering the workforce after opting out, but would include a larger group. The mixed methods study would consist of a survey, asking women about their experiences, and then I would conduct follow up interviews

and focus groups as necessary to better understand the phenomenon. The focus groups could reveal more tensions of a continuum as the stories unfolded. In addition, I would rephrase my research questions that ask about the micro, meso and macro levels. By doing so, their answers would likely better resonate with the positional maps at the micro level, social world/arenas maps at the meso level, and situational maps at the macro level ideologies. As a result, these maps would likely have been easier to create and the maps could have potentially revealed even more.

While I was most interested in exploring the experiences of professional women's career reentry after opting out, this phenomenon necessarily involved experiences that led up to career reentry, including why women opted out of the workforce, as well as their experiences while opted out. As a result, additional future research questions emerged. For example, "How is the millennial generation changing workplace benefits to be more family friendly?" would be an interesting and relevant study. In keeping with the scope of my research and the penalties women faced while reentering the workforce, an additional research question could be "How can the penalty of returning to the workplace after opting out be reduced?" When considering the theoretical frame of this study, the Kaleidoscope Career Model, an additional research question could be "How do United States companies currently reflect the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters?" In line with the Kaleidoscope Career Model, a research question could be, "How can professional women juggle authenticity, balance and challenge while remaining in the workforce?" While my study focused on professional women who had opted out of the workforce, I am curious about professional men who had opted out of the workforce. An additional research question could therefore be, "What are the career reentry experiences of professional men who had opted out of the workforce?" Instead of focusing on returning to the

workforce after opting out, we could also ask, “How can organizations adapt their benefits to retain professional new mothers?” The United States has fewer family friendly benefits than European countries. In fact, the United States is the only industrialized country that does not require paid maternity leave (Glassdoor.com, 2016). Another interesting study would be “An in depth analysis of family friendly workplace benefits in the United States and the European Union.” In addition, I would like to explore balance more. The KCSI indicated that balance was what the women were focusing on the least. In fact, one women stated, “I gave up on balance because it will never be attainable.” This is sadly interesting. Perhaps a study on working women and balance would be interesting to explore further. In addition, additional studies on the “Perception of women reentering the workforce” would reveal why some women had a harder time than others reentering the workforce. Why were some women more denigrated than others? Why were some women sexually harassed in the workplace and not others? Because of ideologies, many women reentering the workforce are perceived as different, perceived as less than, the same person as before is perceived as less. A study on these perceptions would be fascinating. Along these lines, many of the women who opted out ended up getting divorced or started having relationship problems. A study on “perception of professional women who are opted out” would also be interesting. Are these also perceived as less than at home? Do their spouses view them differently when staying home and no longer being in a professional career? A participant stated when describing her relationship problems, “My husband said to me that I wasn’t the ambitious career woman he once married, and he missed her.” Do couples grow apart when one takes a major career break? Are these women who opt out perceived as less valuable, less attractive? This concept of being devalued in the workplace and at home is definitely worth

exploring more as well. This much needed study raises many issues that should definitely be studied and explored more to benefit individuals, families, as well as organizations.

Summary of the Research

In conclusion, this dissertation sought to explore the experiences of highly successful career women reentering the workforce after opting out, using a Kaleidoscope Career Model perspective. This study was initiated from my own personal experiences, being a professional woman who opted out after having kids, and exploring the possibility of reentering the workforce. The Kaleidoscope Career Model theoretical framework was used. Like a kaleidoscope that turns and patterns take different shapes, the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge shift based on priorities and stages of life. When conducting the qualitative interviews of the eight professional women who had successfully reentered the workforce after opting out, three parts of their stories emerged. These were Part One: Experiences of high achieving professional women after having kids, Part Two: Experiences of high achieving professional women while opting out, and Part Three: Experiences of high achieving professional women when they return to the workforce after opting out. Situational analysis was used to analyze the data. The maps that were created were slightly different than the maps used by Clarke, and the differences were detailed in the dissertation. Most professional women do not choose to opt out of the workforce. Either workforce pushes or family pulls typically steered them to opting out. Both in this study and in research previously conducted by others, once they opted out, many had a difficult time reentering the workforce, and usually at a much lower salary. For most who successfully reentered the workforce, they sacrificed challenge in order to achieve some form of balance and authenticity. Because most professional women do not actively choose to opt out, a focus for both organizations and legislative policies should be

how to keep these individuals from leaving the workforce at all. *Working Mother's* 2016 companies for working mothers include benefits such as flexibility on hours, telecommuting, job sharing, and job unbundling, along with leadership development programs for women, gender diversity training, accountability measures, transparency, and rethinking the workplace culture. Employees should be able to utilize these benefits without fear of penalty or retribution. Additional policies and work need to be done to eliminate the “lip service” benefits – ones that look good on paper but are rarely utilized. Many additional studies can stem from this one, focusing both on successful career reentry after opting out but also on how employers can retain valuable employees and prevent them from ever opting out. As a researcher, this study has taught me not only how to conduct research and analyze data, but has also given me insight into the journey which leads up to a successful career reentry after opting out, as well as the important work that still needs to be done in this country. We can break the glass ceiling. Political beliefs aside, the 2016 female candidate for the Democratic party's nomination summed up where this country stands regarding women very well, “Although we were not able to shatter that highest and hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it has 18 million cracks in it, and the light is shining through” (Clinton, 2016). Continued research by scholars, policy changes by the government, as well as changes made within organizations will continue to push our country to create better opportunities for all.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER



School of Education
209 Education Building
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588
(970) 491-6317

Career Reentry and the Kaleidoscope Career Model: Experiences of High Achieving Women Reentering the Workforce after Opting Out



REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Who is conducting the study and what is this study about?

Researchers from the Education at Colorado State University are recruiting participants for a study to explore the experiences of high achieving women who have reentered the workforce after opting out from having children.

Who can join this study?

You can participate in this study if you are a mother who had previously opted out of the workforce after having children, you are in a professional career, and you have reentered the workforce working 24+ hours/week.

What will I be asked to do?

Participate in an interview to share your opt out and career reentry experiences and share impactful life stories, take an insightful survey and participate in a focus group. A \$25 Amazon gift card will be provided both at the completion of 1) interview & survey and 2) focus group.

Why should I join this study?

Let your voice be heard about opting out and career reentry. Help in research that could result in making organizations family friendly for women trying to juggle professional and personal lives.

How do I join this study?

If you want to join this study, contact the Study Coordinator/PI or Co-PI listed below.

Jennifer Knowles
jenniferknowles@gmail.com
720-202-2164

Gene Gloeckner, PI
gene.gloeckner@colostate.edu

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT PLAN FOR LISTSERV AND FACEBOOK

I will provide an online short message that will be posted online both on the Stapleton Mom's Group email listserv as well as the Stapleton Mom's Group Facebook page. The teaser message will be the same for both.



Hi! Are you a mom and professional who opted out after having kids and have since reentered the workforce? If so, I would love to talk with you. Two, \$50 gift cards of your choice will be provided.

I am a Stapleton Mom and a CSU Ph.D Candidate who is conducting a research study for my dissertation.

If interested, please contact me via this post or contact me directly at:

jenniferknowles@gmail.com or 720-202-2106 and I will provide more information. Thank you!

APPENDIX C: FACEBOOK RECRUITMENT POST



Jennifer Knowles

7 hrs

Swap: Your stories for two, \$25 gift cards of your choice.

Are you a mom and professional who opted out after having kids and have since reentered the workforce? If so, I would love to talk with you!

I'm a Stapleton Mom and a CSU Ph.D Candidate conducting a research study for my dissertation on the experiences of reentering the workforce after opting out.

If interested, please contact me via this post or contact me directly at: jenniferknowles@gmail.com or 720-202-2106 and I will provide more information. Thank you!!

 Like

 Comment

APPENDIX D: PRE-SCREEN QUESTIONS

Hi,

Thank you so much for reaching out and being willing to talk with me for my CSU dissertation on the experiences of women reentering the workforce after opting out. If you'd be willing, I have just a few questions for you to answer to make sure you meet the criteria.

**Have you reentered the workforce after opting out?

**What was your previous profession prior to opting out? What is your current profession after reentering the workforce?

**How many hours do you work professionally per week?

If you do meet the criteria and you'd still be willing to chat, I'll email you the details and hopefully we can set up a date!

As a fellow mom, I know how busy you are, juggling many hats. I am so passionate about this topic and believe our voices need to be heard. Thanks so much!

Kindest regards,

Jennifer Knowles

720-202-2106

Hi _____! Thanks for reaching out! I just have a few questions to see if you meet the criteria:

**Have you reentered the workforce after opting out?

**What was your previous profession prior to opting out? What is your current profession after reentering the workforce?

**How many hours do you work professionally per week?

If you do meet the criteria and you'd still be willing to chat, I'll send you the details and hopefully we can set up a date! My email is jenniferknowles@gmail.com, if that's an easier way to communicate :-)

Thanks!

APPENDIX E: CSU PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



School of Education
209 Education Building
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588
(970) 491-6317
FAX: (970) 491-1317
Email: soeinfo@colostate.edu

Dear Participant,

My name is Jennifer Knowles and I am a Ph.D candidate and researcher from Colorado State University in the School of education. We are conducting a research study on the career reentry experiences of women who have previously opted out. The title of the research project is: Career Reentry and the Kaleidoscope Career Model: Experiences of High Achieving Women Reentering the Workforce After Opting Out. I am the Co-Principal Investigator and my Ph.D Advisor, Gene Gloeckner, is the Principal Investigator.

There are four general areas that I would like to cover with you. First, I would like to interview you regarding your experiences opting out and career reentry. Second, I would like to understand your life history, to better understand life events that have made you who you are today. Third, I have the Kaleidoscope Career Self Assessment Inventory for you to complete so we can better understand which Kaleidoscope Career Model parameter of authenticity, balance, and challenge is most prioritized in your current life. Fourth, I consent to participating in a focus group at a later date with other people who have gone through this process. All of your information will be kept confidential and will be protected on a password protected computer. The information will only be accessible to the research team. While there are no direct benefits to you, please know that your stories will add to the scarce research on career reentry of women who have opted out and that sharing your experiences may help others.

There are no known to this research, but we have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any potential unknown risks.

To indicate your willingness to participate in each part of this research, please sign and date below.

I consent to participating in an interview regarding my experiences opting out and career reentry.

Participant, Date

Jennifer Knowles, Date
Ph.D Candidate

Gene Gloeckner, Date
Ph.D Full Professor

I consent to participating in a life history, to provide a better understanding of who I am today.

_____ Participant, Date	_____ Jennifer Knowles, Date Ph.D Candidate	_____ Gene Gloeckner, Date Ph.D Full Professor
----------------------------	---	--

I consent to taking the Kaleidoscope Career Self Assessment Inventory to gain a better understanding of which Kaleidoscope Career Model parameter of Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge, is my biggest priority currently.

_____ Participant, Date	_____ Jennifer Knowles, Date Ph.D Candidate	_____ Gene Gloeckner, Date Ph.D Full Professor
----------------------------	---	--

I consent to participating in a focus group at a later date with other people who have gone through this process to further discuss these experiences mentioned above.

_____ Participant, Date	_____ Jennifer Knowles, Date Ph.D Candidate	_____ Gene Gloeckner, Date Ph.D Full Professor
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If you have any questions, please contact me, Jennifer Knowles, anytime at 720-202-2106, jenniferknowles@gmail.com, or Gene Gloeckner at gene.gloeckner@colostate.edu, 970-491-6317. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553. Thank you very much!

_____ Participant, Date	_____ Jennifer Knowles, Date Ph.D Candidate	_____ Gene Gloeckner, Date Ph.D Full Professor
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APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening Comments:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study is focused on high achieving women who previously opted out and have reentered the workforce. The questions I am about to ask you can be answered from your experience and perspective in your current role.

In this interview, I will audio record our discussion, so that I do not miss any relevant details, and I may write some note on items I'd like to follow up on. I have an informed consent form for you. In order to participate, please take a few minutes to read over and let me know if you have any questions. One copy will be for you, the other will be for me. Your involvement is voluntary and you may decline to respond to any question that I ask and you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

There are three general areas that we will cover today. First, I have a series of questions I'd like to ask you regarding your experiences opting out and career reentry. Second, I would like to better understand your life history, in chunks, to better understand life events that have made you who you are today. Lastly, I have the Kaleidoscope Career Self Assessment Inventory for you to complete so we can better understand which Kaleidoscope Career Model parameter of authenticity, balance, and challenge is most prioritized in your current life.

Do you have any questions for me? (Pause.) If not, let's get started.

Transition to opt out

- Why did you opt out?

Experiences while opting out

- What are pros of your experiences while opting out?

- What are cons of your experiences while opting out?
- What led you to desire reentering the workforce?

Reentering the workforce

- What challenges did you face when you reentered the workforce?
 - Is your pay comparable to your job prior to opting out?
 - Are you in a similar type of position or different than prior to opting out?

Personal best leadership

- Tell me about your personal best leadership over the course of your career.
- Have you had another personal best experience since you reentered the workforce?

Authenticity (KCM Parameter)

Authenticity, as defined by the Kaleidoscope Career Model, is when values are aligned with your external behaviors and the values of the employing organization. A personal desire for authenticity, to be genuine and true to yourself, to follow your own passions and needs.

- Are you able to authentically demonstrate your Values at work and at home?
- Is this job you've returned to showcasing your strengths?

Balance (KCM Parameter)

Balance, as defined by the Kaleidoscope Career Model, is striving to reach equilibrium between work and non-work. A family often has need for balance, relationships, and care-giving.

- Is balance attainable?
- Tell me about an example of a time when you feel balanced in your life.
- Tell me a time when balance was falling apart.

Challenge (KCM Parameter)

Challenge, as defined by the Kaleidoscope Career Model, is a need for stimulating work as well as career advancement. An individual often has a need for challenge, career advancement, and self-worth.

- Are you sufficiently challenged in your job since you returned?
- Are you treated as a full resource?
- Do you ever feel that you are not utilized to your potential?

Other

- Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that I have not asked you?

APPENDIX G: LIFE HISTORY

Below is the life history outline. This life history information is gathered in eras. These eras include:

Early Family Life

- Tell me about your early family life
- Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- What were your parents like?
- What are your first memories?

Pre-Kindergarten- 12th Grade

- Describe your home life from pre-kindergarten- 12th grade
- Where did you grow up?
- What were the most meaningful events growing up?

College

- What did you major in?
- Where did you attend college?
- Did you study post graduate work?
- What were your most meaningful experiences during college?

Career

- What was your first job out of college?
- Tell me about your career history once you left college.
- What are all of the jobs and the titles you have had?

General

- Describe two key moments in your life. Did they lead to changes in well-being?
- What was the happiest moment(s) of your life?
- What are some of the best events you can remember from your life? When did they happen? How did they affect your well-being?
- What are some of the worst things you can remember from your life? When did they happen? How did they affect your well-being?
- What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- Is there anything we didn't talk about that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX H: KALEIDOSCOPE CAREER SELF-ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Directions.

For the following statements indicate the number that best describes how you feel. Indicate:

“1” for “*This does not describe me at all*”

“2” for “*This describes me somewhat*”

“3” for “*This describes me often*”

“4” for “*This describes me considerably*”

“5” for “*This describes me very well*”

	This does not describe	This describes me	The describes me often	This describes me	The describes me very
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I look for new challenges in everything I do.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. I can fulfill both my work and my family responsibilities well.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. I hope to find a greater purpose to my life that suits who I am.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. I view setbacks not as "problems" to be overcome but as “challenges” that require solutions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. I find that balancing work and family is hard to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. I am determined to find my own path and set my own goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. I have a certain expertise in my field and I enjoy using that expertise in my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. I constantly arrange my work around my family needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. I hunger for greater spiritual growth in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. I believe one's salary defines one's worth.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. I don't have a "career" per se; I prefer to take jobs and assignments that fit my life when I can.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. I have discovered that crises in life offer perspectives in ways that daily living does not.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. I want to have an impact and leave my signature on what I accomplish in life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	1	2	3	4	5
14. My work is meaningless if I can't take the time to be with my family.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
15. If I could follow my dream right now, I would.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
16. Added work responsibilities don't worry me.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
17. There must be more to life than work, but I am having trouble finding out just what it is.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
18. Retirement is the time when I will be able to actively follow my passions.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

19. My greatest accomplishment in life is the number of promotions I've earned.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
20. Balance means I take one day at a time and hope for the best.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
21. Being authentic in what I say and what I do is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
22. Most people would describe me as being very goal-directed.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
23. When my boss asks for extra work hours, I draw the line.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
24. At this point in my life, I tell people what I honestly think.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
25. I thrive on challenges, and am excited by them.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
26. Achieving balance between work and family is life's holy grail.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
27. At this point in my life, I have enough confidence in myself to chart my own path.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
28. I have always known I wanted to start my own business someday.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
29. There are too many constraints on my life (family demands, work demands) to reserve any time for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
30. Life is too short not to have done what you want with it.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Scoring Chart:

Copy your response rating, either 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, for each statement alongside the number of that statement in the chart below.

<u>Authenticity</u> Responses that indicate a focus on Authenticity.
3.
6.
9.
12.
15.
18.
21.
24.
27.
30.
Authenticity Total:

<u>Balance</u> Responses that indicate a focus on Balance.
2.
5.
8.
11.
14.
17.
20.
23.
26.
29.
Balance Total:

<u>Challenge</u> Responses that indicate a focus on Challenge.
1.
4.
7.
10.
13.
16.
19.
22.
25.
28.
Challenge Total:

Total your scores in each column. Responses greater than 35 (midpoint) indicate you have considerable motivation to fulfill this aspect of your kaleidoscope at this point in time. In the next section, how these parameters interact is described. After that brief description, you will use your authenticity, balance and challenge scores to chart your own "Kaleidoscope Career Profile."

The Kaleidoscope Career Parameters:

Three Kaleidoscope Career parameters frame our motivation to work. These parameters reflect:

- A personal desire for *authenticity*, to be genuine and true to yourself, to follow your own passions and needs,
- A family's need for *balance*, relationships, and care-giving, and
- An individual's need for *challenge*, career advancement, and self-worth.

We call this the **ABC model of Kaleidoscope Careers**. Just as a kaleidoscope uses three mirrors to define a multitude of patterns, our Kaleidoscope Career Model has three parameters (Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge) which combine in different ways throughout our lives. Like a kaleidoscope, this model reflects how different aspects of our careers and our lives intersect and unfold to create our own unique pattern over our lifetimes.

Consider, for example, the natural ebb and flow of a career using the artistic metaphor of a kaleidoscope. As a woman or man makes career decisions over the life span, the colors of the kaleidoscope are reflected in these three parameters, shaping decisions as one aspect of the kaleidoscope, or color, takes on greater intensity as a decision parameter at different points of the life span. Over the course of a woman's life span, she may search for the best fit that matches the character and context of her life, the colors of the kaleidoscope shift in response, with one color (parameter) moving to the foreground and intensifying in color as that parameter takes priority at that time in her life. The other two colors (parameters) lessen in intensity and recede to the background, but are still present and active as all aspects are necessary to create the current pattern of her life and career.

At one point, she may delay having children in order to devote more energy to her career. At another point, she may subjugate career ambitions for the sake of her family needs, such as childcare or eldercare. Later in life, she may forge ahead, searching for meaning and spirituality in her life. Somewhere in the middle she may be most concerned about balance and relationships in her life. Her context shapes her choices. Therefore, "opting-out" becomes a natural decision based on the fit of the colors of her kaleidoscope at that point in time. Her career does not dictate her life. Instead, she shapes her career to fit her life as marked by her distinct and changing personal kaleidoscope patterns over her life span. This discussion applies to men as well who may pursue career challenges and authenticity early in their careers, or who may decide not to pursue "my father's career" and instead opt for greater family balance at the price of lesser career challenges.

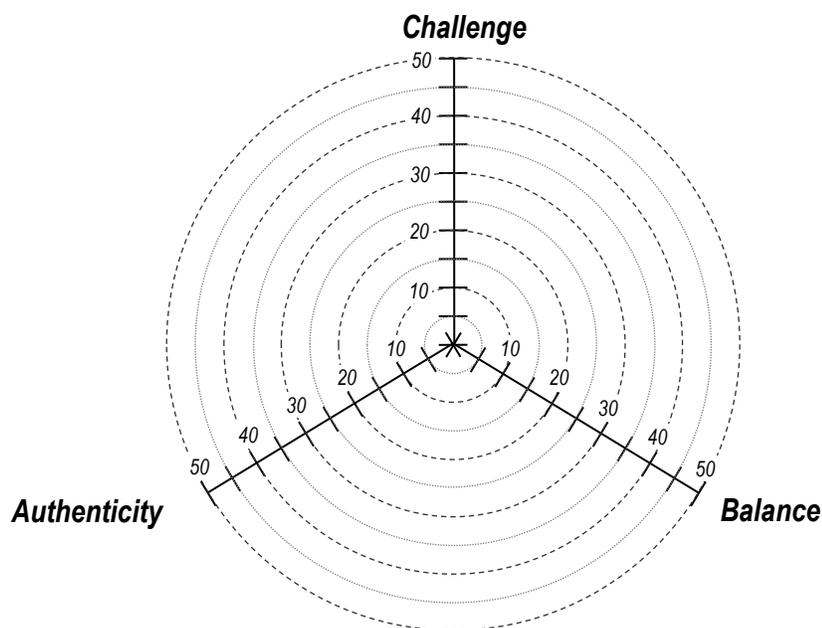
These kaleidoscope parameters, or decision making questions, are active as signposts throughout a person's career. Certain kaleidoscope parameters predominate at different points in the life span, forcing decisions about opting-out, making major career or life changes, or staying-in the workforce. The strength of a kaleidoscope parameter to shape a career transition depends on what is going on in that person's life at the time. If money is needed, then career issues obviously take priority. If family balance is at a critical point, then adjustments can be made to better serve family needs. If both these parameters are not active, then the individual can take

stock, smell the roses, and ask the question, "Am I doing what I need to be doing with my life?", and become more centered, authentic, reflective, and spiritual in the process.

Kaleidoscope Career Profile: Are You an Alpha or a Beta?

The Kaleidoscope Career Self-Assessment Inventory allows you the opportunity to determine if you are following an *alpha* or a *beta* kaleidoscope pattern at this point in time. Kaleidoscope careers ebb and flow based on the three parameters of Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge. At certain points you may find you are more interested in balancing the needs of your family with your work. At other points you may discover the value of pursuing a challenge and the fulfillment of accomplishment. At still other points you may pursue your own ideas and passions, regardless of the career path you have chosen.

Using the total scores from each of the three columns in the score chart, plot your kaleidoscope pattern along the three axis of this diagram:



Appendix Figure 1. Kaleidoscope Self-Assessment Scoring Patterns.

If your needs for Challenge and Authenticity override your need for Balance, then you are following the **Alpha** pattern. Alpha kaleidoscope careerists are more focused on work and challenge than balance, and find solutions to the balance issues in their lives.

If you need for Balance overrides your needs for Challenge and Authenticity, you are following the **Beta** pattern. Beta kaleidoscope careerists focus more on their families and personal needs, and accept work only to the extent that it does not limit their time with their families.

If your need for Authenticity overrides your need for Balance, you maybe moving into uncharted territory. You are ready to create an entirely new Kaleidoscope Career pattern based on your own definition of what you want in life.

If your needs across all three categories are equally strong, then you are a true kaleidoscope careerist. You are able to focus on the aspects of your life that provide you with the most fulfillment, without sacrificing others needs.

If you are an **Alpha**:

Consider whether or not your firm is supporting your need for career advancement at this point in time. Is your job providing you with challenge? Do you feel fulfilled by the responsibilities associated with your job? If not, consider the following opportunities to increase your career satisfaction at this point in time:

- Are there ways to outsource the menial tasks you perform so you can accomplish "meatier" work assignments?
- Is there an opportunity for you to take a field assignment to gain new experience?
- Is job rotation possible within your department or company?
- Can you volunteer to help your boss develop a strategic plan for your department or unit that coincides with the firm's overall strategic plan?
- Can you volunteer to do service work within the community that will bolster the company's image while offering you the change to learn new skills?
- Can you define a "skill portfolio" - the skill competencies you have that are saleable in your marketplace?
- Are there international career opportunities you can consider to broaden your skill base?

If you are a **Beta**:

Consider whether or not your firm is supporting your need for family and personal balance at this point in time. Do you have the opportunity to work at home for some of the time? Are there neglected opportunities in your community network to help you define a consistent day for your children? Consider the following opportunities to increase your career satisfaction at this point in time:

- Can you identify tasks in your job that you can easily work on at home?
- Are there ways to subdivide your work, so that certain tasks can be worked on through flexible hours, while others require face time with colleagues or customers? For example, perhaps Monday is split between time in the field and time in the office, Tuesday for administrative duties and face-to-face meetings, Wednesday is flex-day where you work at home in the morning and come into the office in the afternoon, Thursday is a full day at the office for administrative duties and meetings, and Friday is for catch up and working part of the day at home through the use of technology (e.g., email, phone calls).
- Can you provide your boss with facts and figures that illustrate how taking time out from 3 – 5pm to support your children after school or to take an elderly relative for medical treatments, will more than be made up by your taking work home each day?
- Are there ways to share job tasks with others in the similar situations?
- Should you reconsider the firm you work for and move to a more family-friendly work environment?
- Is it possible to take a corporate sabbatical for a few months to regroup, or an "opt-out" career interruption for a year or two, with the promise of returning?
- Have you ever considered working as an entrepreneur, practicing your skills, from your home environment?

Whether or not you are an alpha or a beta, you might find it useful to make suggestions to your employer on how to create a more family-friendly environment. Some initiatives family-friendly firms have implemented include:

- Paid corporate sabbaticals for 1 - 3 months

- Corporate wellness programs, focusing on health and stress management
- Developing an employee leisure interest time bank of free hours, to be spent as needed
- Offering reduced hour careers that allow for reducing work hours at certain times and increased hours at a later time
- Providing "tech for flex" programs so workers can work remotely from their homes
- Offering retention benefits, such as partial college tuition reimbursement benefits for employees and their children or increased vacation time based on company tenure
- Initiating alumni status rehiring programs for those who take a career interruption for a period of years
- Offering volunteer opportunities whereby employees devote part of their workweek to community projects that may include time spent as a volunteer at their children's school or parent's retirement center
- Providing programs that redefine family beyond children and support eldercare issues as well as the need of single employees without children.