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Exploring the Lived Experiences of Educated Women who Opted Back Into the
Workforce After Working as a Stay at Home Mother: A Phenomenological Study

A Dissertation by
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Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
February 2018

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Workforce After Working as a Stay at Home Mother: A Phenomenological Study

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bonding and raising them together. I would not take back one day that I spent at home because that would be one less day spent laughing with you. I love you with all my heart.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to all the hard-working mothers out there who give selflessly of themselves each and every day to their families. Your unconditional love and sacrifice has made this research come to life and show that women can do it all, inside and outside of the home. Thank you for being an inspiration to me and restoring hope in a future where my daughters will not be penalized for wanting to become a mother and pursue a career.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my three girls: Angelina, Brooklyn, and Austin. You have made me the luckiest and proudest mommy and I hope that you have learned from my example that with hard work, dedication, and persistence, you can accomplish anything you set your mind too.

ABSTRACT

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Educated Women who Opted Back Into the Workforce After Working as a Stay at Home Mother: A Phenomenological Study

by Gina Albertini-Bennett

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated women who opted back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother. The study explored how stay at home mothers honed their soft and hard skills which subsequently led to an effective transition back into the workforce. This study considered the internal and external motivations that women experience as they move throughout their motherhood journey by way of interviews. The need to interview these working mothers to discover how they effectively returned to the workplace was not only necessary resource for future reentry women but critical for businesses who will benefit from their potential return. Educated working mothers were selected for this study as a reference to describe their journey from opting out of the workforce to working as a stay at home mother, and their ultimate return.

Methodology: The study was qualitative with a phenomenological approach to research.

Findings: Findings from this study revealed that women are motivated by a deeper intrinsic level to return to the workforce, the need to find personal fulfillment not only in their home, but in their careers.

Conclusions: Stay at home mothers developed a high degree of empathy and compassion at home *and* apply it in the workforce. Stay at home mothers develop advanced multitasking skills and increased efficiency at home *and* apply in the workforce. Stay at home mothers need to be assertive and have a plan that will work for their family and themselves when reentering the workforce. Stay at home mothers who reenter the

workforce need to ask for help and surround themselves with a supportive work/life balance environment to prevent them from leaving the workforce again.

Recommendations: Further research should be expanded regarding the often penalized and stigmatized reentry of mothers who have a gap in their professional resume so that society as a whole embraces their reentry as a positive accomplishment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Historical Perspectives of Women’s Roles in the Workplace.....	6
Women’s Financial Impact on Society.....	6
Positive Impact-Women in the Workplace.....	7
Negative Impact-Women in the Workplace.....	7
Women’s Unique Set of Personal and Professional Challenges.....	8
Perceived barriers in the workplace.....	8
Motherhood penalty-outside the home.....	9
Second shift-work inside the home.....	9
Opting Out- The Final Straw.....	10
The New Stay at Home Mother.....	10
Stay at Home Mother’s Reentry in to the Workplace-The Comeback.....	11
Qualities and Soft Skills Employers Desire.....	13
Qualities and Skills Stay at Home Mothers Acquired.....	13
Women’s Return to the Workforce.....	13
Statement of the Research Problem.....	14
Purpose Statement.....	15
Research Question.....	15
Central Question.....	15
Research Sub-Questions.....	16
Significance of the Study.....	16
Definitions.....	18
Delimitations.....	20
Organization of the Study.....	21
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	22
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Historical Perspectives of Women’s Roles in the Workplace, A Century of Working American Women’s Evolution.....	24
United States Civil War Sparks Work for Women.....	24
American Federation of Labor: A Set-Back for Working Women.....	25
The Great Depression: A Mixed Set-Back for Working Women.....	26
World War II and the Defining Change for Working Women.....	26
Civil Rights Act of 1964- Further Progress for Women in the Workforce.....	27
American Women in the Workforce- Full Circle Evolution.....	28
Women’s Financial Impact on Society.....	31
Positive Impact- Women in the Workplace.....	32
Negative Impact- Women in the Workplace.....	34
Mother’s Unique Set of Personal and Professional Challenges.....	35
Perceived barriers in the workplace.....	36
Motherhood penalty.....	37
Mommy tracked.....	39

Mothering risks	39
Second shift-work inside the home	40
Husband's career takes precedence	41
Opting Out-The Final Straw.....	42
The New Stay at Home Mother.....	45
Intensive mothering	48
Volunteering and non-profit career	49
Stay at Home Mother's Reentry in to the Workplace-the Comeback	51
Strategies Women Employ to re-enter the Workforce	55
Strategy 1: Personal assessment	55
Strategy 2: Workplace options	55
Strategy 3: Networking.....	56
Strategy 4: Updating your hard skills	56
Strategy 5: Resume overhaul.....	56
Qualities and Skills Stay at Home Mothers Acquire.....	58
Qualities and Skills Employers Desire.....	59
Increased empathy in the workplace	62
Women's Return to the Workplace.....	63
Summary	64
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	65
Overview.....	65
Purpose Statement.....	65
Research Question	65
Central Research Question.....	66
Research Sub-Question	66
Research Design.....	66
Method	68
Rationale	68
Population	69
Target Population	69
Sample.....	70
Sample Subject Selection Process.....	71
Instrumentation	72
Researcher as an Instrument of the Study	72
Women's Career Reentry Experience	73
Validity	74
Criterion Validity	74
Content Validity	75
Expert Panel	75
Expert 1.....	76
Expert 2.....	76
Expert 3.....	76
Pilot Interview	77
Reliability.....	77
Internal Reliability of Data.....	78

Inter-coder Reliability	79
Human Subject Considerations	80
Data Collection	81
Interviews	82
Data Analysis	83
Data Coding Process	83
Analysis	84
Limitations	84
Time	85
Researcher as Instrumentation of Study	85
Videography	85
Summary	86
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS.....	87
Overview.....	87
Purpose Statement.....	87
Research Question	87
Central Question.....	87
Research Sub-Questions.....	87
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures	88
Rationale.....	89
Population	89
Target Population	90
Sample.....	90
Demographic Data and Introduction.....	91
Average Time as a Stay at Home Mother	91
Back to Work Then Quit Again	93
Average Time Back in the Workforce	94
Years at Home vs. Years Back at Work.....	95
Average Years at Home vs. Years Back at Work	96
Same Career Before Opting Out?.....	96
Presentation and Analysis of Data	97
Intercoder Reliability.....	97
Major Theme Results for Central Question	97
Empathy and compassion	98
Multitasking and efficiency	98
Results for Sub-Question 1	99
Timing of a new career opportunity and/or child starting school.....	99
Desire for independence/validation and socialization outside the home.....	100
Desire for self-discovery, financial gain, and mental stimulation outside the home	100
Consideration of compelling professional opportunity outside the home	101
Results for Sub-Question 2	102
Preferred qualities acquired.....	102
Empathy	103
Patience	103

Compassion.....	103
Experiential (timing, boundaries, appreciation) and big picture perspective	104
Flexibility.....	105
Prioritization	105
Preferred skills acquired	106
Time management.....	106
Organization and efficiency/focus	107
Decision making and budget planning.....	107
Networking and multi-tasking	108
Results for Sub-Question 3	110
Assertiveness	110
Prioritization	110
Education/learning and adaptability	111
Networking	111
Results for Sub-Question 4	112
Increased Empathy within the workplace.....	112
Increased time management/organization and patience/perspective within the workplace.....	113
Resilience and passion/meaningful work	113
Increased Flexibility	114
Increased foresight/vision, negotiation, confidence, and listening skills	115
Improved multi-tasking skills.....	115
Maturity	116
Results for Sub-Question 5	117
Sub-question 5	117
Relationship management/networking.....	117
Flexibility/balance.....	118
Work/life balance.....	118
Pace yourself.....	118
Open-minded/new challenges	118
Results for interview question 5A	120
Ask for help/childcare.....	120
Have confidence/fearless	120
Step back but not out/start part-time	120
Identify right opportunity.....	121
Avoid false starts.....	121
Realistic expectations.....	122
Go back to work sooner	122
Results for interview question 5B	123
No regrets staying home	123
Start reentry part time	124
Ask for help.....	124
Pursue learning/education.....	125
Results for interview question 5C	125
Starting at entry-level/pay cut.....	125
Spread thin/double bind and missing out.....	126

Adjustment/learning curve.....	126
Guilt and crying/emotional	127
Exterior appearance	127
Results for Interview Question 5D	128
Know your worth and needs	128
Don't feel guilty.....	128
Find your passion.....	129
Support network/help.....	129
Don't compare yourself to others	130
Lead by example for your kids	130
Ignore negativity	130
Learn from mistakes	131
Summary of Major Themes and Patterns in the Findings.....	132
Increased Empathy	132
Increased Time Management/Efficiency and Multitasking	133
Increased Patience and Assertiveness	133
Timing of a New Career Opportunity and/or Child Starting School	133
Asking for Help.....	133
Double Bind-Spread too Thin	134
No Regrets in life	134
Know Your Worth.....	135
Summary	135
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	136
Overview.....	136
Purpose Statement.....	136
Research Question	136
Central Question.....	136
Research Sub-Question.....	136
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures	137
Population	137
Target Population	138
Sample.....	138
Major Findings.....	139
Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 1	139
Finding 1: Timing of a new career opportunity and/or child starting school	139
Finding 2: Desire for independence/validation and socialization outside the home	140
Finding 3: Desire for self-discovery, financial gain, and mental stimulation outside the home.....	140
Major Findings from Research Sub-Question 2.....	141
Finding 4: Increased empathy.....	141
Finding 5: Increased time management/efficiency and multitasking.....	141
Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 3	141
Finding 6: Increased assertiveness	142
Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 4	142

Finding 7: Increased empathy, time management/organization, and patience/ perspective within the workplace	142
Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 5	142
Finding 8: Confronting the double bind	143
Finding 9: Mothers have no regrets	143
Finding 10: Mothers need to know their self-worth	143
Unexpected Findings	144
Conclusions.....	145
Conclusion 1: Stay at Home Mothers Develop a High Degree of Empathy at Home and in the Workforce	145
Conclusion 2: Stay at Home Mothers Develop a High Degree of Compassion at Home <i>and</i> in the Workforce.....	146
Conclusion 3: Stay at Home Mothers Develop Advanced Multitasking Skills at Home <i>and</i> in the Workforce.....	147
Conclusion 4: Stay at Home Mothers Develop Increased Efficiency at Home <i>and</i> in the Workforce.....	149
Conclusion 5: Stay at Home Mothers need to be Assertive and Have a Plan That Will Work for Their Family and Themselves When Reentering the Workforce.....	150
Conclusion 6: Stay at Home Mothers who Reenter the Workforce Need to ask for Help and Surround Themselves With a Supportive Work/Life Balance Environment to Prevent Them From Leaving the Workforce Again.....	151
Implications for Action	152
Implication 1: Strategies Women Employ to Re-enter the Workforce	153
Strategy 1: Personal assessment	153
Strategy 2: Workplace options	153
Strategy 3: Networking.....	154
Strategy 4: Updating your hard skills	154
Strategy 5: Resume overhaul.....	154
Implication 2: Employers Need to Embrace the Reentry Mother	155
Implication 3: Employers Need Adjust Their Support Systems to Keep Mothers From Leaving the Workforce	155
Recommendations for Further Research.....	156
Recommendation 1.....	156
Recommendation 2.....	157
Recommendation 3.....	157
Recommendation 4.....	157
Recommendation 5.....	158
Recommendation 6.....	158
Concluding Remarks and Reflections.....	158
 REFERENCES	 161
 APPENDIX.....	 176

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Job Category with the Lowest Percentage Wage Gap, 2014.....	29
Table 2.	Job Category with the Highest Percentage Wage Gap, 2014.....	29
Table 3.	Top 10 Professional Career Qualifiers for the Stay at Home Mother	61
Table 4.	Study Participants Number of Years as a Stay at Home Mother.....	92
Table 5.	The Number of Years the Back in the Workforce	95
Table 6.	The Number of Years Home versus Back in the Workforce.....	95
Table 7.	Catalyst for Workforce Reentry.....	102
Table 8.	Soft Skills Acquired as a Stay at Home Mother	106
Table 9.	Hard Skills Acquired as a Stay at Home Mother.....	109
Table 10.	Skills and Qualities That Aided in Stay at Home Mothers Transition Back Into the Workforce.....	112
Table 11.	Skills and Qualities Gained at Home That Impact New Job Effectiveness..	116
Table 12.	Recommendations for Stay at Home Mothers who Desire to Reenter the Workforce	119
Table 13.	What Would Study Participants do Differently Upon Career Reentry?.....	123
Table 14.	What Would Study Participants do the Same Upon Career Reentry?	125
Table 15.	What was Most Difficult for Study Participants Upon Career Reentry?.....	128
Table 16.	Final Words of Wisdom from Study Participants to Current Stay at Home Mothers	132

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	23
Figure 2.	Self-Determination Theory.....	24
Figure 3.	Women’s earnings as a percentage of men’s, for full-time wage and salary workers, 1979-2015.	31
Figure 4.	Top Five Reasons Women Leave the Fast Lane.	43
Figure 5.	Top Five Reasons Men Leave the Fast Lane.....	43
Figure 6.	About One-in-Ten Highly Educated Mothers “Opt Out.”	44
Figure 7.	Highly Educated “Opt-Out” Moms Are a Small Group.....	48
Figure 8.	Mother’s Reentry into the Workforce (Outside the Home) Conceptual Framework..	52
Figure 9.	The top 10 most popular soft skills companies say they look for when hiring	60
Figure 10.	Reflexive Questions: Triangulated Inquiry..	78
Figure 11.	The Average Number of Years at Home versus Back in the Workforce	93
Figure 12.	Average of all 12 Study Participants Years at Home and Back in the Workforce.	96
Figure 13.	Comparison of Reentering the Workforce in the Same or Different Career Field	96
Figure 14.	Percentage of participants who re-entered the workforce in the same career	144

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Women in the workforce may experience a career filled with stress, lack of sleep, and exhaustion resulting in a 40% increase for the risk of a heart attack, heart disease, and even stroke (Huffington, 2014). In the United States, a second generation of women have evolved in larger numbers who are choosing to pursue higher education, and combine career *and* a family (Golden, 2001; Robinson, 2016). Some of these women have begun to recognize that the ladder to the top can result in a possible death sentence or no quality family time and are therefore choosing to opt out for a life that is less stressful and more meaningful than the corporate rat race primarily dominated by men. However, their departure from the workforce leaves a significant gap in the lost wages and potential earnings to the tune of \$30 billion dollars (Robinson, 2016). Some reports show that the exit of women in the workforce may cost that business upwards of 150 to 250% of the women's salary (Hochschild, 1989). Women's reentry back into the workforce is a critical component to the success of today's businesses (Berkowitz, 2013). An international revolution is currently taking place pioneered by women who are deciding to return to the workplace after child rearing and reaching for success to benefit not only their families but, personal fulfillment, and advancement in their careers (Lechter, 2014). Currently, 43% of women who have children will leave their jobs at some point. Approximately 75% will return to the workplace but only 40% will return full-time (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Huffington, 2014). For society to benefit from a women's reentry into the workforce, key components such as timing, flexibility, and value have been identified by researchers to bridge the gap of corporate burnout and stay at home stigmas (Canfield, Hansen, & Walker, 2012; Huffington, 2014; Stone, 2007).

A Women's role inside and outside the home carry great expectations to do it all. Arguably the most physically demanding time in a women's life is during the early child-rearing years (Evans & Grant, 2008). However, research has shown that there is a lack of support for the full-time career mother and her work-life balance among their employers (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Martorana, 1996; Stone, 2007). Workplace demands are often implicit with the norms being accepted as the way corporations run. The ideal worker in today's grueling society is unencumbered by the demands of home-life. This is someone who does not have the distractions of family and can focus solely on their career without any interruption outside of work. This model is male-centric and reinforces the gender stereotype that females are at home taking care of any interferences that may arise throughout the work week (Gerstel & Gross, 1987; Moen & Roehling, 2004).

Today's working mother may also be faced with the challenge that she will fall behind if she takes her foot off the corporate gas pedal by extending her maternity leave indefinitely (Blau & Kahn, 1994; Di Mento, 2013; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Rose & Hartman, 2004; Sandberg, 2013). Career mothers who have remained in their respective careers often find themselves in a non-supportive work environment that does not allow for the flexibility necessary to have a healthy home and work-life (Huffington, 2014; Stone, 2007). The following conclusions have been made from many experts in the field regarding the current climate of the career mom who is not working in a supportive environment. First, motherhood is a detriment in some careers and children are perceived as a distraction to those respective professions, the term is dubbed the motherhood penalty. The definition derived from the 1950s when there were laws that required women to resign in their respective careers once they became pregnant (Greenberg,

1998). Second, the side-effects of working in an unsupportive environment include: (a) career burnout, (b) lack of time spent with their children, (c) demanding workloads, and (d) guilt (Meglich, Mihelic, & Zupan, 2016). In addition to the lack of flexibility among their employers, research has disclosed that women are opting out of the high demands placed on them in the workplace arena in exchange for a more family-centered role or a new venture that will bring that passion back into their lives. Finally, opting out of a career to raise a child is not a new trend but, according to Stone (2007) is an option that *if* available for a certain demographic of women serves as an alternative to the demanding and unsupportive career workloads that keep them away from a more balanced life with their children.

While working mothers are grappling with corporate restraint and contemplation about opting out, stay at home mothers today are experiencing their own unique set of challenges that leaves a similar impact of stress. Zimmerman (2000) interviewed several mothers from stay at home mothers and breadwinner father families and found that although the mothers in her study believed their mothering role was important and beneficial for their children they felt different publicly. These women reported that they did not feel accepted outside their homes, felt undervalued and that society did not respect them because they were not doing more challenging or paid work. Zimmerman goes on to conclude that the women interviewed reported feeling high levels of stress and exhaustion, which they attributed to unrealistic expectations that were mainly self-imposed. This self-imposed expectation came as a result of the formerly high achieving business role now exchanged for a high-achieving mothering role. A term known as intensive-mothering (Warner, 2005). Some current challenges women face today is that

stay at home mothers are not given credibility publicly when the work at home doesn't translate to a professional career. In an article by the Wall Street Journal, the author dismisses any professional legitimacy for stay at home mothers in the following quote, "Family managers are accustomed to being surrounded mostly by people who are...clearly dependent, unable to function fully on their own. Spending quality time with people with limited vocabularies doesn't hone complex strategic thinking" (Kwoh, 2013, p. 2).

Another challenge presented to these stay at home mothers who are *now* in a position and ready to reenter the workplace include flexibility, timing, and financial considerations (Casone, 2016; Stone, 2007). To find an area of common ground, some women today have found a way to keep their professional accomplishments relevant as well as find balance as a home-maker. In a recent interview by *The Chicago Tribune*, the author interviews stay at home mothers who formerly held successful, high-powered executive positions in companies such as Google and Proctor and Gamble. These women believed it was important for them to be with their young children at home, but continued to maintain a level of connectedness to the outside world (Ruiz, 2016).

Forty percent of educated women who leave their workplace to stay at home with their children effectively reenter the workforce (Light, 2013). The literature suggests that stay at home mothers who once had successful careers are employing specific strategies and developing new skills that enable them to reenter the workplace once deciding to return. These women now hold valuable knowledge and understanding as to how their return was accomplished. Their insight and guidance offered towards those women who

are interested in reentering the workplace could be an invaluable asset that women can reference and apply to their own comeback experience.

Background

Women who have achieved growth in this world today relative to their career, personal life, and relationships have benefited a great deal from the sacrifices and impact their predecessors before them have made. It has been less than 100 years since women have won the right to vote in 1920 in the United States. Since then, women have gone on to fight for equal pay and equal rights in society and in the workplace. There is still much work to be done to reexamine the male dominated workplace and infrastructure so that it is more sustainable for women, particularly mothers, and men to thrive in, not opt out. Women should have the opportunity to be successful inside her home *and* in her career (Casone, 2016; Huffington, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

By exploring women's process of professional reinvention, their self-efficacy and the theory behind their intrinsic motivation, one can begin to gain a better understanding of women's lived experience. This study referenced theoretical frameworks by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory along with Self-Determination theory (SDT). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory begins with; (a) physiological and basic needs, (b) safety and health needs, (c) belongingness and love, (d) esteem and family needs, and finally the highest, need of (e) self-actualization. This study will focus on the two highest levels, esteem and self-actualization. The second theory of Self-Determination will focus on the basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness from a phenomenological perspective with respect to women's transition from inside to outside

the home. The women in this study will be asked to elaborate on their intrinsic motivation and self-determination, the key's that unlock their experiences in life that helped propelled them back into the workforce.

Historical Perspectives of Women's Roles in the Workplace

Women throughout history have made great strides in the battle for equality and legitimacy. The idea that women were once treated as second class citizens, not allowed to vote, own property, own their own clothes and jewelry, and finally owned by their husbands is something American children today will never know (Roberts, 2017). Understanding history and the roles women have played in the fight for liberation, equality, and an education is imperative to the current situation we face today such as; discrimination, unequal pay, and reprimand for the added role of motherhood in the workplace. In the United States in 2015, women employed full-time earned 81 cents for every dollar that men earned (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

Women's Financial Impact on Society

According to recent findings, women hold 30% of private wealth in the world, and the majority of that is self-made (Tindera 2016). Warren Buffet has also commented on the financial impact women have in business, "The key to America's future success lies in helping women achieve as much as their male counterparts, too many women continue to impose limitations on themselves, talking themselves out of achieving their potential" (as cited in Berkowitz, 2013, p. 1). Their financial impact on the workplace is estimated to be \$30 billion dollars in the United States alone (Robison, 2016). By understanding how women are motivated in their decisions to reenter the workforce, society will benefit from their return (Zwirn, 2016).

Positive Impact-Women in the Workplace

In addition to the impact women's reentry will make on the economy, women CEOs and board of directors have a noticeably positive impact on their companies versus men in the same roles (Carter, Joy, Wagner, & Narayanan, 2007). Companies also found that those who had the highest percentage of women as board of directors outperformed the competition by 53%. The return on sales with women as the board of directors reported at least 42% increase, and the return on investment capital was 66 % (Carter et. al., 2007). Women's positive influence however is limited in numbers. For example, only 4.2% of the CEOs are women, and only 15% of the seats on the boards of directors are held by women (Eagly, 2007; Tindera 2016).

Negative Impact-Women in the Workplace

While women's access to leadership positions has resulted in financial successes for business and companies, these successes have not come without a price to women's health and physical wellbeing. Women who have kept up the pace in the demanding male centered structure of grueling work hours, limited flexibility, and constant technology accessibility have left women reeling from the side-effects. Women who have a highly stressful job have a 40% increased risk for heart disease, heart attacks, and a 60% increase in type 2 diabetes (Novak, 2013; Slopen, 2012).

Along with the physical side-effects of the work-related stress on women, their reported happiness and positive emotions were low and depression was high. Some researchers suggest that women who worked themselves into a lifestyle of imbalance and constant rat race found that once they hit a desired goal, the outcome was not worth the climb getting there (Huffington, 2014; Kushner, 2001).

Women's Unique Set of Personal and Professional Challenges

Women are also faced with a unique set of professional decisions that impact their career relative to maternity leave and the decision of when to return to work after having a baby. The professional decision of when to return to work also carries the added stigma that women will be passed over for that promotion if they take their foot off the corporate gas pedal (Di Mento, 2013; Sandberg, 2013). Women have been told to lean in and deserve a seat at the table, however achieving that seat has proven to be harder than expected and many women are choosing not to go after the promotion to maintain a more balanced life outside of work (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005; Huffington, 2014).

Perceived barriers in the workplace. The glass ceiling is another experience that women who have left their careers reported was an issue. This term is described as “an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions. Women still use this term today to describe how they have perceived their predecessors experience and suppression in the workforce” (Webster-Merriam, 2017).

Harvard Business Review that suggests that the glass ceiling is a thing of the past since women *have* gone on to become CEOs and presidents of companies and stated: “the glass ceiling fails to incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women can face in their leadership journeys” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 3). The new term that is used to describe women's current experience in the workplace is the labyrinth of leadership. The labyrinth is a metaphor that describes the complex and twisted journey that women have been on throughout history to advance in their careers. There is an eventual goal in

mind that is attainable if you are willing to stay on the path regardless of the unknown variables (Eagly, 2007).

Motherhood penalty-outside the home. The breakdown of the responsibilities for the family have proven that men have been rewarded and perceived as more valuable in the workforce for having a family and a career over women (Correll, xa, Benard, & Paik, 2007). This term has been coined the motherhood penalty in that women are held to higher standards than men in their career and experience more discrimination than fathers. Author's Benard and Correll, (2010) maintain the motherhood penalty is a negative experience for women but a positive one for fathers in the following statement, "Parenthood enhances the perceived interpersonal qualities of male but not female applicants. Fatherhood is a signal of positive interpersonal qualities" (Benard & Correll, 2010, p. 633). Ariana Huffington (2014) founder of the Huffington Post reflects on her own experience in motherhood and suggests, "for women with jobs and careers, taking care of themselves becomes even harder if they become mothers. In our current corporate culture, having children is often seen as a major barrier into career advancement" (p. 70).

Second shift-work inside the home. Women's role inside the home also carries with it a unique set of demands that primarily fall on the mother's shoulders. Even with a supportive spouse, women report the majority of the child rearing, household duties, and errands land on the shoulders of women regardless if they work inside, or outside the home full-time (Riday, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). The term second shift has been researched by Hochschild (1989), which points out the gender norm of household duties that are performed by working women who come home from their career and perform

approximately an extra month of work a year. The culmination of this double responsibility for women who carry the burden inside and outside the home may leave them feeling burned out.

Opting Out-The Final Straw

Opting Out is a term to describe the experience women feel where quitting their careers in exchange for a less stressful life, increased flexibility, and balance is more appealing than going to work every day in a stressful and unfulfilling environment (Stone, 2007).

Women opt out for a variety of reasons, but one common thread is lack of enjoyment, flexibility, support, and fulfillment in their career (Hebreard, 2010; Stone, 2007). According to a *ForbesWoman* survey, 84% of working women report that staying at home to raise children is a financial luxury they aspire to (as cited in Casserly, 2012). Studies have found that 43% of women who have children will opt out and quit their careers at some point and of the women who quit approximately three quarters will return to the workforce but only 40% will return full time (Huffington, 2014). The alternative to remain at home is now more appealing than the day-to-day grind in an unsupportive work environment. More and more women with a higher education have traded the professional arena for an opportunity to be more hands on with their young children (Rubin, 2005, Stone, 2007).

The New Stay at Home Mother

The new stay at home mother may now find that she is completely fulfilled and satisfied with her choice to opt out of the career world. Many former executives go on to form very meaningful lives through social networks, PTA board positions, and

volunteering in social causes. The intrinsic motivation to continue to be active and involved has shown to provide women with value and meaning without the added corporate stress. There are however drawbacks to a full-time life at home. Some women reported that they did not feel accepted outside their homes, felt undervalued and that society did not respect them because they were not doing more challenging work. One such comment in a Forbes online article wrote “The corporate world values work experience, and no matter how you spin the story about your PTA service and volunteer work, staying at home with the kids is no work experience” (Hannon, 2013, p. 2).

Zimmerman (2000) goes on to conclude that the women interviewed reported feeling high levels of stress and exhaustion, which they attributed to unrealistic expectations that were mainly self-imposed. This self-imposition will later be referred to as intensive mothering. A term to describe a more demanding form of motherhood than the generation of women prior to our society today. This version of mothering encompasses a high quality of life that comes from expending numerous amount of time, energy, and money in the raising of their children. An extensive version of mothering that nurtures developmental milestones, builds self-esteem, autonomy, and self-reliance (Warner, 2005).

Stay at Home Mother’s Reentry in to the Workplace-The Comeback

The 40% of women who do return to the workforce will face their own set of motivators in wanting to get back out there. In a detailed process that outlines steps mothers may utilize as a guide to reenter workforce designed by Ericksen, Jurgens, Garrett, and Swedburg (2008), the mother’s reentry into the workforce conceptual framework lays out six filters: (a) family demands, (b) support, (c) education level, (e)

experience, (f) self-concept, and (g) cost vs. benefit of reentry. Those filters first begin with the five driving forces that are a catalyst to their reentry process: (a) financial, (b) environment, (c) self-image, (d) skills, and (e) abilities, and (f) interests. Mothers who referred to this model could personally apply their own motivators and lived experiences in this framework (Ericksen, Jurgens, Garrett, & Swedburg, 2008).

The decision for women to return to the workforce is personal and based on a reported intrinsic motivation to achieve accomplishments outside the home. For corporations to reap the rewards of the mother's reentry some considerations should be examined. In an article written in *The Atlantic* by a former Harvard graduate and mother of four, Light (2013) examines the 40% that do return full time only to be met with current job skills that they no longer qualify for. The author suggests that corporations offer more project based work with a clear beginning and end in mind as a viable alternative to the daily grind at a desk-job:

Project-based work provides many benefits to both businesses and those re-entering...With clear project descriptions, deadlines, and compensation, more moms who may be overqualified for a position might decide that they are willing to help out with a project because it meets their needs in the short term. I am sure that many moms will even step up to do a project even at the cost of their family because the timing is only temporary. As the business and the mom work together more, maybe a full-time job will come of it when all parties understand the value. (Light, 2013, p. 5)

Qualities and Soft Skills Employers Desire

The qualities and soft skills employers desire in the workplace have been reported to be but not limited to: (a) positive attitude, (b) flexibility, (c) vision, (d) competence, (e) integrity, and (f) good judgement (CareerBuilder, 2014; Fallon, 2014). Corporations have also adopted strategies to encourage stay at home mothers back to the workforce (Kwoh, 2013). The idea to get mothers to return to the workforce has also gained momentum with various head hunter agencies such as The Mom Project, who specialize in placing women in short-term project based assignments that give them the flexibility to work from home and/or choose their hours of work (Robinson, 2016).

Qualities and Skills Stay at Home Mothers Acquired

In addition to the desired skills employers seek, the skills acquired while educated women were at home have added to their qualification to reenter the workplace. As Light (2013) mentioned before in her online article in The Atlantic, soft skills are a positive qualifier for employment:

Consider the management, negotiation, budgeting skills we gained in our years out of the workforce and the skills that many of us never lost. Highly qualified parents could do strategic analysis, build financial models, write legal briefs or PR pieces, generate blog posts or plan corporate conferences. (Light, 2014, p. 5)

Women's Return to the Workforce

The final piece to women's full circle journey is their return to the workforce. The unique attributes that educated women who left the workforce to stay home and then reenter the workforce is complex and worth exploring to have better understanding of their unique set of skills. Forty percent of educated women who leave their workplace to

stay at home with their children effectively reenter the workforce (Light, 2013). The literature suggests that stay at home mothers who once had successful careers are employing specific strategies and developing new skills that enable them to reenter the workplace once deciding to return. These women now hold valuable knowledge and understanding as to how their return was accomplished. Their insight and guidance offered towards those women who are interested in reentering the workplace could be an invaluable asset that women can reference and apply to their own comeback experience.

Statement of the Research Problem

Women today still have a significant way to go in achieving equal opportunities, motherhood *and* career support, and finding their way through life's maze of circumstances. By understanding women's history and their continued struggle for equality, society will be better equipped to support their reentry into the workforce.

In the United States only 4.2% of the CEOs are women, and only 15% of the seats on the boards of directors are held by women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Tindera 2016). The gender pay is not equal and in the United States in 2005, women employed full-time earned 81 cents for every dollar that men earned (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, research has shown that companies with women in leadership positions, board of directors, and stakeholders achieve greater financial success across all measurable spectrums. Women's successful addition to the workplace has proven that companies need their influence and presence in the day-to-day operations of business (Catalyst, 2007; Rodriguez, 2011; Zwirn, 2016).

There is much to understand about the complexities as to why women are so valuable in the workplace but more importantly despite their positive influence almost

half will leave their career at some point. Studies have found that 43% of women who have children will opt out and quit their careers and of the women who quit approximately three quarters will return to the workforce but only 40% will return full-time (Hebreard, 2010; Huffington, 2014; Stone, 2007). For the 40% of women who do return to the full-time workforce, there is little guidance and support in how to make that transition successful (Light, 2013; Robinson, 2016).

Society and business have begun to recognize the importance of women's reentry back into the workplace however, the gap pertaining to this specific research is evident regarding the reentry process. Very little is known about the lived experiences from the 40 percent of women who have returned to the workplace fulltime and how stay at home mothers who are thinking about returning to the workforce can learn from the women who have made it back (Kwoh, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

Research Question

This study was guided by one central research question and five research sub-questions:

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother?

Research Sub-Questions

1. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?
2. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?
3. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce?
4. What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?
5. What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?

Significance of the Study

According to the book *Lean In* by Sandberg (2013), women need to keep their foot on the corporate gas pedal despite the masculine centered working model of today's workplace but, the emotional and physical demands of keeping that lifestyle in drive have left women's health in jeopardy (Kushner, 2001; Sandberg, 2013). Despite Sandberg's recommendations, 43% of women are leaving the workplace at some point in their lives. There has been a considerable amount of research regarding the catalysts in women's career exit however, little is known regarding women's successful reentry process and the skills they have gained as a stay at home mother.

In the working model of mother's reentry process by Ericksen et al. (2008), the Mother's reentry conceptual framework lays out six filters that contribute to the reentry process: (a) family demands, (b) support, (c) education level, (e) experience, (f) self-concept, and (g) cost vs. benefit of reentry. Those filters first begin with the five driving forces that are a catalyst to their reentry process: (a) financial, (b) environment, (c) self-image, (d) skills and abilities, and (e) interests (Ericksen et al., 2008). The identification and awareness of the mother's acquired skills at home coupled with the mother's reentry conceptual framework process will provide women with information and support that may be necessary once they decide to return to the workplace.

As women embark on a new phase in their lives by returning to work, it is crucial that the necessary support be given to stay at home mothers to ensure a successful workforce reentry. Women's reentry back into the workforce is a critical component to the success of today's businesses (Berkowitz, 2013). This study will address the gap in research and help identify the skills mothers acquired at home that will be vital to the new phase of their professional lives.

This study will also address the importance of women's reentry into the workplace and recognize the skills that stay at home mothers identified as necessary in the reentry process. The study is designed to report on the lived experiences of women's lives and provide a working logic model of identified inputs and outputs of skills acquired at home. The comprehensive research will yield a strategic plan aimed at mothers looking to reenter the workplace and ensuing employers looking to hire and welcome back women to the workplace.

Definitions

The following words are referred to throughout the study and are defined here to provide a specific meaning and perspective. The terms were defined based on a combination of literal definitions and terms coined in the field of research. It is worth mentioning that all definitions took into consideration that the educated women in the study were in the workforce while having children and then left to become a stay at home mother which differentiates them from the population of women who were never in the workforce while a mother.

Barriers for women. Biases in relation to motherhood. Experimental studies show biases against mothers in competence expectations and screening recommendations (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008). Working mothers are more self-oriented and seen as less dedicated to their children than stay at home moms – particularly when they are thought to work because of a personal choice rather than financial necessity (Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990).

Career mother. Working mothers, as a label, refers to women who are mothers and who work outside the home for income in addition to the work they perform at home raising their children (Turkington & Tzeel, 2004).

Educated career women. The formal definition refers to every form of education that aims at improving the knowledge, and skill of women and girls. It includes general education at schools and colleges, vocational and technical education, professional education, health education, etc. Women education encompasses both literary and non-literary education. Educated women are capable of bringing socio-economic changes (Sehgal, 2015). For the purpose of this study educated career women refers to women

who have a minimum of a bachelor's degree and have worked in a defined career prior to opting out of the workforce.

Glass ceiling. An intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

Intensive mothering. This version of mothering encompasses a high quality of life that comes from expending numerous amount of time, energy, and money in the raising of their children. An extensive version of mothering that nurtures developmental milestones, builds self- esteem, autonomy, and self-reliance (Warner, 2005).

Labyrinth of leadership. For women who aspire to top leadership, routes exist but are full of twists and turns, both unexpected and expected. Because all labyrinths have a viable route to the center, it is understood that goals are attainable. The metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Maternal wall. This term is replacing the glass ceiling as the metaphor that describes the more “formidable obstacle to women’s economic advancement and full equity with men” (Hartmann, Yoon, & Zuckerman, 2000, p. 268).

The leaky pipeline. A term to describe the financial toll that being out of the workforce for a minimum of a year has on women’s salary and potential future earnings. Approximately 30% of a women’s salary is diminished when she is out of the labor force for two to three years (Bliss, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Rose & Hartman, 2004).

Opt out. This term refers to women who are in a professional career and for a variety of reasons make the conscious decision to exit their professional life. Lisa Belkin (2003) first coined the term “opting out” to describe highly educated, high-achieving women who seemingly chose to “opt out, ratchet back, and redefine work” after becoming mothers.

Second shift. The term researched by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) who pointed out that working women have a second shift of domestic duties to perform when they get home from work. Women perform the majority of child-rearing and housekeeping, equal to approximately a month of extra work a year.

Stay at home mother (SAHM). Basic definition of a stay at home mom is someone who stays home to raise her children and manage her household. The formal definition is: remaining in one's residence, locality, or country; *especially*: to tend to children and domestic duties while a spouse is at work (Merriam-Webster, 2017). For the purpose of this study SAHM are in a new role that they chose an alternative to their career outside the home and are now in this role after opting out.

The Comeback- reentry process to the workforce. Reentering the workforce after several years away from the workforce while they raised children. Specifically targeting women who are planning their return to a career or work outside of the home (Casone, 2016).

Time-bind. The inability to be able to engage 100% effectively in your career and 100% effectively as a mother. The idea that there is not enough time in the day to both work and mothering successfully.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to educated career women who (a) possessed at least a bachelor's degree or higher, (b) held fulltime positions prior to opting out of the workforce, and (c) worked as a stay at home mother for at least one year. Further, an additional delimitation was that marital status was not considered as a factor in the women's opting out process.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters with accompanying references and appendices. Chapter I includes relevant background information for the problem, an explanation of the problem, the purpose of the study, identified research questions, definitions of terms and finally the delimitations. Chapter II includes a review of the literature that addresses the theoretical framework for the study as well as identifying the catalysts for women who desire to return to the workforce. The literature review begins with the history of women's issues, then moves into the state of the current workforce culture, reasons for women to opt out and leave their career as-well as identifying what stay at home mothers perceive as skills they acquired at home that support their subsequent return to the workforce. Chapter III presents the research design and methodology for the study, along with procedures for data collection, the population and sample. Chapter IV details the data analysis and findings of the study. Finally, Chapter V comprehensively discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. A significant list of references and appendices are provided.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is a comprehensive review of the literature specific to women's history and the journey from career to motherhood and back into the workforce. Five main areas are presented in the literature review and are detailed in chronological order beginning with the theoretical framework based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and SDT, followed by the history of women in the workplace. Next, the positive and negative experiences and financial impacts of women inside and outside the workforce will be discussed. This review will then transition into the full circle cycle of motivators in opting out of the workforce, life as a stay at home mother and finally the last stage of opting back into the workforce. Here, the soft skills that stay at home mothers acquired while at home will be compared to current skills that employers desire when reentering the workforce. This last comeback stage is further supported by the mother's reentry conceptual framework that women may utilize throughout their transition back into their workforce journey.

Theoretical Framework

This study has based its foundation on Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework as well as SDT. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is based on the organization of human needs that occur in a step-by-step fashion. The way in which a person can move through the levels is by meeting each of those needs beginning with physiological and basic needs, safety and health needs, belongingness and love, esteem and family needs, and finally the highest, need of self-actualization. This study will concentrate on the two highest levels, esteem and self-actualization since the women in the study will be focused on their desire for further achievement, freedom, independence, and at this point in life

are in a state of personal and professional transition. Maslow (1943) described motivation as something that is constantly changing which coincides with the motivation the women in this research study experience by transitioning first out and then back into the workforce. The second theory of Self-Determination is an empirically based organismic theory of human behavior and personality development. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), SDT focuses on the nature, structure, and functioning of a person in action. This theory is relevant to the study based on life events that either support or hinder people’s ability to thrive through satisfaction of their “basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy...SDT defines the self, first and foremost phenomenologically” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, Introduction section). Since this study is phenomenological in nature, the amalgamation of the two theories will give validation to the lived experiences women vacillate through in their life.

The two theories are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 and shows the process in which human’s move through their basic needs.

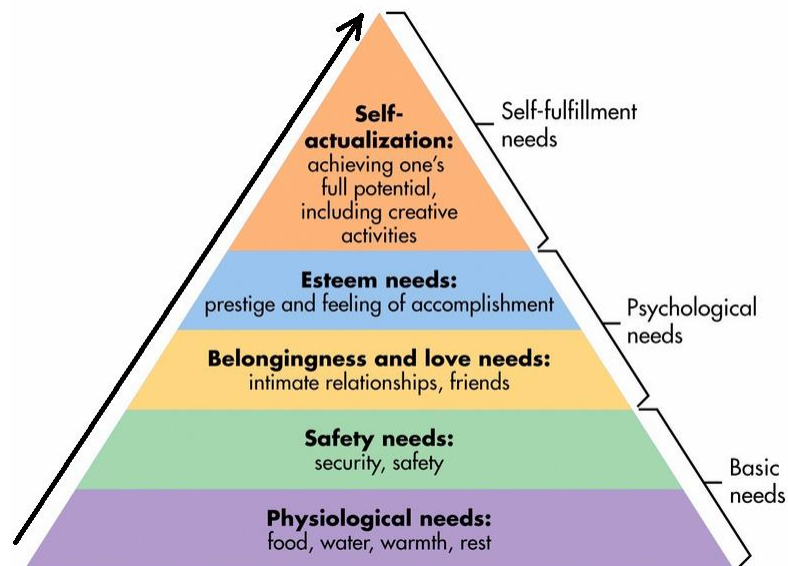


Figure 1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Adapted from “Simply Psychology,” by S. McLeod, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

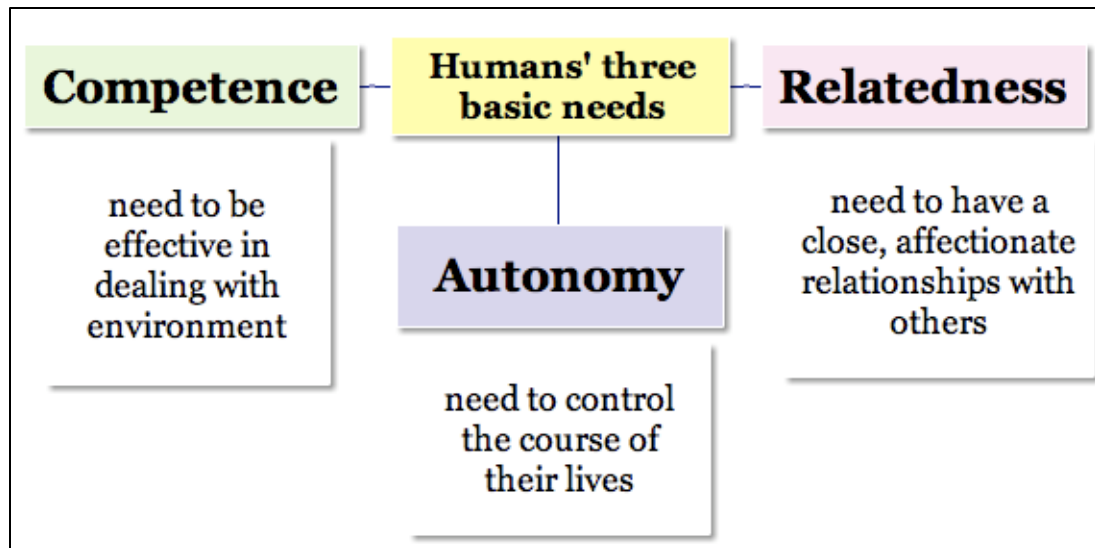


Figure 2. Self-Determination Theory. Adapted from “Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being,” by M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, 2000, *American Psychological Association*, 55(1), p. 68-78. DOI: 10.1037110003-066X.55.1.68

Historical Perspectives of Women’s Roles in the Workplace, A Century of Working

American Women’s Evolution

Women throughout history have made great strides in the battle for equality and legitimacy. The idea that women were once treated as second class citizens, not allowed to vote, own property, own their own clothes and jewelry and finally owned by their husbands is something American children today will never know (Roberts, 2017). Understanding history and the roles women have played in the fight for liberation, equality, and an education is imperative to the current situation we face today such as; discrimination, unequal pay scales, and reprimand for the added role of motherhood in the workplace. In the United States in 2005, women employed full-time earned 81 cents for every dollar that men earned (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

United States Civil War Sparks Work for Women

Women’s role in the workforce has ebbed and flowed over the past one hundred years in the United States. Beginning after the U.S Civil War in 1861 the role of women

in the workforce began to significantly change. The death toll of American soldiers was upwards of 600,000 and tens of thousands more were injured and could not earn a living. Women were then obligated to enter the workforce for manual labor to fill factory positions otherwise run by men (Frank, 2004). It was during this time that preliminary women's worker labor unions were formed in order to create safer working conditions for the women. The Knights of Labor federation was first formed in 1869 but was a model for women to later argue for equal pay, safer working conditions, and an eight-hour workday. In addition to an eight-hour workday, the union had a mix of female and male members which argued for equal pay regardless of sex or color. Key leaders included "the beloved widow, Mary Harris Jones", better known as Mother Jones (Foner & Garraty, 1991).

American Federation of Labor: A Set-Back for Working Women

After success in the fight for women's labor and pay equality, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) began to gain popularity and the Knights of Labor lost their liberal group of members in exchange for a more conservative mindset regarding women's role in the workforce during 1890-1910 (Currarino, 2006). The AFL was led by president Samuel Gompers who believed that a women's place was in the home. Thus, the union's official stance on women in the workplace was that "it is wrong to permit any of the female sex of our country to be forced to work, as we believe that men should be provided with a fair wage in order to keep his female relatives from going to work" (as cited in Reed, 1930, p. 126). Gompers also believed that allowing women to work would diminish male respect for women and would even give rise to a generation of

“weak children who are not educated to become strong and good citizens” (as cited in Reed, 1930, p. 126).

The Great Depression: A Mixed Set-Back for Working Women

The Great Depression created further set-backs for women and their quest for equality and legitimacy in the workforce. During that decade from 1929 to 1939, unemployment rose to 25% of the workforce, and male dominated labor unions furthered the struggle by insisting that only men were entitled to jobs even though capable women were often unable to work outside the home to support their husbands who had lost their jobs (Rothbard, 1972). According to Leckie (2017) some wives wanted to help with the family finances by looking for work when their husbands were laid off however, some employers refused to hire married women. Gender segregation in the workplace was so prevalent and unemployment was so much higher in better-paying industries, these wives often had to rely on traditionally female jobs that were belittled by men. Nevertheless, a positive outcome from the decade of the Great Depression was married women who *were* able to enter the workforce during that time rose by more than 25% (Leckie, 2017).

World War II and the Defining Change for Working Women

Just like with the Civil War jobs were left unattended as the men went off to fight in World War II, this time leaving upwards of six million job openings for women to fill. The jobs available were mostly in manufacturing and heavy-industry. The iconic image of Rosie the Riveter began appearing across the United States and became the new symbol for hard-working American women (Gluck, 1987). After the end of World War II women surrendered their jobs back to the men returning home from the war. However, the tapestry was permanently changed for women in the workplace. The post-war

working women went on to fulfill highly skilled positions that were biased as female occupations but nonetheless successful as; teachers, nurses, retail sales clerks, and secretarial work (Baxandall, Gordon, & Reverby, 1976; Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1946).

A survey completed by the Methodist Federation for Social Action revealed that in 1946, 2.7 million women left their emergency war jobs to once more don aprons and settle down to domestic routine; however, approximately 16.8 million women were still in the workforce once the war ended (Costello, 1985; Hartman, 1978). This caused concern for conservative view points and American conservatives tried to justify the large numbers by acknowledging that veterans were still returning to the workforce and women were still leaving their jobs. This led to extended discussion within the Methodist Church in the immediate postwar years on the acceptability of women working outside the home. Historians have debated the effect that the propaganda published during and after the war was to encourage women to return to their proper sphere. The struggle for acceptability for women to work outside the home after the necessity of the war pulled at the heartstrings of religious and conservative mindsets across America (Chafe, 1972; Foner, 1979).

Civil Rights Act of 1964- Further Progress for Women in the Workforce

Arguably the most significant moment for women in the workforce came with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This act outlawed discrimination in the workforce based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. In addition to equality for women, this Act, ended racial segregation in schools and public facilities which

subsequently allowed for more minority women to be educated in otherwise unattainable establishments (Wright, 2005).

The positive influence that this Act would have on women created further job openings in the workforce and led to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). By 1978 another bill, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was introduced that banned discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace (United States Equal Opportunity Commission, 1978; Yang, 2015).

American Women in the Workforce-Full Circle Evolution

According to the American Census bureau, there are approximately 75 million working women in the United States today. That number has increased by more than 30 million since the 1980's, which means that females 16 and older who participated in civilian labor now make up 47.4% of the total labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

In addition to that progress, women are increasing their presence in formerly male dominated work spaces. For example, from 1972 to 1977 women created a 338% increase in enrolling in MBA programs (Brown, 1979). Women also went on to make up approximately half of law school students, a quarter of the engineers which is up from only 1% in the 1970s, and now make up 30% of all MDs (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2016).

Despite the increase of women in the workforce, women still lag-behind in earnings. This imbalance in pay is in part due to the specific work being performed, not necessarily due to intentional discrimination (U.S. Bureau of the, 2014). Table 1 and 2

below show the specific job category with the lowest percentage of wage gap and the next being the highest based on full-time, wage and salary workers in the United States.

Table 1

Job Category with the Lowest Percentage Wage Gap, 2014

Occupation	Earnings ratio	Wage gap
Stock clerks and order fillers	102.0%	-2.0%
Health practitioner support technologists and technicians	100.0%	0.0%
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	99.0%	1.0%
Food preparation workers	97.6%	2.4%
Cooks	97.4%	2.6%
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	97.1%	2.9%
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks	95.5%	4.5%
Office clerks, general	94.6%	5.4%
Bus drivers	94.5%	5.5%
Social workers	94.1%	5.9%

Note. Based on median annual earnings of full-time, wage and salary workers, 16 years old and over. The 10 occupations had the lowest women’s to men’s earnings ratio among the 116 occupations for which data for both women’s and men’s earnings were available in 2014. Adapted from “Current Population Survey,” by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014. Copyright by U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/cps/cps_aa2014.htm

Table 2

Job Category with the Highest Percentage Wage Gap, 2014

Occupation	Earnings ratio	Wage gap
Personal financial advisors	61.3%	38.7%
Physicians and surgeons	62.2%	37.8%
Securities, commodities, and financial services sales agents	65.1%	34.9%
Financial managers	67.4%	32.6%
First-line supervisors of housekeeping and janitorial workers	69.4%	30.6%
First-line supervisors of production and operating workers	70.0%	30.0%
Sales and related workers, all other	70.0%	30.0%
Chief executives	70.0%	30.0%
Retail salespersons	70.3%	29.7%
Other teachers and instructors	70.4%	29.6%

Note. Based on median annual earnings of full-time, wage and salary workers, 16 years old and over. The 10 occupations had the highest women’s to men’s earnings ratio among the 116 occupations for which data for both women’s and men’s earnings were available in 2014. Adapted from “Current Population Survey,” by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014. Copyright by U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/cps/cps_aa2014.htm

According to Barnett and Rivers (1996) women in the workplace have found that they can have a balance with career and a home-life when both spouses earn a living. However, that dual earner equilibrium shifts when the woman becomes pregnant. The positive dual earner household goes into a professional imbalance when the woman is passed over for new job assignments or seen as mommy tracked but the husband is rewarded and perceived as more responsible and adds value to the company (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). This implicit norm, known as the motherhood penalty, has proven to be the main barrier that women face in today's workforce-not gender (Benard & Correll, 2010; Stone, 2007). Women earn approximately 82% of what men make from an overall standpoint, which breaks down to approximately 82 cents for every dollar a man earns. Progress has been slow and steady. At the height of women's growth in the workforce, women's employment was rising at a steady 4.3% in the 1970s and it slowly began to decline down to 0.4% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This decline is in-part due to the Opt-Out (forced-out) revolution and the labyrinth of leadership that women go through in their quest for legitimacy and balance in the workforce and as a mother in the 21st century (Stone, 2007). Fortune 500 companies do have women in senior leadership positions but the numbers are low in that only 3-5% are women, and little is known as to how many of these leaders are mothers (Oakley, 2000). However, the increase in positive work-life balance and career advancement is still on the

rise and women continue to make progress in all areas of their professional and personal lives thanks in-part to the century long fight for equality (see Figure 3).

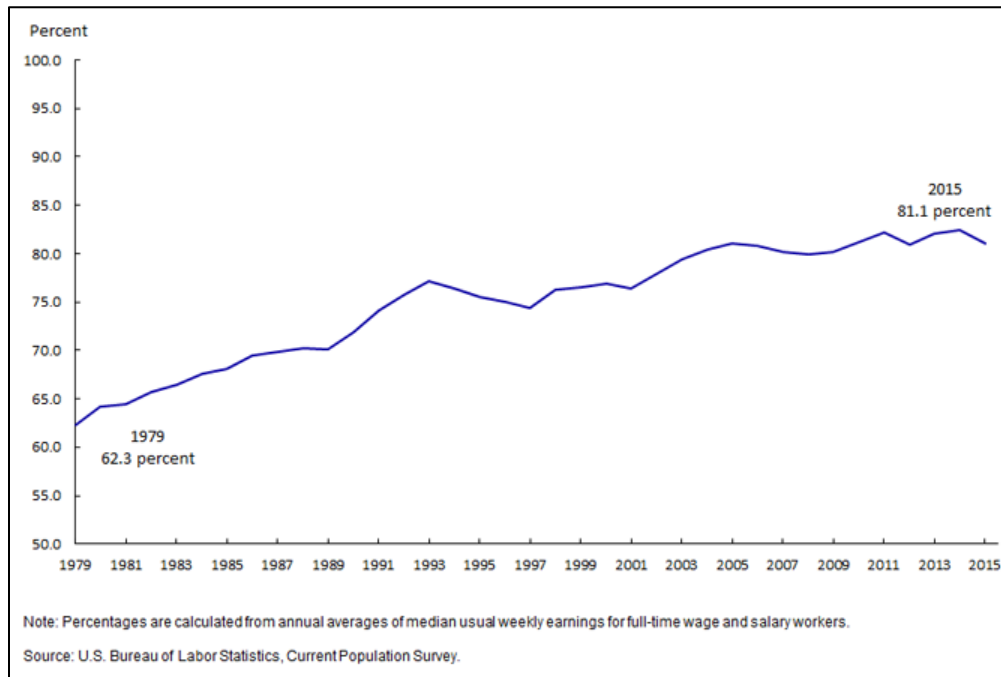


Figure 3. Women’s earnings as a percentage of men’s, for full-time wage and salary workers, 1979-2015. Adapted from “TED: The Economics Daily,” by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2015/womens-earnings-compared-to-mens-earnings-in-2014.htm>

Women’s Financial Impact on Society

According to recent findings, women hold 30% of private wealth in the world, and the majority of that is self-made (Tindera, 2016). Warren Buffet has also commented on the financial impact women have in business, “The key to America's future success lies in helping women achieve as much as their male counterparts, too many women continue to impose limitations on themselves, talking themselves out of achieving their potential” (as cited in Berkowitz, 2013, p. 1). Their financial impact on the workplace is estimated to be \$30 billion dollars in the United States alone (Robison, 2016). By

understanding how women are motivated in their decisions to reenter the workforce, society will benefit from their return (Zwirn, 2016).

Positive Impact- Women in the Workplace

In addition to the impact women's reentry will make on the economy, women CEOs and Board of Directors have a noticeably positive impact on their companies versus men in the same roles (Catalyst, 2007). Companies also found that those who had the highest percentage of women as Board of Directors outperformed the competition by 53%. The return on sales with women as the board of directors reported at least 42% increase, and the return on investment capital was 66% (Catalyst, 2007). Women's positive influence however is limited in numbers. For example, only 4.2% of the CEOs are women, and only 15% of the seats on the boards of directors are held by women (Eagly, 2007; Tindera 2016). Another positive impact of women in the workplace are the women owned firms in the United States. According to the National Association of Women Business Owners, more than 9.4 million firms are owned by women who employ nearly 7.9 million people, and generating 1.5 trillion in sales as of 2015. Fifty-one percent of women owned firms account for 31% of all privately held firms and contribute to 14% of all employment that results in 12% of total revenues (National Association of Women Business Owners, 2015).

In an article from Forbes.com, Loubier (2017) reports:

Women entrepreneurs are also more successful and ambitious, according to a 2016 BNP Paribas Global Entrepreneur Report, 90% of the female entrepreneurs that took part in the survey expected to see an increase in profits

within the next year and were reporting higher revenues than their male counterparts. (p. 2)

With the financial gains that women have made in society over the last several decades, there is still room for further advancement in primarily male-dominated professions such as the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The General Electric Company, (GE) has set goals of having 20,000 women fill STEM roles by 2020 and obtaining 50:50 representation for all GE technical entry-level development programs. In a white paper, GE outlines the talent crisis for women in STEM roles. Currently in the United States, only 14% of all engineers and 25% of all IT professionals are women. Despite the fact that women make up 55% of all college and graduate students overall, only 18% of computer science graduates are female, according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics (as cited in GE Reports Stats, 2017).

In an article for the Huffington Post, Norma Carr-Ruffino, a professor at San Francisco State University and an expert on women in management, argues that it is important to focus on the issues that women in the workforce are still facing but, she questions why we are still having the same conversation in 2013 as she did back in the 1970s (as cited in Mehroz, 2013). Carr-Ruffino mentioned another issue specific to women's experience is the work-life balance, arguing that society needs to shift its cultural understanding of the role of mothers and fathers (as cited in Mehroz, 2013). Carr-Ruffino went on to note, "I would like to see the culture move to a place where the fathers could be as responsible [as mothers] so it wouldn't be such an expectation that the mothers have the primary responsibility [for child rearing]" (as cited in Mehroz, 2013, p. 2).

Negative Impact- Women in the Workplace

While women's access to leadership positions has resulted in financial successes for business and companies, these successes have not come without a price to women's health and physical wellbeing. Women who have kept up the pace in the demanding male centered structure of grueling work hours, limited flexibility, and constant technology accessibility have left women reeling from the side-effects. Women who have a highly stressful job have a 40% increased risk for heart disease, heart attacks, and a 60% increase in type 2 diabetes (Novak et al., 2013; Slopen et al., 2012).

Along with the physical side-effects of the work-related stress on women, their reported happiness and positive emotions were low and depression was high. Some researchers suggested that women who worked themselves into a lifestyle of imbalance and constant rat race found that once they hit a desired goal, the outcome was not worth the climb getting there (Huffington, 2014; Kushner, 2001, Sandberg, 2013).

If the health concerns were not evidence enough, the absence of women in the workplace leaves with it a negative price for the company as-a-whole. Some reports show that the exit of women in the workforce may cost that business upwards of 150 to 250% of the women's salary (Hochschild, 1989). In a study conducted by the Harvard Business Review in 2005, off-ramping of a women's career is costly. Their data showed that women lose an average of 18% to 28% of their earning power when they take an off-ramp from their careers. The longer a woman stays out, the more severe the penalty becomes. Across sectors, women lose a staggering 37% of their earning power when they spend three or more years out of the workforce (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Mother's Unique Set of Personal and Professional Challenges

Women are faced with a unique set of professional decisions that impact their career relative to maternity leave and the decision of when to return to work after having a baby. The professional decision of when to return to work also carries the added stigma that women will be passed over for promotions if they take their foot off the corporate gas pedal (Di Mento, 2013; Sandberg, 2013). Women have been told to lean in and deserve a seat at the table, however achieving that seat has proven to be harder than expected and many women are choosing not to go after the promotion to maintain a more balanced life outside of work (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005; Huffington, 2014).

There is a certain rhetoric that describes the workplace as a hostile environment for women but especially mothers. A study of top executives from 10 United States based corporations, found that gender was an obstacle in the workplace and that women were passed over for promotions, excluded from networking groups, and had limited role models to reference (Galinsky et al., 2003). The discrimination working mothers reported was subliminal at times but nonetheless felt in the climate of the workplace despite the inclusion of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993 in which working mothers would not be penalized for taking time off for maternity leave (Stone, 2007).

The female CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi, noted recently in an article by FastCompany, that her company is investing \$100 million dollars to support women and girls. She has also invested in the advancement of work-life balance for their employees. For example, they are creating day care facilities at work, allowing paid paternity and maternity leave as well as giving people flextime:

PepsiCo does not have an entry-level problem with women...they do very well in the early stages...then they get married and have kids, that's the time they have to build a career, and most companies don't have support systems that allow women to have a life and a livelihood. We almost force people to choose...If we don't provide the support system for employees in their thirties and forties to have a family and work, there is no way we are going to build a pipeline to the C-suite. (FastCompany, February 2017, p. 79)

Perceived barriers in the workplace. Workplace demands are often implicit norms that are being accepted as just the way corporations run. The ideal worker in society today is unencumbered by the demands of home-life. This is someone who does not have the distractions of family and can focus solely on their career without any interruption outside of work. This model is male-centric and reinforces the gender stereotype that females are at home taking care of any interferences that may arise throughout the work week (Gerstel & Gross, 1987; Moen & Roehling, 2004). According to recent studies 75% of executive men had a stay at home wife and women are running the day-to-day operations at home in order for their husbands to thrive at work. (Galinsky et al., 2003). Katrina Alcorn (2010) mentions in a support group for working women, "It's not that these titans of industry don't have children. Most of them do. But the majority of these CEOs, VPs, senators, and executive directors simply have no understanding of what it takes to run a household" (p. 1).

The glass ceiling is an experience that women reported as another barrier in the workplace. This term is described as "an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions. Women still use this

term today to describe how they have perceived their predecessors experience and suppression in the workforce” (Webster-Merriam, 2017, Glass Ceiling section).

In contract to the glass ceiling effect, a study in the Harvard Business Review suggests that the glass ceiling is a thing of the past since women *have* gone on to become CEOs and presidents of companies; “The glass ceiling fails to incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women can face in their leadership journeys” (Eagly, 2007, p. 3). The new term used to describe women’s current experience in the workplace is the labyrinth of leadership, a metaphor that describes the complex and twisted journey that women have been on throughout history to advance in their careers. There is an eventual goal in mind that is attainable if you are willing to stay on the path regardless of the unknown variables (Eagly, 2007). Indra Nooyi, the aforementioned CEO of PepsiCo reflected on her rise to the top as having to work “50 to 100 percent better than her male counterparts” when she was rising up the ranks in the workforce (as cited in FastCompany, 2007, p. 79).

Motherhood penalty. The breakdown of the responsibilities for the family have proven that men have been rewarded and perceived as more valuable in the workforce for having a family and a career over women (Correll et al., 2007). This term has been coined the motherhood penalty in that women are held to higher standards than men in their career and experience more discrimination than fathers. A Pew Research Center survey finds:

The public remains of two minds about the gains mothers have made in the workplace—most recognize the clear economic benefits to families, but many voice concerns about the toll that having a working mother may take on children

or even marriage. About three-quarters of adults (74%) say the increasing number of women working for pay has made it harder for parents to raise children, and half say that it has made marriages harder to succeed. At the same time, two-thirds say it has made it easier for families to live comfortably. While the vast majority of Americans (79%) reject the idea that women should return to their traditional roles, the new Pew Research survey finds that the public still sees mothers and fathers in a different light when it comes to evaluating the best work-family balance for children. About half (51%) of survey respondents say that children are better off if a mother is home and doesn't hold a job, while just 8% say the same about a father (as cited in Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013, p. 1).

Author's Benard and Correll, (2010) maintain that parenting is a negative experience for women in the workplace but a positive one for fathers in the following statement, "Parenthood enhances the perceived interpersonal qualities of male but not female applicants. Fatherhood is a signal of positive interpersonal qualities" (p. 633). Ariana Huffington (2014) founder of the Huffington Post reflects on her own experience in motherhood and suggests, "for women with jobs and careers, taking care of themselves becomes even harder if they become mothers. In our current corporate culture, having children is often seen as a major barrier into career advancement" (p. 70). Another penalty that mothers face in the workforce is the decline in their salary after taking time off for childrearing, a term described as a leaky pipeline. The leaky pipeline is when women are penalized financially and slowed in their promotions for career breaks. Approximately 30% of a women's salary is diminished when she is out of the labor force for two to three years (Bliss, 2006; Friedman, 2006, Rose & Hartman, 2004).

Mommy tracked. According to an interview by Stone (2007) she discovered that women who first announced that they were pregnant at work wore the proverbial M on their chest that labeled them a mommy. One such women in Stone's interview went on to quote her boss as saying, "If you're going to choose to have kids, this is as far as your career is going to go, you're derailing, you're on the mommy track now" (p. 100). Other women in Stone's study mentioned that they timed announcing their pregnancies after their bonuses were paid so they would not risk losing out on their money. This experience was a common theme among several seminal authors that researched the mommy track issue that women face in the workforce. Research has shown that pregnancy is this dirty secret that women in the workforce often keep silent for as long as possible (Jacobs & Gerson 2004). Other examples of the mommy track have shown to be reminiscent of the prior generations when becoming pregnant then excluded women from being qualified for employment. Despite legislative that has banned exclusion from becoming a mother in the workplace, there is still a very real implicit law or "wall" that blocks women who have made significant advances in their career and are now being stuck behind this maternal wall and their career (Crittenden 2001).

Mothering risks. To add to the complexity of the motherhood penalty, women by most accounts, for the exception of surrogacy or adoption, physically conceive and give birth to the children. The toll that some women experience throughout their pregnancy journey is significant. Sheryl Sandberg (2013), COO at Facebook mentions in her book *Lean In* that she worked up until the very last month of her pregnancy. She goes on to mention that her pregnancy "was very difficult making it impossible to be as effective as normal...I tried writing e-mails while hovering over the toilet" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 97).

Sandberg also disclosed that her labor was very intensive and pulled a ligament during delivery leaving her unable to walk without crutches for a week after giving birth (Sandberg, 2013).

Second shift-work inside the home. Women's role inside the home also carries a unique set of demands that primarily fall on the mother's shoulders. Even with a supportive spouse, women report the majority of the child rearing, household duties, and errands land on the shoulders of women regardless if they work inside, or outside the home full-time (Riday, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). According to a recent study, married couples who both work full time report that the woman does 40% more of the child care and approximately 30% more of the household chores (Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009). The term second shift has also been researched several years earlier by Hochschild (1989) who points out the gender norm of household duties that are performed by working women who come home from their career and perform approximately an extra month of work a year. In 2009, a survey was conducted on dual earner households which found that only 9% of couples reporting sharing housework, child care, and money evenly (Hall & MacDermid, 2009). A more recent study of more than 2000 women revealed that the average work day for a mother begins at 6:30 a.m. in the morning and doesn't finish until 8:30 p.m. at night, an average of a 14-hour day or 98 hours a week (Moller, 2017).

The culmination of this double responsibility for women who carry the burden inside and outside the home leaves an imbalance in the marriage. Husbands who do not share in the household duties once home from work reinforce the imbalance of gender roles in marriage despite women's professional advances in the workforce.

Husband's career takes precedence. A major theme emerged in the research as another reason why highly educated career women experience barriers and leave the workforce- their husband's career trumps theirs. A study by Cha (2010), found that the odds of professional mothers quitting their careers is 112% more likely if their husbands work more than 60 hours per week. In addition to the extensive hours worked, finances also played a large factor in opting out. The women who most likely stayed home were those whose husband's salaries were either in the top five percent or the lowest in earnings. Lower-class mothers generally quit work because they could not afford child care and upper-class mothers while being able to afford child care often resulted in the husband's high paying job requiring them to be absent in the child rearing. This absence ultimately left working mothers the choice between having both parents working full time or at least having one parent home full time (Cotter, Hermsen, & England 2008). Another theme of relocation emerged in the reporting. If the company that the husband worked for required moving and the financial gain was worth the move, the opportunities for women to resume their career in a new town diminished (Stone, 2007).

Husband's careers played a dominant role despite the perception of an often-portrayed egalitarian marriage. This contradiction was realized when husbands voiced their support for their wives but made little or no accommodations to keep them in the workforce (Rose & Hartmann, 2004; Steil, 1997). To summarize, husbands were a factor in opting out because "their husband's career came first...they earned more money...and ultimately the husbands were unavailable" (Stone, 2007, p.78).

Opting Out-The Final Straw

Opting Out is a term to describe the experience women feel when quitting their careers in exchange for a less stressful life, increased flexibility, and balance is more appealing than going to work every day in a stressful and unfulfilling environment (Stone, 2007). Lisa Belkin (2003) who originally coined the term ‘opting out’ in an article for the New York Times, describes these women as high-achieving and highly educated but they decide to leave the workforce to spend more quality time with their families. In 2009, the Center for Work-Life Policy surveyed women with advanced degrees and found that among those who left the workforce, almost 70% mentioned that they would not have done so if their workplace offered more flexible work arrangement (as cited in Hewlett, Sherbin, & Forster, 2010).

The culmination of reasons formally mentioned lead to a common thread; lack of enjoyment, inflexibility for scheduling/time, lack of support from the workplace, and their spouse’s absence from the child rearing (Hebreard, 2010; Stone, 2007). According to a *ForbesWoman* survey, 84% of working women report that staying home to raise children is a financial luxury they aspire to (Casserly, 2012). The alternative to remain at home full time is now more appealing than the day-to-day grind in the aforementioned work environment. This trade off however did not come without an often long drawn out exit strategy. If companies had been more flexible and accommodating to the changes that come with being a parent, many women who were otherwise happy in their career would not have quit. Notably, the FMLA had the reported opposite effect on women and

kept them from returning to work instead of a “stay act” that welcomed and embraced women’s impending return (Stone, 2007) (see Figure 4 & 5).

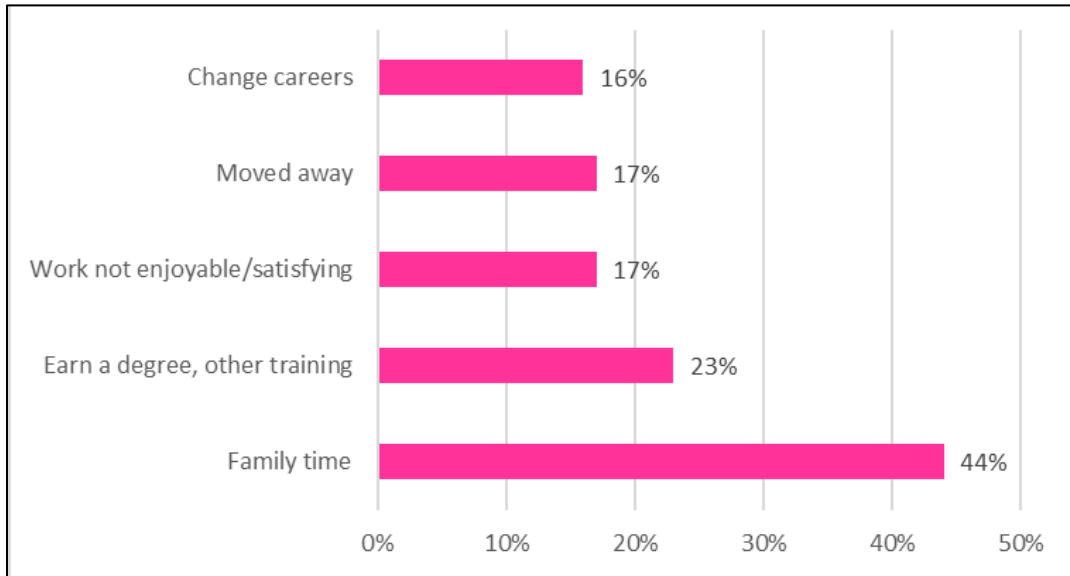


Figure 4. Top Five Reasons Women Leave the Fast Lane. Adapted from “Why Do They Leave The Fast Lane?,” by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation. 2005. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2005/03/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-keeping-talented-women-on-the-road-to-success>

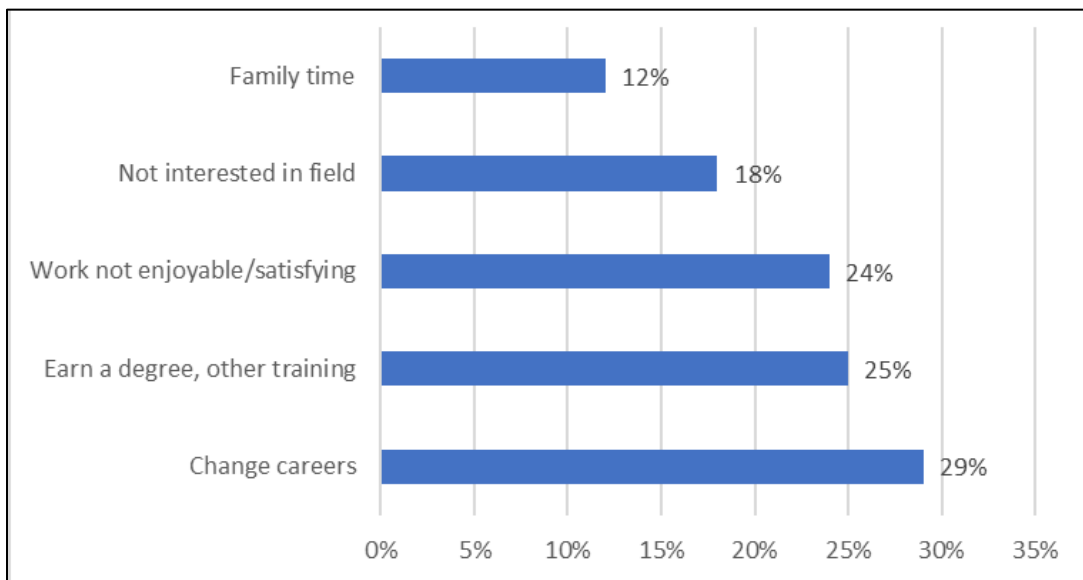


Figure 5. Top Five Reasons Men Leave the Fast Lane. Adapted from “Why Do They Leave The Fast Lane?,” by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation. 2005. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2005/03/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-keeping-talented-women-on-the-road-to-success>

A study by Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, and Saute (1999) found that high-achieving working mothers were torn by the time bind. Time oppression is an experience that many women in successful careers felt as a barrier in their career and motherhood, they could not do both successfully; something had to give. This time divide lent itself well to another example of gender inequality and one more notch in the opting out belt. In a study by the Pew Research Center, roughly one-in-ten mothers with a Master’s degree or more are staying at home. This equates to approximately 10% of all highly educated mothers who have decided to leave the workforce to care for their families full time (see Figure 6).

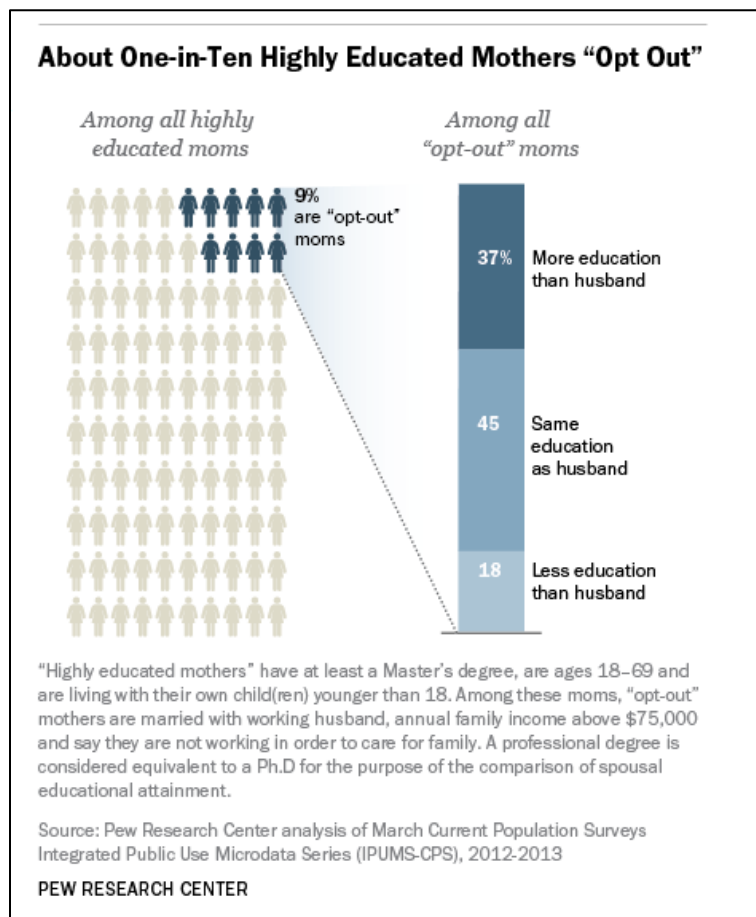


Figure 6. About One-in-Ten Highly Educated Mothers “Opt Out.” Adapted from “Opting out? About 10% of highly educated moms are staying at home,” by G. Livingston. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/07/opting-out-about-10-of-highly-educated-moms-are-staying-at-home/>

The New Stay at Home Mother

More and more women with a higher education have traded the professional arena for an opportunity to be more hands on with their young children (Rubin, 2005, Stone, 2007). The new stay at home mother may now find herself completely fulfilled and satisfied with her choice to opt out of the career world. Many former executives go on to form very meaningful lives through social networks, PTA board positions, and volunteering in social causes. The intrinsic motivation to continue to be active and involved has shown to provide women with value and meaning without the added corporate stress. For the first time in their personal lives as mothers, women are now able to better take care of themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually, they got off the symbolic hamster wheel. Stone (2007) wrote about women who take up music lessons, house projects, participate in their children's classrooms, and form very meaningful relationships with other parents. One such example was expressed in a mother's interview with Stone (2007):

I was able to pick up my son and daughter from school every day, be there when their friends came over...I noticed the first week they were very, very happy, you know, having your mother to help make decisions about what to do is different than a babysitter...In the mornings I was just getting two kids ready for school, I wasn't also getting dressed, and muttering under my breath how all my pantyhose seemed to have runs in them. I was able to focus on them, and that is so nice. (p. 135)

The unexpected domestic bliss was rewarding but, the view point however, among stay at home mother's in Stone's (2007) qualitative study was mixed with half the reactions being positive and half negative. Although their life was less chaotic trying to be the career women full time and a mother full time, some reported that drawbacks exist. Women reported that they lost both their identity and income which was a major downside remaining home full time. They worked so hard to achieve a higher education yet they lacked the contentedness with not doing more with their new role at home. One example was expressed in a quote from a former executive, *now* a stay at home mother:

And not working is a major loss of identity and status, and everything else...It was really hard. It's been two years, and I still feel kind of mixed about parts of it... advantage is life is far less stressful. It's probably easier on my husband. He's probably happier in a lot of ways...Disadvantages are my identity is not nearly what it was... I don't know if I feel as important in the world...Sometimes I wonder if my brain is slowing down. (Stone, 2007, p. 133-134)

The path of a formally educated women takes many years to develop and cultivate. That formally high achieving woman is still inside the new stay at home mother who may be constantly grappling with her new-found role in life. In another study regarding the new stay at home moms, Zimmerman (2000) reported that they did not feel accepted outside their homes, felt undervalued and that society did not respect them because they were not doing more challenging work. The author goes on to conclude that the women interviewed reported feeling high levels of stress and exhaustion, which they attributed to high expectations that were mainly self-imposed (Zimmerman, 2000).

A supporting comment in a Forbes online article wrote “The corporate world values work experience, and no matter how you spin the story about your PTA service and volunteer work, staying at home with the kids is not work experience” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 2).

Women’s study author De Marneffe (2004) acknowledges the productive change in women’s lives that has taken place because of feminism and advances in women’s rights regarding legislative. However, she has shown concern over the lack of appreciation often shown by feminists of the positive motivation to mother. De Marneffe believes the choice of educated women to have children is trivialized, stating “when educated women plan to integrate motherhood into their adult identity...conveying thoughtfulness so poignantly lacking in the pregnant teen...it is at times treated as a kind of thoughtlessness” (p. 206). De Marneffe argues that rather than devaluing women who have given up earning power, their choice to do so deserves respect. For these women, says De Marneffe, “this choice to sacrifice professional aspirations serves the important purpose of allowing them to take a vital role in raising their children” (p. 55).

The positive side for women remaining at home full time with their children as a stay at home mother is that they have the ability to schedule out their day without reprimand or permission from the outside world. There is a certain level of autonomy that is gained when a woman begins her new role at home full time. In the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul, Stay at Home Moms* (2012) over 100 stories are written by mothers and a few fathers reflecting on their time at home as the hardest yet most rewarding job in the world despite the disparaging comments from corporate America (Canfield et al., 2012) (see Figure 7).

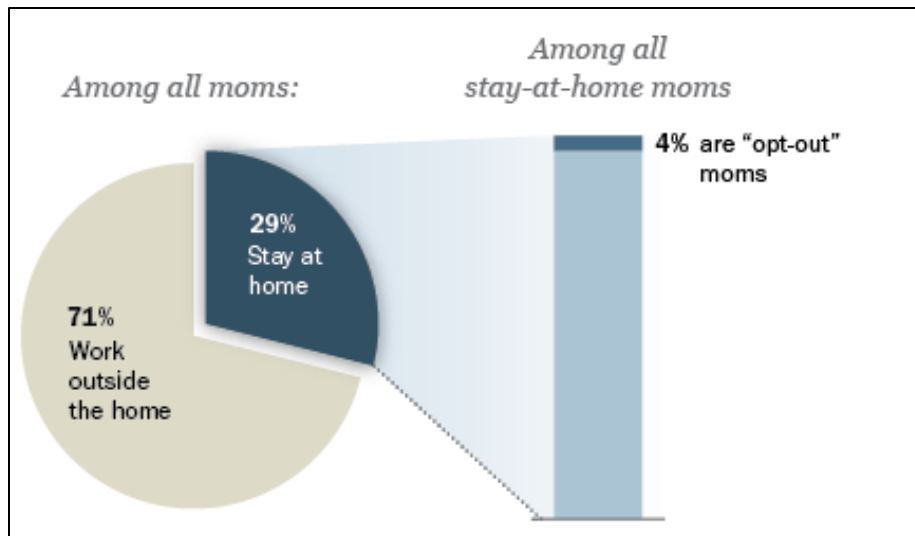


Figure 7. Highly Educated “Opt-Out” Moms Are a Small Group. Based on mothers ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household. Among these moms, “opt-out” mothers are married with a working husband, have at least a Master’s degree, have annual family incomes of \$75,000 or more, and state that they are not working in order to care for family. Adapted from “Highly Educated “Opt-Out” Moms Are a Small Group,” by Pew Research Center, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/07/opting-out-about-10-of-highly-educated-moms-are-staying-at-home/>

Intensive mothering. This specific demographic of high achieving women who opt out of the workforce also fall into the category of high achieving parent at home. These women who have worked hard in their educational and career paths now channel that same level of high expectation when it comes to raising their children. Parenting experts Rizzo, Schiffrin, and Liss (2013) wrote about five categories that define the ideologies and expectations that mothers place on themselves that qualify as an intensive parent in the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*.

- Essentialism is the feeling that mothers, over fathers, are the more “necessary and capable” parent.
- Fulfillment in parenting is defined by beliefs like “a parent’s happiness is derived primarily from their children.”

- Stimulation is the idea that, the mother should always provide the best, most intellectually stimulating activities to aid in their child's development.
- Challenging is, as you might guess, the idea that parenting is just about the most difficult job there is (participants ranked statements like, "It is harder to be a good mother than to be a corporate executive").
- And Child-Centered refers to the idea that kids' needs and wants should always come before your own.

Douglas and Michaels (2004) authors of *The Mommy Myth* examine the new trend in parenting that identifies perfection as a goal to reach that will allow mothers to have contentment in their lives. The authors however, debunk this myth and point out that the unrealistic standards that mothers place on themselves may lead to depression, unhappiness, and the realization that they cannot achieve perfection from intensive mothering.

Volunteering and non-profit career. There is a push and pull that takes place among women who vacillate in their personal and professional roles. Volunteering and achieving high level board positions at schools, non-profits, and community service organizations lesson the blow of being asked "what do you do" for work. Women have found ways to cultivate their designer education and channel it for use in many meaningful ways. Some former executive moms have written online articles about the benefits to volunteering and even describe the experience as the passing of the torch from executive mom to now classroom mom. Gross (2015) has narrowed down the top reasons that stay at home mothers should volunteer in the community with the top four being listed as: (a) using your talents, (b) your education, (c) keeping your references

updated, and (d) networking for potential future jobs. This networking has also been described as keeping the career pilot light on. According to authors Harrington and Heffernan (2014) there are several examples that volunteering can give balance between a women's former and new life. These authors went on to note:

Many stay-at-home moms work hard outside their homes for no pay. This is how our communities, our schools, and our religious organization run. But for moms with unpredictable schedules and the demands of small children, it can be a way to gain, or at least maintain, valuable work experience. Volunteers may not get paid, but they have a choice of what they do and a parent who foresees returning to work can volunteer in ways that will align with future career goals.

Volunteering need not be limited to the non-profit sector. Journalists who can no longer write to a deadline can publish on The Huffington Post, keeping their resumes current. Lawyers can take on pro bono assignments and teachers can tutor kids with limited resources. We tend to think of volunteering as moving out of the corporate world, but the two can intersect. The word "volunteer" has a very wide definition. (Harrington & Heffernan, 2014, p. 3)

Another positive contribution to being a stay at home mom has been acknowledged by Sheryl Sandberg (2013) in her book *Lean In*. Sandberg has made the conscious point to identify all the contributions that stay at home mothers provide to schools, nonprofits, and communities. She recalled a story about getting past her own notions of feeling judged by stay at home mothers and the judgements she perceived about them and to truly be appreciative for all their hard work and selfless dedication to

her son's classroom. So many people were able to benefit from those women's time and tireless unpaid work.

Stay at Home Mother's Reentry in to the Workplace-the Comeback

The 40% of women who do return to the workforce will face their own set of motivators in wanting to get back out there but, according to a study by Hewlett and Luce (2005), 93% of women studied want to rejoin the workforce, however only 5% want to return to their original employer. This overwhelmingly large percentage of women will be experiencing opting back into the workforce not only as a working mother but also in a completely new career field. In a detailed process that outlines mothers' reentry into the workforce by Ericksen et al. (2008), the mother's reentry into the workforce conceptual framework lays out six filters that contribute to the reentry process: (a) family demands, (b) support, (c) education level, (d) experience, (e) self-concept, and (f) cost vs. benefit of reentry. Those filters first begin with the five driving forces that are a catalyst to their reentry process: (a) financial, (b) environment, (c) self-image, (d) skills and abilities, and (e) interests (see Figure 8). Mothers who referred to this framework could personally apply their own motivators and lived experiences in this conceptual framework (Ericksen et al., 2008).

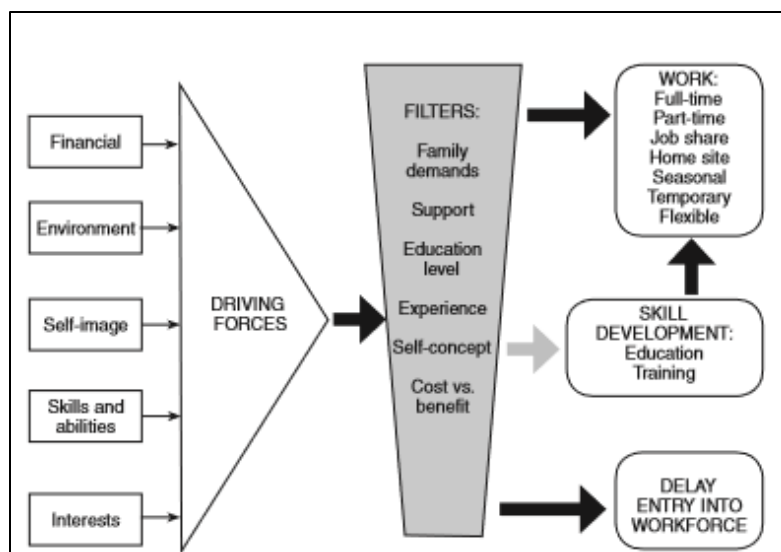


Figure 8. Mother's Reentry into the Workforce (Outside the Home) Conceptual Framework. Adapted from "Should I stay at home or should I go back to work? Workforce reentry influences on a mother's decision-making process," by K. S. Ericksen, J. C. Jurgens, M. T. Garrett, & R. B. Swedburg, 2008. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 45(4), 156-167.

This conceptual framework demonstrates the complicated steps that mothers face when looking to reenter the workforce. The mother's reentry into the workforce conceptual framework was designed as a tool to identify the specific driving forces, filters, and outcomes pertaining to women. The concept then creates a foundation for employment counseling interventions and techniques to support mothers with their reentry into the workforce. The mother's specific to this study have opted out for a variety of reasons but, what is the catalyst for their reentry? According to the SDT and Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, both theories back the argument that self-image and interests are high motivators for women to begin the path towards career reentry. The highest of levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization, which supports the mother's reentry conceptual framework's model as one of the driving forces women feel to return to work. Padula (1994) found that self-actualization and self-improvement contribute to a mother's decision to reenter the workforce. SDT focuses on the nature,

structure, and functioning of a person in action based on life events that either support or hinder people's ability to thrive through satisfaction of their basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The women that are looking to reenter the workforce with regard to intrinsic motivation are moving through the phenomenological life process (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to the results of Hewletts' (2005) focus group study, the authors discovered the women's motivation to reenter the workplace was:

A desire to give something back to society and are seeking jobs that allow them to contribute to their communities in some way... off-ramped women talked about how their time at home had changed their aspirations. Whether they had gotten involved in protecting the wetlands, supporting the local library, or rebuilding a playground, they felt newly connected to the importance of what one woman called "the work of care. (p. 6)

In the journal of employment counseling, authors Ericksen et al. (2008) have stated that, "Women's interests, skills, and abilities are strong triggers for a return to the workforce...A women's reentry support needs are different based on the amount of support she receives" (Ericksen et al., 2008, p. 161). The authors concluded that a women's driving forces are now filtered through (a) family demands, (b) education, (c) spousal support, (d) experience, and (e) self-concepts. All the filters are areas of importance when considering the reentry process. The authors also conclude that discussing these five filters in combination with the driving forces should be done with an expert career counselor to develop effective reentry strategies. The career counselor will

arguably play an invaluable role in assessing the workplace readiness and the mother's concept of herself as a mother and potentially back in the workforce.

According to Killy and Borgen (2000), women may need “assistance in understanding and validating the importance of their own needs” (p. 126) and cognitive reframing to help her envision her goal. One such career coach based in San Francisco, Wynn Burkett, designs workshops for mothers attempting to re-enter the workforce. Burkett believes one of the biggest obstacles women face when trying to reenter the workforce is the loss of confidence suggesting that, “One of the biggest fears women have is feeling obsolete, like their previous skills and experiences are no longer relevant...stay at home moms often ask themselves, ‘Do I still have what it takes to be successful in the workplace?’” (as cited in Parent, 2016, p. 1).

In an article written in *The Atlantic* by a former Harvard graduate and mother of four, Light (2013), examines the 40% of women that do return full time only to be met with current job skills that they no longer qualify for. The author suggests that corporations offer more project based work with a clear beginning and end in mind as a viable alternative to the daily grind at a desk-job.

Project-based work provides many benefits to both businesses and those re-entering. Freelancers don't hit the bottom line as hard because they aren't paid benefits. With clear project descriptions, deadlines, and compensation, more moms who may be overqualified for a position might decide that they are willing to help out with a project because it meets their needs in the short term. I am sure that many moms will even step up to do a project even at the cost of their family because the timing is only temporary. As the business and the mom work

together more, maybe a full-time job will come of it when all parties understand the value. (Light, 2013, p. 5)

The decision for women to return to the workforce is personal and based on timing and a reported intrinsic motivation to achieve accomplishments outside the home. For corporations to reap the rewards of the mother's reentry some considerations should be examined.

Strategies Women Employ to re-enter the Workforce

Experts in the career counseling field have identified many strategies to be most effective for women who begin their plan to return to the workforce. These strategies can begin the process of career reentry for a woman and assist in the next phase of a working mother's life based on seminal research (Casone, 2016; Eriksen et al., 2007, Hannon, 2013, Parent, 2017).

Strategy 1: Personal assessment. Undertaking a personal assessment which can begin with the mother's reentry to the workforce conceptual framework and hire a professional to provide career counseling and resume writing (Parent, 2017). An example from the website Apres (2017), a women's recruitment and career placement agency has posted several video clips online from women who detailed their journey back into the workforce. All the stories mentioned begin with a personal assessment of where they were in their life and what new direction they wanted to explore. These women noted that hiring a professional in the career counseling field was an invaluable asset.

Strategy 2: Workplace options. Exploring all facets of work reentry such as, volunteering, freelancing, examining your personal passions, and flexibility in the

workplace. The women who were interviewed for the book *The Comeback*, reported that they worked for non-profits and performed pro bono work while at home full time and how rewarding that experience was and how it helped shape a new passion for community service work (Keller, 2008).

Strategy 3: Networking. Networking and reaching out to alumni associations, former colleagues, and online social networks, community job fairs. Another example from the women's agency Apres (2017), involved an attorney who found herself at home for eight years. She did pro bono work part time but when she was ready to transition back into the workforce full time networking was her number one suggestion to other mothers looking to on-ramp their careers. This mother describes her experience by saying she wouldn't end a conversation without a new name or lead to follow up with. This strategy paid off and she was able to effectively return to work through her networking efforts.

Strategy 4: Updating your hard skills. Updating education, hard skills, technology efficiency, and computer skills. Another example from the book *The Comeback* involved one mother's description of her experience getting back into the workforce by going back to school. Her passion was with children and she wanted to be an occupational therapist. The university she applied to had a program that she could qualify for to get her teaching credentials and begin the process of a new career path. After completing the program, this mother went on begin her new career working with children and living her passion (Keller, 2008).

Strategy 5: Resume overhaul. Revise and recreate a resume that highlights soft skills, volunteer work, committee obligations, and updating credentials and participating

in pro bono community work. That strategy women utilize in beginning their career transition is by recreating a resume that reflects their work at home as a productive experience. One suggestion from a head hunting agency was to create a consulting firm while you are working as a stay at home mother to highlight all the volunteer work that was done during their time at-home. This strategy legitimizes all the efforts, volunteer hours, and community work that was performed (Robinson, 2016).

There are several ways in which women can harness their self-determination and get back to finding what motivates them. In order to achieve that result, research has suggested utilizing the support available from companies that “specifically focus on back-to-work moms to organizations that offers skill-building “enternships” which is essentially an internship for entering back into the workforce for women of all ages” (Santos, 2016, p. 1).

Karen Steele, career coach and creator of the Passion Shift, teaches a seven-step program for women offering strategies to help them find the passion in their life and create a life that has more balance and freedom. Steele, went on to mention that “women don’t want to go back the high-powered, high-stress job they had before kids” (as cited in Parent, 2017, p. 2). Steele professes it is imperative that women consider all aspects of their intrinsic motivation and career goals when they begin the reentry process (as cited in Parent, 2017).

The idea to get mothers to return to the workforce has also gained momentum with various head hunter agencies such as The Mom Project, which specializes in placing women in short-term project based assignments that offer the flexibility to work from

home and/or choose hours of work (Robinson, 2016). Corporations have also adopted strategies to encourage stay at home mothers back to the workforce (Kwoh, 2013).

Goldman Sachs is one example of a company who in 2008 designed a program coined the “returnship” aimed at getting people transitioned back into work. The company described the experience as “A unique way for the firm to develop talented individuals who, after an extended absence from the workforce, are seeking to re-start their careers” (Goldman Sachs, 2008. p. 1).

Qualities and Skills Stay at Home Mothers Acquire

Many researchers and career specialists convey that the skills educated women acquire while at home have added to their qualification to reenter the workplace (Casone, 2016; Keller, 2008; Stone, 2007). While some suggested these are considered soft skills, Allison Kelley, Founder and CEO of MomCorps, suggests that women should not undermine and sell themselves short, she mentions that, “It is possible to find a company that will value your previous work experience and what you’ve learned during your time out of the workforce” (as cited in Parent, 2016, p. 4).

As Light (2013) mentioned in her online article in The Atlantic:

Soft skills are a positive qualifier for employment. Consider the management, negotiation, budgeting skills we gained in our years out of the workforce and the skills that many of us never lost. Highly qualified parents could do strategic analysis, build financial models, write legal briefs or PR pieces, generate blog posts or plan corporate conferences. (p. 5)

According to several business networking groups and career advice books women

have accomplished many work relevant skills while at home which qualify them for career reentry. The skills have been identified as: (a) organizational leadership, (b) proficient planner and organizer, (c) key decision maker, (d) communication skills, (e) budget and time management, (f) teacher, and (g) chair or committee member to name a few (Casone, 2016; Lawrence, 2015; Raye, 2013).

Ruiz (2016) interviewed a mother who opted back into the workforce through Morgan Stanley's return to work program providing an example of a woman who used her newly acquired skill set to gain access back into the workplace. Galvin Casey's time as a stay-at-home mom wasn't a weakness, but a secret weapon. Despite an 11-year gap on her resume, Casey who has an MBA from Duke was offered a Vice President position in the wealth management division. According to Casey she learned:

Years of caring for children and elderly parents was the perfect preparation for project management at the fourth-largest investment bank in the world...It's a lot of juggling. It's a lot of putting ducks in a row, marshaling resources, pushing people in directions they perhaps don't want to go...Anyone with teenagers knows exactly what I'm talking about. (as cited in Ruiz, 2016, para. 4)

Qualities and Skills Employers Desire

The qualities and skills employers desire in the workplace have been reported to be but not limited to: (a) vision, (b) competence, (c) integrity, and (e) good judgement (Fallon, 2014) (see Figure 9). According to a 2014 CareerBuilder survey, an overwhelmingly high response for soft-skills was reported as just as important as hard skills, 77% to be exact. The national survey was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder from February 10 to March 4, 2014, and included a

representative sample of 2,138 hiring managers and human resource professionals across industries and company sizes. These findings are consistent with the skills that stay at home mothers have acquired while working from inside the home (Canfield et al., 2012).

Rosemary Haefner, Vice President of Human Resources at CareerBuilder reports that:

Along with responsibilities, it's important to highlight soft skills that can give employers an idea of how quickly you can adapt and solve problems, whether you can be relied on to follow through and how effectively you can lead and motivate others. (as cited in CareerBuilder, 2014, para. 3)

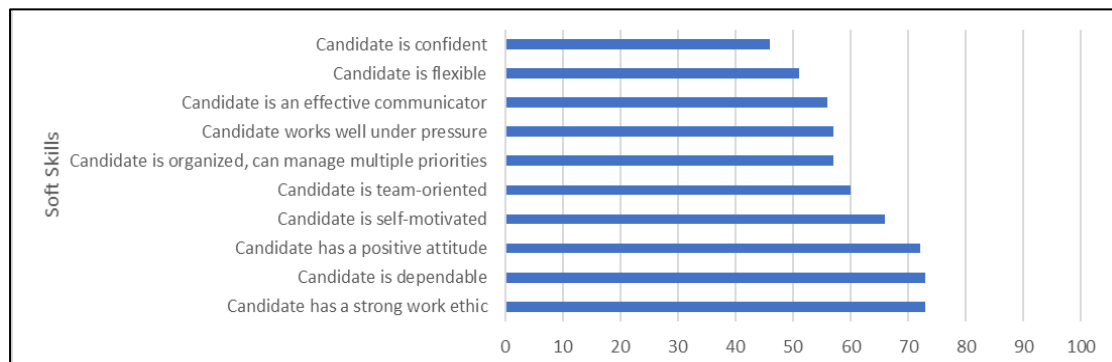


Figure 9. The top 10 most popular soft skills companies say they look for when hiring. Data reflects the percent of respondents that deem the soft skill import. Adapted from “Harris Poll,” by CareerBuilder, 2014. Copyright CareerBuilder, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?ed=12/31/2014&id=pr817&sd=4/10/2014>

These soft skills combined with the stay at home mother’s higher education, former work experience and future career counseling will arguably make for an ideal candidate that is looking to reenter the workforce. Table 3 displays the cross references soft-skills that employer’s desire with the skills stay at home mothers possess based on current research and references from seminal works.

Table 3

Top 10 Professional Career Qualifiers for the Stay at Home Mother

CareerBuilder Expectations	Stay at Home Mother Soft Skills
Strong Work Ethic	Stamina of a 15-hour work day, planning and maintaining strict schedules of children, homework, laundry, cooking, cleaning (Moller, 2017).
Dependable	Primary goal is child-rearing and fulfilling the day to day needs of dependent children (Ray, 2013)
Positive Attitude	Keep the household running in a positive setting. Main provider of examples of positivity and positive reinforcement (Stone, 2007)
Self-Motivated	The day-to-day grind of running the household lies in the intrinsic motivation of the mother to create the example of success (Ryan & Desi, 2017)
Team-Oriented	Mother's relationship with the children begins inside the home with modeling and sharing with siblings. Building positive relationships through playgroups and social interactions with other parents and children (Zimmerman, 2000).
Organized	The household's organization is a priority for the effective and smooth running of the day-to-day responsibilities inside and outside the home. An organized home results in accomplishing the many tasks the intensive parent tackles throughout the day. The more children the mother has, the more her priorities are stretched to meets the children's needs.
Works well under pressure	Stay at home mothers operate on a very strict timeline throughout the day that requires them to make many crucial decisions that may affect the wellbeing of her children. Their safety and health lies in the mother's hands and dangerous situations must be handled in a split-second.
Effective communicator	The mother is the model for learning to speak, communicate clearly and effectively throughout the day to keep the household thriving along with negotiation and compromise to resolve conflicts that may arise.
Flexibility	Mother's at-home full time must be a flexible throughout the day. Children have temper tantrums, become sick, bathing, feeding, sleeping, diaper changes, and toilet training can happen at any time. The mother's flexibility is crucial to be able to adapt to an environment that may change on a moment's notice.
Confident	The running of a household full-time through the day requires that the primary caregiver is someone who can handle the 15-hour on average workday. Confidence is a necessity when you are the primary leader of the household.

Note. Adapted from “The Comeback. How Today’s Moms Reenter the Workplace Successfully,” by C. Casone, 2016. Copyright by Portolio/Penguin; “4 Leadership Qualities Employers Look For,” by N. Fallon, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.Businesnewsdaily.com/5699-leadership-job-qualifications.html>; “6 Ways stay-at-Home Moms an Keep the Pilot Light on Under Their Careers,” by M. D. Harrington & L. E. Heffernan, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/grown-and-flown/six-ways-stayathomemoms-careers_b_4252150.html; “Study Finds Mom Work 98 - Hours a Week,”

(continued)

by K. Moller, 2017. Retrieved from workingmother.com; “Stay at Home Mom: 8 Essential Skills you can Take Back to the Workforce,” by J. Ray, 2013. Retrieved from <https://brandredresume.com/2013/10/21/8-essential-skills-of-sahm/>; “Insight into the Parenthood Paradox; Mental Health Outcomes of Intensive Mothering,” by K. M. Rizzo, H. H. Schiffrin, and M. Liss, 2013, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 22(5), 614-620, doi 10.1007/s10826-012-9615-z ; “Self-Determination Theory. Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness,” by M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, 2017. Copyright by The Guilford Press.; “Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Their Careers,” by P. Stone, 2007. Copyright by University of California Press.; “Marital Equality and Satisfaction in Stay-at-Home Mother and Stay-at-Home Father Families,” by T. S. Zimmerman, *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 22(3) 337-354.

Increased empathy in the workplace. Women in the workplace, in particular the mothers in this research have reported that empathy is a crucial skill that they gained while at home full time that has positively affected their performance in the workforce. According to Gentry, Weber, and Sadri (2007), empathy in the workplace is a crucial soft skill for effective leadership. They went on to note that empathy is a skill that can be learned and improved on but, having empathy is not the same thing as demonstrating empathy. Conveying empathic emotion is defined as the ability to understand what others are feeling (Duan, 2000; Duan & Hill, 1996; Goleman, 2006). The authors expanded further that empathy is the ability to actively share emotions with others, and passively experiencing the feelings of others (Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2006) in order to be effective. Authors Gentry et al., (2007) went on to define empathy in the workplace as:

- Is sensitive to signs of overwork in others.
- Shows interest in the needs, hopes, and dreams of other people.
- Is willing to help an employee with personal problems.
- Conveys compassion toward them when other people disclose a personal loss.

Dr. Simone Ahuja, an innovation expert, noted that empathy is a feminine trait you should maximize at work (as cited in Rezvani, 2014). Ahuja was quoted in an article featured in Forbes magazine by Rezvani, (2014) stating:

Women tend to have greater empathy than men, a key innovation competency in their approach to problem solving. Empathy helps them to be truly user-centric and focused on whether there is a real value-add in the solutions they are providing - and to remove assumptions, an innovation killer. (p. 1)

Women's Return to the Workplace

The final piece to a women's full circle journey is their return to the workplace. The unique attributes that educated women who left the workforce to stay home and then reenter the workforce is complex and worth exploring to have a better understanding of their individual set of skills. This area is the final stage in the comeback and the positive reinvention of women both personally and professionally.

Forty percent of educated women who leave their workplace to stay at home with their children effectively reenter the workforce (Light, 2013). The literature suggests that stay at home mothers who once had successful careers are employing specific strategies and developing new skills that enable them to reenter the workplace once deciding to return. These women now hold valuable knowledge and understanding as to how their return was accomplished. Their insight and guidance offered towards those women who are interested in reentering the workplace could be an invaluable asset that women can reference and apply to their own comeback experience.

Summary

Women throughout history in America have proven to be not only resilient but leaders in their careers and in their homes. Women's personal and professional lives have been compared to a jungle gym with on-ramps and off-ramps. The penalties women pay for those off-ramps are loss of a paid professional wage however, their time at-home raising their children is a priceless and personal experience. The on-ramping process for stay at home mothers who formerly had careers begins by employing specific strategies that enable them to reenter the workplace. The new soft skills that they developed at home coupled with self-determination to reenter the workforce is a potent combination that meets the needs of today's professional qualifications. The women who have returned to the workforce now hold valuable knowledge and understanding as to how their on-ramp was accomplished. Their insight and guidance offered towards those mothers who are interested in reentering the workplace could be an invaluable asset that women in the future can reference and apply to their own comeback experience.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The current qualitative phenomenological study will shed light on women's reentry into the workplace process and the impact that women's at-home skills had on their effectiveness once returning to the workplace. By interviewing the research problem directly from the lived experiences of former stay at home mothers who transitioned back into the workplace, women and businesses can learn from their knowledge. Through qualitative interviews, society may begin to understand the positive impact women's reentry into the workplace has on the economy *and* within their homes.

Chapter II discussed the methodology used for this study and the supporting research questions. This chapter begins with the design of the research, identifies the population and study sample. This chapter further details the development of the instrument used to collect the interview data and concerns about validity and reliability are addressed. Additionally, this chapter presents the limitation of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

Research Question

This study was guided by one central research question and five research sub-questions:

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother?

Research Sub-Question

1. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in an educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?
2. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?
3. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce?
4. What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?
5. What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?

Research Design

There are three types of research that can be conducted for research: (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative, or the (c) combination of the two-mixed methods. In order to come to a conclusion as to what research design is appropriate, the researcher needs to consider what exactly are the results they are looking measure (Patten, 2014).

Quantitative research is when the researcher is looking to measure variables; independent and dependent and the relationship between the variables. According to Patten (2014), “Quantitative research is presented as quantities or numbers (i.e., statistics). Quantitative researchers tend to select large samples to use as participants. Quantitative researchers are able to work with large samples because they are easier to administer” (p. 19). Quantitative inquiry *does* make a prediction about the end result of the research. There is a hypothesis about what the data is going to reflect via the statistical analysis.

Quantitative research uses instruments such as surveys, questionnaires, and measures numbers instead of words. Here the researcher crunches the numbers to get an answer that will either support or reject the hypothesis of the study. There is more anonymity to the study since the subjects are not personally interviewed and the research is more based on theory that will in the end yield a statistical report.

It is appropriate to use qualitative research when the researcher is looking to delve deep and explore meaning in people’s experiences. The researcher will explore the *what* and *how* in the questions by way of personal interviews, observations, fieldwork, and documents. According to Patten (2014), “Qualitative inquiry studies, documents, analyzes, and interprets how human beings construct and attach meanings to their experiences. Interviews and observations reveal those meanings and their implications” (Patten, 2014, p. 13).

In addition to exploring the what and the how, qualitative inquiry does not generally make a prediction about the end result of the research. There is no hypothesis about what the data is going to reflect via the interviews and observations.

Along with qualitative and quantitative research, mixed method approach is a mix of the two forms of research that not only works with the interviews and the personal approach to research but, utilizes the numbers and statistical results to support their data. “Mixed methods yield both statistics and stories” (Patton, 2015, p. 8).

Method

Qualitative design was chosen to be the most appropriate research approach for this study. To gather the data, a phenomenological perspective will be the best method for the type of research that is needed to collect data from the women in the study. This method is described as, “Phenomenology aims at gaining deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences...” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). The way in which the data was gathered was through a series of one-on-one interviews in person or via video chat. The one-on-one interviews were based on the criteria the samples met for the study. Techniques to ensure good qualitative questions included a field test that was conducted first, interview script critiques, and revisions as needed to get to the final phase and approved questions (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Rationale

The rationale for this study was based on the request for the information that was necessary to formulate insight from the sample of women interviewed. The approach required the interviewer to carefully capture and describe how women perceived their lived experience as a mother who effectively transitioned back into the workplace. According to, Adams (2008), “phenomenology is interested in recovering the living moment of the now...showing how our words, concepts, and theories always shape (distort) and give structure to our experiences as we live them” (pp. 616-617). It is also

imperative to mention that phenomenological research is aimed at capturing the participants own experience from their words. The research problem was the main focus of the interview to get at the heart of the issue and deduct what is the participants meaning of the event (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Population

A population is the total group that the sample is generalized from (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The study population consisted of educated women who have a bachelor's degree or higher in the United States and were employed in a career prior to leaving the work place to raise their children. These educated women then decided to reenter the workplace after typically one to 10 years serving as a stay at home mother. The opting out and opting back into a career is a generalized experience for women but it is the goal of this study to narrow down the population of women in order to gather information on their personal experience and life lessons from transitioning back into the workforce.

Target Population

Creswell (1998) states that the target population is the "actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected" (p. 393). The target population for this study consisted of educated career women with a minimum bachelor's degree who reside in the United States. Their age is between the 30 and 45 years old. The women had been in the career field prior to leaving the workforce and have at least one child under the age of 15. They were a stay at home mother for a minimum of one year. They have since reentered the workforce for a minimum of one year and are working in an environment that is a paid position outside the home within the United States.

Sample

A sample is defined as the “group of individuals from whom data are collected from within the target population” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). This is the group of participants in the study selected from the target population. The sample population consisted of 12 women. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. The ideal amount will be 12 women who meet the criteria for identifying the answers in the research problem. Purposeful sampling will help the researcher obtain the desired number of participants by selecting particular criteria from the population based on the information relative to the research topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The weaknesses however from purposeful sampling is the results are dependent on unique characteristics of the sample, the identified population is less represented, and finally it is difficult to generalize to other subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample population was taken from contacting women from specialty websites that were specifically dedicated to women’s career reentry as well as word of mouth requests which led to a snow ball referral effect. These agencies were located in the Midwest and East Coast regions of the United States. Reentry women had posted their testimonies regarding their reentry experience and subsequently their names were posted on the agencies website. After reading their testimonies and verifying their criteria for the study the subjects were sent a request from the researcher via LinkedIn to accept an invitation to connect with the researcher. Once the subjects accepted the request, the next step in communication began via personal email. The personal referrals were contacted the same way using email and telephone to

schedule an appointment time to conduct the interview. Those personally referred subjects lived in Southern California.

Sample Subject Selection Process

The sample subject selection process began after approval from the Brandman University Institution Review Board (BUIRB) (see Appendix A). Once approval had been obtained and following with the Brandman IRB Policy Regarding Solicitation of Research Participants via Electronic Communication, the women that met the sampling criteria were contacted via LinkedIn or telephone and sent an email invitation explaining the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). The sampling process began to have a snowball sampling effect, subjects who agreed to communicate voluntarily began to refer other mother's that met the reentry criteria to the researcher via email. Since the purpose of the research was to describe the lived experiences of women who opted back into the workforce, the women who met the criteria for the study were kept to a small sample size to ensure detailed rich interviews that would yield narratives of their lived experiences of being a professional working mother. The following process was used to select the women for the interviews:

1. An inquiry was placed online to several career reentry websites and LinkedIn in the United States requesting a conversation to discuss the purpose of the research study.
2. Once a LinkedIn request was accepted, an email was sent as a follow up that contained the research purpose.
3. Women in the United States who met the selection criteria were identified with the help of snowball sampling and personal referrals.

4. After the 12 women participants were selected using purposeful sampling, participants were contacted via phone and e-mail by the researcher. An appointment date was then scheduled with an approximate time and location for the interview to take place. Pending the proximity to the researcher, an adobe connect link was set up to conduct the interview via an online if meeting face to face was too difficult.
5. The participants were then sent their confirmation date, time, and location of the interview as well as their: Formal Invitation Letter, Research Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix C), Informed Consent Form (to be signed in person or via DocuSign) (see Appendix D), Audio/Video Release Form (see Appendix E), Interview Script (see Appendix F) and Interview Questions (see Appendix G).

Instrumentation

Researcher as an Instrument of the Study

The purpose of gathering qualitative data relies on the researcher as the actual instrument in the study. When piloting qualitative research, the researcher is known as the instrument (Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015). Due to the researcher being the instrument in a qualitative study, Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) contended that the unique personality, characteristics, and interview techniques of the researcher may influence how the data is collected. As a result, the study may contain some biases based on how the researcher influenced the interviewee during the qualitative interview sessions.

The main instrument used in this study was the researcher by using standardized open-ended interview questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). For this study, the researcher was directly asking the questions from a detailed script in order to elicit the responses based on the lived experiences of women who reentered the workforce. The questions and responses were recorded by the researcher and then transcribed from a secure and confidential professional transcriptionist. The final question was recorded vocally and visually using a video camera in an attempt to capture the emotion and tone in voice as well as facial expressions. The final question from the script asked participants to provide a personal reflection of their lived experiences during the transition process offering recommendations to other career women who are attempting to reenter the workplace after an extended period of serving as a stay at home mother. Researchers use video primarily to “gather data ‘rich nonverbal cues’ to stimulate critical reflection rather than as a way to collect observational data or descriptions of phenomena” (Tobin & Hsueh, 2009, p. 77).

The interview consisted of two phases. The first involved verbal scripted questions that related to the subject’s soft skills acquisition, experience at home, and catalyst in motivation for career reentry. The second phase included the video camera to capture the lived stories of the subjects telling their reentry experience based on Research Question 5 which asked for recommendations to future mother’s looking to reenter the workforce. All 12 of the interviews were conducted with in the United States.

Women’s Career Reentry Experience

The interview questions were designed to link a connection between the custom designed interview questions and the soft skills matrix that was designed to match the

Career Builder qualifications that employers seek. The literature review was tailored in a way to guide the reader in a chronological order of events of the lived experiences of women. The final stage of the research ends with the eventual goal of career reentry and reflections about that process. The literature review highlighted the many agencies and opportunities available for women who are looking to reenter the workforce. However, the gap in the literature was noted when there was very little feedback directly from the women who had already made the career reentry happen and what if any soft skills they gained at home matched the top 10 career qualifiers from Career Builder's study.

Validity

In this qualitative study, validity refers to "the degree of congruence between the explanation of the phenomena and the realities of the world" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). The definition goes on to infer that the researcher is hearing what they are supposed be hearing, seeing what they are really seeing, "validity of qualitative design is the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meaning between the participants and the researcher" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). To have validity for this study, the researcher and the subjects were in agreement over the results of the interview answers to ensure the interpretation was correct. The second part included providing the subject with a copy of the videotaped portion of the interview to ensure accuracy and transparency.

Criterion Validity

The criteria that the interviewer established when beginning the research was based on several areas:

1. The subject would have to be a female and a mother.

2. The age of their child was under 15 years old.
3. The subject had a minimum of a bachelor's degree.
4. The subject had been back in the workforce for a minimum of one year.
5. The subject was out of the workforce for a minimum of one year.

Content Validity

The interview questions were developed with the collaboration of the expert review panel and dissertation chair. Questions were developed based on relevant literature and results from the literature review tailored to address the research questions. The subjects were given the questions and definitions in advance so that they were familiar with the terms and expectations of the interview. This also allowed the subject to have a clear expectation of what the interview was going to entail and prior understanding of these terms ensured comprehension of the interview questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Expert Panel

An expert panel was assembled to review and refine interview questions to ensure they aligned with the research purpose statement. Three expert panel members were selected based on having experience using qualitative research design, known in the professional arena for their expertise in women's studies and have demonstrated their knowledge of women's issues through formal presentations or publications on the subject. These individuals reviewed the interview questions and validated the purpose of the interview questions was in alignment with the purpose statement and five sub-research questions. The expert panel was also used to safeguard against any bias from the researchers own experience as a stay at home mother.

Expert 1. The first member of the expert panel was qualified to review the study based on over 20 years of professional experience. This expert panel member was as an elementary, middle, and high school teacher who later went onto become a principal. The expert also advanced in her career by becoming an Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent in California and Hawaii and has served on many dissertations related to women's issues. She is well known throughout the professional world for mentoring women leaders to advance in their careers.

Expert 2. The second member of the expert panel is a former doctoral candidate who completed his dissertation through Brandman University. He was well versed in the qualifications needed to be on the expert panel and provided rich feedback on the instrumentation. The member also has a back ground in women's studies and is familiar with the theme of this dissertation and was personally recommended to participate in this study.

Expert 3. This third expert panel member is a proven leader who advocates change, continuous improvement and team building. In addition to her B.S. in Environmental/Occupational Science, she also holds an MBA and received her Doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Brandman University. The focus of her research was on women in the workforce, gender, chemistry, and communication. Dr. Scharpenberg complements her well-rounded industry experience and strong educational background with a leadership vision that is grounded in the belief that three key elements: (a) quality, (b) client satisfaction, and (c) employee satisfaction, ultimately lead to organizational success.

Pilot Interview

The goal of the pilot interview was to allow a test run of the interviewer and volunteer subject to be able to be better prepared to conduct the formal recorded interviews. This pilot test also allowed for any updates and corrections to be made to the interview questions.

The participant for the pilot test was a woman who had been referred to the researcher based on her qualifying criteria. She was someone with whom the study and literature review referenced and identified with as an opt-back in mother. This volunteer was able to provide a realistic setting for the interview to take place. The pilot interview was conducted online via a GoTo video conference which included the use of the audio recording devices as well as the video recording device for the last question. The researcher referenced the feedback instrument forms provided by Brandman University to further delve into analysis and critique of the interviewing process (see Appendix H and I). The researcher was able to gather rich feedback from these instruments to be better equipped for the 12 formal interviews from the sample subjects.

Reliability

According to Patten (2014) “A test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results” (p. 83). The consistency in the research study was maintained by the researcher who asked the exact same questions in each interview and maintained consistency in tone, manners, and data collection. The interviewer also made sure to understand reflexivity which according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) involved the interviewer to do a self-examination of themselves and “self-scrutiny” by the researcher in qualitative interviews. Qualitative research “depends to a great extent on the

interpersonal skills of the inquirer, such as building trust, maintaining good relations, being nonjudgmental, and respecting the norms of the situation” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 332).

Patton (2015) has designed a figure that may help the researcher in their reflexive questions in order to establish reliability (see Figure 10). The researcher in study asked one of the expert panel members to audit the process of the interview, questions, and collection of the data.

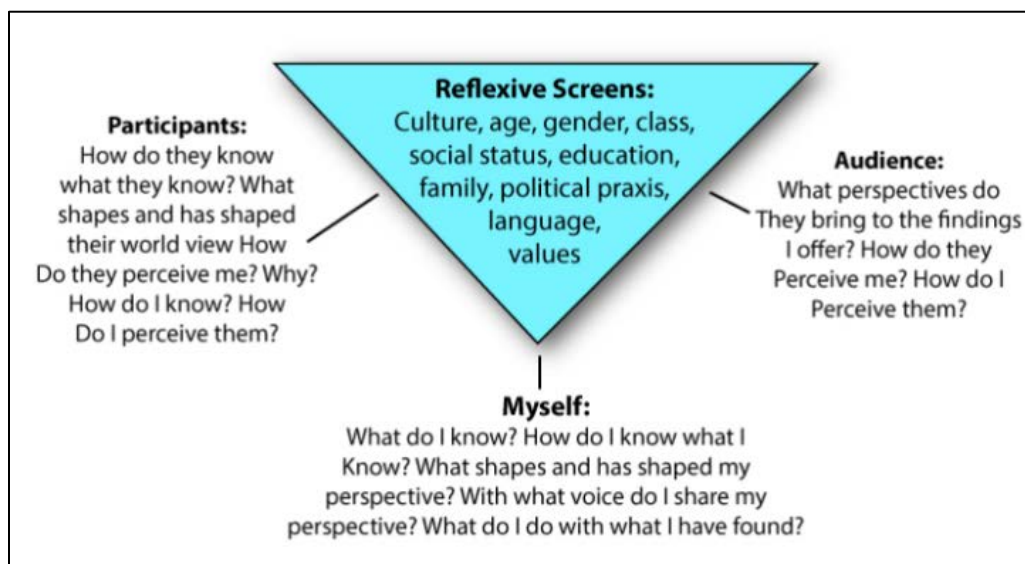


Figure 10. Reflexive Questions: Triangulated Inquiry. Adapted from “Qualitative research and evaluation methods (4th ed.),” p. 72, by M. Patton, 2015. Retrieved from Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Internal Reliability of Data

Internal reliability of the data was ensured through triangulation, and mechanically recorded data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The purpose of Triangulation is to test for consistency in the interview questions and responses (Patton, 2002). Participants were given the option to review their transcripts to ensure the accuracy and no misinterpretations were made in the themes that emerged. In addition to triangulating the data the interviews were mechanically recorded using a tape recorder,

laptop recording device, as well as a video camera for the last question of the interview. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “tape recorders...and videotapes provide accurate and relatively complete records” (p. 331). According to Jewitt (2012), video provides a fine-grained multimodal record of an event detailing gaze, expression, body posture, and gesture. It is a sharable, malleable digital record in which all modes are recorded sequentially... video recording has enabled the expansion of the repertoire of researchers. (para. 1)

These checks in the reliability were provided to create an atmosphere that was not biased and easily provided accuracy in the interview.

Inter-coder Reliability

Researchers and transcribers can get to the conclusion and accuracy of the data through inter-coder reliability. This process ensures code consistency in the research (Lombardi, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2010). The process consisted of a collaboration with one of the expert panel members who were familiar with the study as went as followed:

1. The researcher established a process to code the data from the interviews.
2. The researcher then made notes as to possible themes that emerged. This began as data segments which is one idea, a piece of important information, it is “usually one to three sentences long” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371).
3. The researcher made further notes and processed potential meaning behind the themes that related to the interview questions. The segments were then turned

into codes. “A code is a name or phrase that is used to provide meaning to the segment” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371).

4. The qualitative data was then analyzed using the software NVivo to code the interview questions based. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), it is important to let the codes emerge on their own. Typically, qualitative data has “30-50 initial codes” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371).
5. The researcher then collaborated with the expert panel member to verify the codes were consistent with those of the researcher. Appropriate corrections were made if the inconsistencies were identified.
6. The researcher then finalized the agreed upon themes and continued with the analysis.

Human Subject Considerations

Before the collection of any data, the qualitative research design and interview strategies were approved by the BUIRB to ensure the rights and confidentiality of the subjects in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Next a formal invitation was delivered to the 12 subjects who had been selected based on their qualifying criteria for the study. This invitation included a detailed description of what the study was going to entail as well as the intended purpose of the research. Once the participants received their invitation they were then provided/emailed an electric copy of Brandman University Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. The final step included providing the participants with:

1. An informed consent that included the formal title and purpose of the research study.

2. A description of the study's procedure, risks and benefits.
3. Permission to use an audio recorder for all the questions.
4. Permission to use a video recorder for the last question.
5. Option to review the transcription.
6. Option to receive a copy of the video recording.

Once these steps of the consent forms were completed a copy was provided to the subject and the original forms were then contained in a locked box with a password-protected entry in the personal office of the researcher. This ensured confidentiality and the safety of the subject's information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection was based on Patton's (2015) idea that "we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe and to understand what we've observed" (p. 426). The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover and learn about the lived experiences of women who left their careers to stay at home with their children followed by their career reentry process. The interviewer was the instrument in this qualitative study which provided the platform for data collection. In addition, videotaped recordings were conducted on the last question to add depth and richness to the personal experience being documented.

The qualitative data that was used for this study was either a face to face interview or an interview via adobe connect online. The purpose was to describe the lived experiences of women who opted back into the workforce. The interviews were scripted and approved by the expert panel prior to the first interview. According to

Patton (2002), qualitative data is used to describe a place in time or that person's life so we know what their experience was like.

Interviews

The data that was received from the face to face and the adobe connect interviews contained professionally transcribed notes from an approved transcriptionist through Brandman University. The format of the scripted interview questions was based on the five research sub-questions:

1. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?
2. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?
3. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce?
4. What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?
5. What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?

In order to gather data on the five research sub-questions, the interviewer constructed a complete list of interview questions that were approved of by the expert panel and dissertation chair. The phenomenological basis for this research required the

researcher to ask open-ended questions that would allow the subject to answer in their own words and version their experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To add richness to the response of the last question, a video recorder was implemented to document and code the response in a way that transcends the voice recorded version. However, this video was limited to only one question based on a “common limitation in video data is that it can lead to the collection of large amounts of rich data. This can be overwhelming and, if not managed appropriately, can also lead to overly descriptive and weak analysis” (Jewitt, 2012, p. 6).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was based on qualitative research that deducts codes, themes, patterns, and then explores the lived experiences and phenomenon of the subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The researcher can move through these steps organically to interpret the data for analysis.

Data Coding Process

The data coding began as a large scope process and then worked its way down to a smaller more defined version of what the data revealed. The way in which the themes emerged was an organic process of narrowing down the data. The data was professionally transcribed as well as the video recording of the last interview question. The video codes were a separate process that not only checked for themes in the worded answers but non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and emotion.

The data was then formatted for coding by using the software program NVivo that specializes in organizing qualitative data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), it is important to let the codes emerge on their own. Typically, qualitative data

has “30-50 initial codes” (p. 371). The researcher then collaborated with the expert panel to verify the codes were consistent with the researchers. Appropriate corrections were made if the inconsistencies were identified. The last step was researcher then finalized the agreed upon themes and continued with the analysis.

Analysis

The data was compiled in two forms, the audio-recorded version as well as the video recorded version. The researcher then made notes as to possible themes that emerged. This began as data segments which is one idea, a piece of important information, it is “usually one to three sentences long” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371). The researcher then made further notes and processed potential meaning behind the themes that related to the interview questions. The segments were then turned into codes. “A code is a name or phrase that is used to provide meaning to the segment” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371).

The data analysis considered any themes that arose from the segments from women’s transition back into the workforce. The emergent themes considered were: career relevant soft skills, internal motivation, self-determination, current career success associated with skills acquired at home and future recommendations.

Limitations

Qualitative research is subjective in nature and can lend itself to certain limitations. In the book *The Dissertation Journey*, the author notes that limitations occur as something that may negatively affect your study and the final results (Roberts, 2010).

Time

This study had certain limitations based on the time constraints of the subject's availability as well as the researcher's. Some of the interviews had to take into consideration a three-hour time zone difference, personal commitments, as well the blocking out the specific time for the interview.

Researcher as Instrumentation of Study

The interviewer was the instrument in this qualitative study which will provide the platform for data collection but also take into consideration any biases that may lead to a misinterpretation of the data. The purpose of gathering qualitative data relies on the researcher as the actual instrument in the study (Patton, 2002). The main instrument used in this study was standardized open-ended interview questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). For this study, the researcher directly asked the questions from a detailed script in order to elicit the responses based on the lived experiences of women who reentered the workforce. In addition, the researcher personally reached out to potential subjects and kept in mind the importance of developing trust and common ground with these individuals before the research began.

Videography

The video recording was limited to only one question based on a "common limitation in video data is that it can lead to the collection of large amounts of rich data. This can be overwhelming and, if not managed appropriately, can also lead to overly descriptive and weak analysis" (Jewitt, 2012, p. 6). Researchers use video primarily to "gather data 'rich nonverbal cues' to stimulate critical reflection rather than as a way to collect observational data or descriptions of phenomena" (Tobin and Hsueh, 2009, p. 77).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother. This study was phenomenological in nature and sought to explore the lived experiences of 12 women who met the criteria for the research study. The purpose of the qualitative methodology was to provide an environment that would elicit truthful responses from the subjects in order to gather data. The interviews would then be analyzed to find clues in the data that would tell their personal story. It was the role of the researcher to follow Brandman University protocol and confidentiality methods when conducting the research. The following Chapter will discuss the findings and results of the qualitative study.

By interviewing the research problem directly from the lived experiences of former stay at home mothers who have identified their transition back into the workplace as effective, women and businesses can learn from their knowledge. Through these qualitative interviews, society may begin to understand the positive impact women's reentry into the workplace has had on the economy *and* within their homes.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

The following chapter will focus on the findings from the data collection and presentation of corresponding charts and graphs that report a concise collection of the data based on the subjects' lived experience as an educated mother who left the workforce and later returned after working as a stay at home mother. In addition to the research presentation, the major themes that emerge from the data collection will be given significant consideration from the 12 study participants' lived experience.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

Research Question

This study was guided by one central research question and five research sub-questions:

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother?

Research Sub-Questions

1. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?

2. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?
3. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce?
4. What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?
5. What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mothers at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative design was chosen to be the most appropriate research approach for this study. To gather the data, a phenomenological perspective was the best method for the type of research that was needed to collect data from the women in the study. This method is described as, “Phenomenology aims at gaining deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences...” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). The way in which the data was gathered was through a series of one-on-one interviews in person or via video chat. The one-on-one interviews were based on the criteria the sample participants met for the study. Techniques to ensure good qualitative questions included a field test that was conducted first, interview script critiques, and revisions as needed to get to the final phase and approved questions (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Rationale

The rationale for this study was based on the request for the information that was necessary to formulate insight from the sample of women interviewed. The approach required the interviewer to carefully capture and describe how women perceived their lived experience as a mother who effectively transitioned back into the workplace. According to, Adams (2008), “phenomenology is interested in recovering the living moment of the now...showing how our words, concepts, and theories always shape (distort) and give structure to our experiences as we live them” (pp. 616-617). It is also imperative to mention that phenomenological research is aimed at capturing the participants’ own experience from their words. The research problem was the main focus of the interview to get at the heart of the issue and deduct what is the participants’ meaning of the event (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Population

The study population consisted of educated women who hold a bachelor’s degree or higher in the United States and were employed in a career prior to leaving the work place to raise their children. These educated women then decided to reenter the workplace after an average of 4.79 years serving as a stay at home mother based on the median of the 12 study participants. The opting out and opting back into a career is a generalized experience for women but it is the goal of this study to narrow down the population of women in order to gather information on their personal experience and life lessons from transitioning back into the workforce.

Target Population

Creswell (1998) states that the target population is the “actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). The target population for this study consisted of educated career women with a minimum bachelor’s degree who reside in the United States. Their age is between the 30 and 45 years old. The women had been in the career field prior to leaving the workforce and have at least one child under the age of 15. They were a stay at home mother for a minimum of one year and have since reentered the workforce for a minimum of one year and are working in an environment that is a paid position outside the home within the United States.

Sample

The sample population consisted of 12 women. The sample population was taken from contacting women from specialty websites that were specifically dedicated to women’s career reentry as well as word of mouth requests which led to a snow ball referral effect. These agencies were located in the Midwest and East Coast regions of the United States. Reentry women had posted their testimonies regarding their reentry experience and subsequently their names were posted on the agencies website. After reading their testimonies and verifying their criteria for the study the subjects were sent a request from the researcher via LinkedIn to accept an invitation to connect with the researcher. Once the subjects accepted the request, the next step in communication began via personal email. The personal referrals were contacted the same way using email and telephone to schedule an appointment time to conduct the interview in Southern California.

Demographic Data and Introduction

The 12 women interviewed for the study came from a diverse background of professions that ranged from a forensics expert in crime scenes, sales, writers, counselors, business owners, to university professors. The purpose of having study participants with diverse professional backgrounds was motivated in two parts; one to show a wide spectrum of professional working mothers, and two to create opportunities for answers to organically create their own themes related motherhood and their experience with reentering the workforce.

The reasons why these 12 study participants left the workforce and then reentered is not one clear cut or definitive answer. The unique challenges that come with motherhood based on the study participants' journey shows that some women leave and reenter the workforce several times throughout their lives as mothers. The main-focus of the study was to gather data based on career reentry catalysts and the subsequent skills that were obtained at home but, as the researcher, it was necessary to gather preliminary data that touched on the factors that led to the career women leaving the workforce in order to gain a better understanding of the full picture when it came time in their life to reenter the workforce. Each study participants' interviews were unique and held valuable data that reflected the demands that accompany motherhood whether, or not they were back in the workforce.

Average Time as a Stay at Home Mother

The average time the study participants stayed at home as a full-time mother fluctuated from each woman and carried with it differing reasons and often difficult decisions to not return to the workforce. One example came from study Participant 10

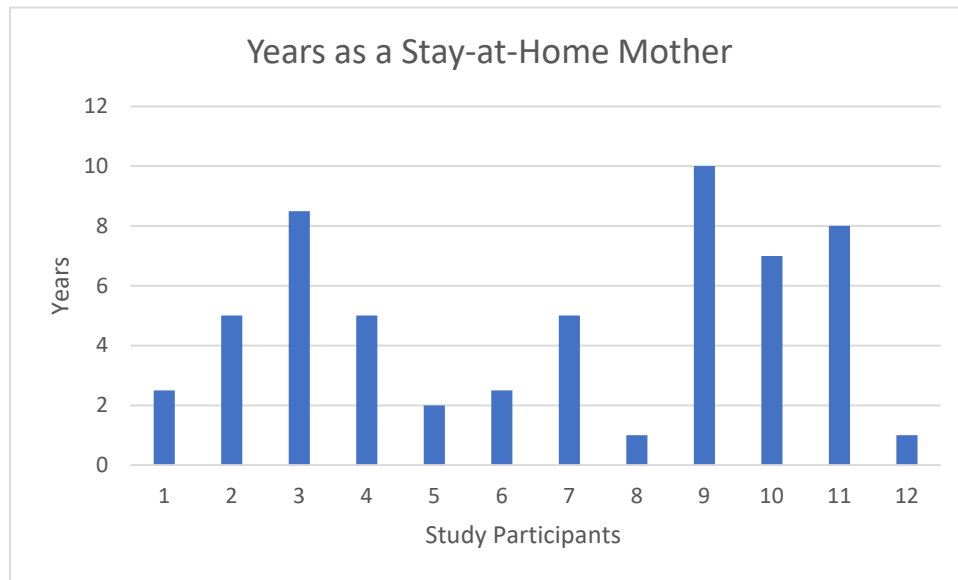
who left her full-time career as writer when her second son was born with hemophiliac, a dangerous blood condition that required round the clock care. Participant 10 stated:

My priorities changed, and I quit my writing career to stay home and take care of my son full time...having a baby with hemophilia sometimes required having to go to the emergency room at 2:00 a.m. in the morning and stay until 10:00 or 11:00 a.m. the next day.

The 12 study participants' average years at home as a stay at home mother was 4.79 years. This data is significant to report based on the different catalyst in each mother's life that contributed to when or when not to reenter the workforce (see Table 4). Figure 11 displays the average number of years at home versus back in the workforce.

Table 4

Study Participants Number of Years as a Stay at Home Mother



Note. The study participants met the criteria for being a stay at home mother for a minimum of one year.

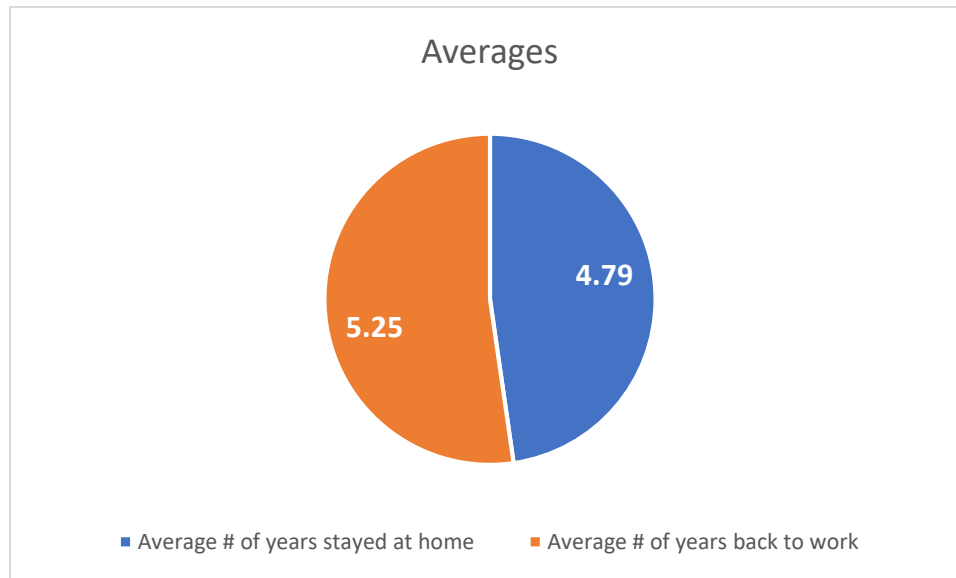


Figure 11. The Average Number of Years at Home versus Back in the Workforce. # = Number.

Back to Work Then Quit Again

The average time study participants were back in the workforce varied based on certain circumstances and timing. What the research uncovered was several of the women interviewed went back to work within six months of giving birth but then realized they jumped back into work too soon or that their priorities had shifted and they wanted back out of the workforce and left to be at home full-time. One example came from study Participant 6. She reflected:

I went back to work right away, I did dispatch here and there...a few grave-yard shifts as a police dispatcher but I was not a crime scene specialist anymore...I tried going back to work full time and my husband and I discovered right away it was not going to work for us both to be on call and working weird hours, I ended up quitting for good after a really bad day care experience. (Participant 6)

Study Participant 1 reflected she jumped at the first opportunity that came her way after she realized she didn't want to be a stay at home mother at all, she wasn't

prepared for “the isolation.” She reported that she regretted not doing more background checks and research on the company and stated:

I just, you know, jumped at the first opportunity that to get back out of the house and not taking into consideration a lot of different things about myself personally and why I wanted to enter the workforce...I realized that I wanted both and I needed flexibility, so I quit the inflexible job and eventually started my own company. (Participant 1)

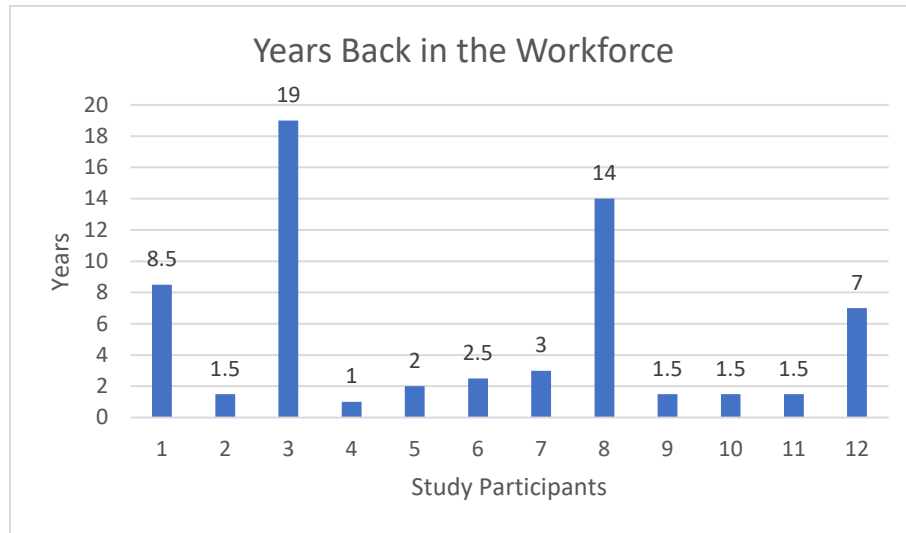
Study Participant 2 and mother of four reflected on her high stress career as a news and documentary producer who went right back to her career after each of her first two children were born but then left her career to stay at home full time when she noticed that the demands of her career were taking a toll on her youngest son. “*I noticed behavioral changes in my son and I realized that I needed to make a full break from work to really focus on the needs of my family*” (Participant 2).

Average Time Back in the Workforce

The next phase of the interviews focused on the current time in the study participants’ life since for some of them they had reentered the workforce for the first or even second time (see Table 5). The following presentation of tables is a synopsis of the introductory part of the interviews.

Table 5

The Number of Years the Back in the Workforce

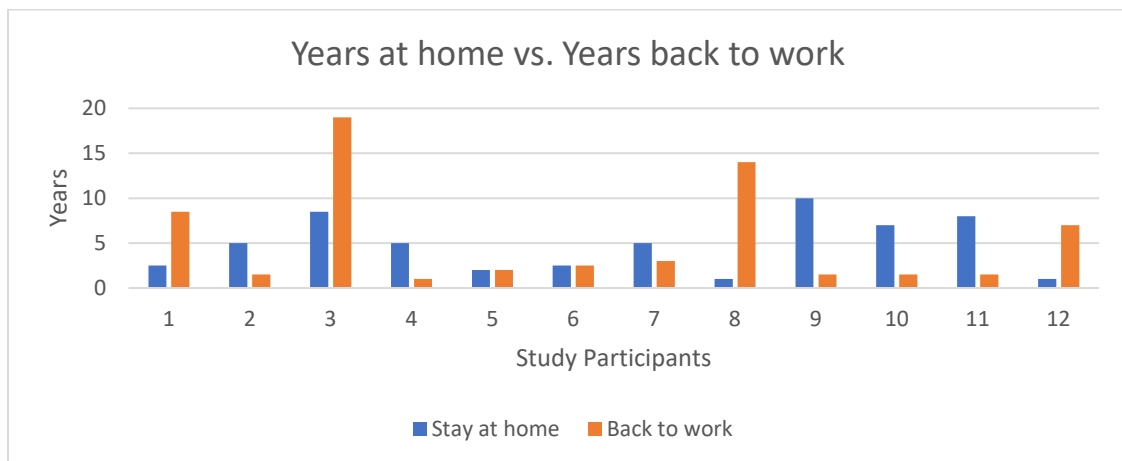


Years at Home vs. Years Back at Work

Table 6 provides a side by side example demonstrating the vast differences in each of the study participants home and career life.

Table 6

The Number of Years Home versus Back in the Workforce



Average Years at Home vs. Years Back at Work

Figure 12 illustrates the average amount of years among the 12 study participants that were home and now back at work.

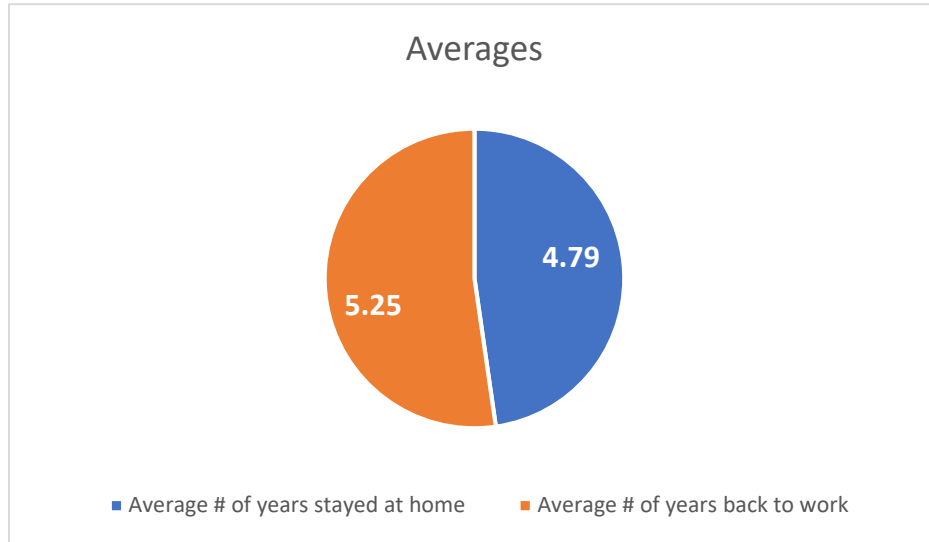


Figure 12. Average of all 12 Study Participants Years at Home and Back in the Workforce.

Same Career Before Opting Out?

Figure 13 demonstrates that almost 60% of the study participants returned to the workforce in a different career field.

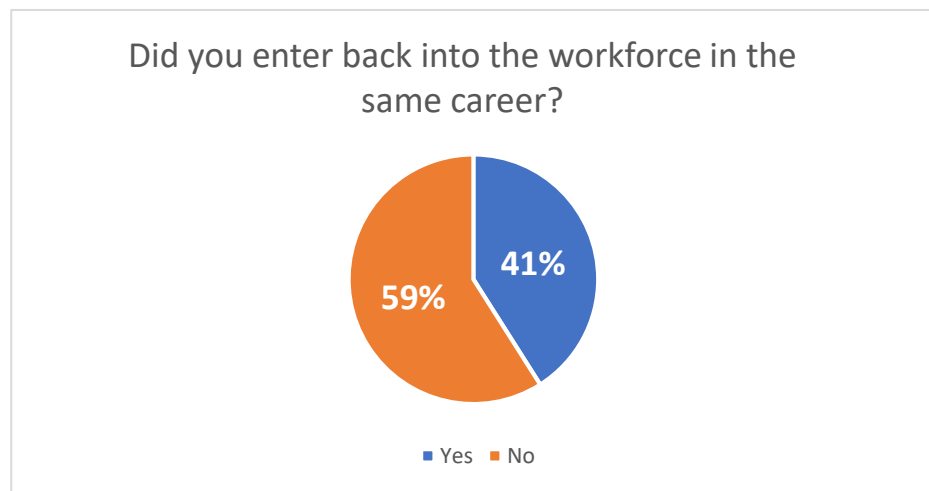


Figure 13. Comparison of Reentering the Workforce in the Same or Different Career Field

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The presentation of the data and analysis will consist of 12 verbal interviews and five video recorded interviews from mothers who met the criteria in the sample selection. The organization for the presentation will be based on the exact format of the interview questions themselves. In regard to the video analysis, the video data was only specific to the last question in the interview.

The data collection began in October 2017 and concluded in November 2017. The interviews were approximately 40 minutes long and the final video recorded question was on average five minutes of testimony.

Intercoder Reliability

To have reliability with the data, there were several steps taken to ensure proper coding and findings from the study were accurate. The researcher utilized the assistance of a former graduate student who was well versed in reading interviews and identifying themes among her subjects. The assistant and the researcher then collaborated on the themes and read through the transcribed answers to the interview questions one-by-one. The researcher finally collaborated with the graduate student to organize all the data into cohesive sections based on the 12 participants answers in the ordered they were asked. The researcher and assistant also collaborated in the designing of the tables and charts to ensure all the data was accurately represented and presented based on their answers.

Major Theme Results for Central Question

The central research question asked: *What are the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother?*

The four major themes that emerged from the lived experiences of educated career women who reentered the workforce can be summed up as: (a) empathy and compassion, (b) multitasking (c) efficiency. No two experiences are alike yet motherhood bonds women in ways that can only be described as a sisterhood founded in strength and stamina.

Empathy and compassion. The most blaring of themes that emerged was empathy and compassion. The women gained empathy for other mothers who have gone through their own struggles personally or professionally and a new sense of compassion for those people in their life that they interact with every day. One example is from Participant 6 who stated, *“I think being a mom has taught me to be able to stop and listen to my students more...be more empathetic and understand the problems that they are going through”*. Another example is from Participant 4, reflecting on her profession as a college professor:

I really love teaching...because you're a mother now, you know that these are just kids...this is their first time away from home and trying to navigate their education themselves, just like my child will be one day...they're going to mess up...I can't think of a better way to say this, I have become so much less of a hard ass with them than I used to be.

Multitasking and efficiency. Motherhood has changed these educated career women in a way that has made them fool proof to the distractions of life inside and outside the home with razor sharp focus and no time for nonsense that will only distract the task at-hand. Time and time again another major theme that emerged was efficiency, multitasking, and strategic planning that cut straight to point of the task. Study

Participant 10 reflected on her time back in the workforce after leaving her hemophilic son at home with dad:

I became a straight talker, I got straight to my point, I had no time for beating around the bush. I had no time for nonsense...I had to grow a backbone. Before being a mom, I was unable to have the courage to stand up to anybody or defend myself, now I like to get down to brass tacks and just do what needs to be done.

Results for Sub-Question 1

Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in an educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?*

Timing of a new career opportunity and/or child starting school. The top response reported as the catalyst in driving forces and career reentry was the timing of the participants' children starting preschool and or kindergarten. Once the children entered into a structured day environment the mothers reported they were motivated to begin the process for their own career reentry. Six out of 12 mothers gave this response as a catalyst for career reentry. Participant 4 stated:

My daughter started kindergarten, I knew that she was going to a public school and had at least seven hours of free childcare a day so that I could go back to work and make money without having to worry about paying for childcare.

Participant 9 went through a divorce while she was planning her career reentry, so her reentry happened later than expected. To reenter the workforce as a qualified candidate in counseling, Participant 9 went back to school for a master's degree while her children were in grade school during the day. Once she graduated she reported "*I wanted*

to make sure they were both secure and comfortable at home and school...I felt so lucky to be able to go back and get my Master's Degree" (Participant 9).

Desire for independence/validation and socialization outside the home. In addition to the timing of the children's school, five out of 12 women reported that independence and validation were imported catalysts for their career reentry which tied with socialization for the second highest answer. The study participants reported it was important for them to get back into the workforce not only when the timing was right but also for themselves to start feeling that validation and independence generated from working outside the home. Study Participant 12 reported that as a therapist she "*enjoyed the work-life balance and working with her clients,*" and added that she started off slow "*only one-two days a week until her son started Kindergarten.*" Study Participant 1 reflected she thought she would enjoy being a stay-at-home mom, but she really lost herself at home:

The day in and day out, you don't get a break. It's 24 hours non-stop, it's like Groundhogs Day but without a paycheck and without positive affirmations that you get from a career...it's just a whole new world...being a stay at home mom, no one really appreciates you. I thought I would love being a stay at home mom and I hated to say that it was really tough...and I didn't love it.

Desire for self-discovery, financial gain, and mental stimulation outside the home. The next most reported responses had a three-way tie with four answers each. The study participants reflected deeply that they wanted the mental stimulation. One study participant mentioned that she started developing a "mommy brain" and that she realized that she needed some adult stimulation outside the home. Another example

came from the mother of four, a television producer, who reported “*I listened to my calling and wanted to be happy...keep my brain functioning.*”

Finances also played a role in the catalyst for career reentry. Participant 5 reported that “*my husband lost his job...we have three daughters to support...we both just started applying for jobs.*” Debt played a role in study Participant 4 as one of her catalysts for returning to work:

I made a lot of sacrifices to stay home with my daughter and we had accrued a lot of debt because of that...now that I started working again it feels so good to be able to contribute to my family, to our child...to paying off debt and still be doing something I love doing, it’s really fun.

Consideration of compelling professional opportunity outside the home. The last of the major themes that emerged was an opportunity that came along that was too good to pass up. Three of the study participants reported that they had been recruited to return to the workforce. One example, from study Participant 7, who adopted her son from Russia, reported that her former place of employment reached out to her to return. “*They contacted me...and I said I would return but only on a part-time basis and they agreed*” (Participant 7).

Participant 6 mentions that she had received an offer to teach at a college level in the forensics lab. She reflected that this was a very personal and difficult time in her life

statin:

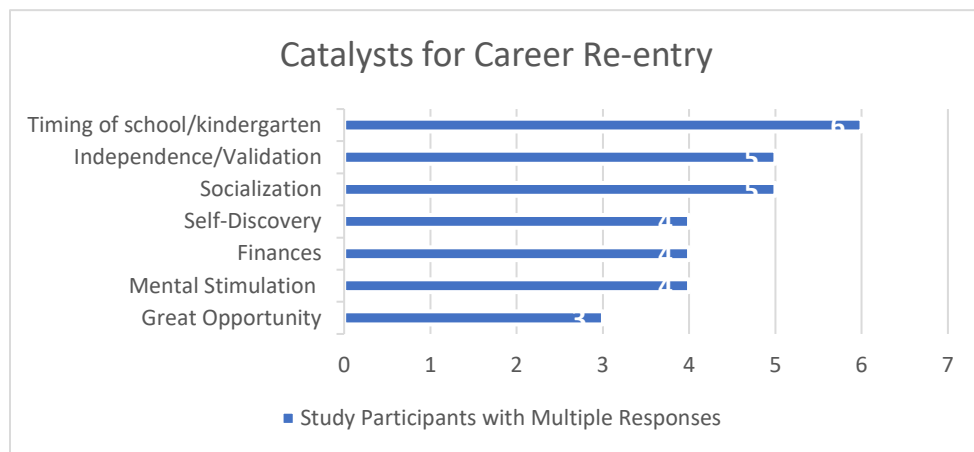
There was this dilemma. Do we have another child, or do I pursue the career path? I personally didn’t feel that I could do both...being married to someone in law enforcement you can’t rely on their schedule to be available with things and

to help very much. So, it was actually a decision that I knew my husband wanted...you know I am a person of faith, so I prayed about it and I just asked God to guide me and I felt like I really should pursue this position and I did. So, it wasn't an easy decision, but it was one that as a family we made together. I ended up applying for and getting the full-time teaching position when [name omitted] was in Preschool.

Table 7 displays the results for Research Sub-Question 1.

Table 7

Catalyst for Workforce Reentry



Results for Sub-Question 2

Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?*

The results for this sub-question will be displayed in two parts: the preferred qualities (soft skills) and then the preferred skills (hard skills).

Preferred qualities acquired. The 12 participants were asked to identify what job preferred qualities were acquired while working as a stay at home mother.

Empathy. The study participants unanimously reported that empathy was the main job preferred quality “soft skill” gained while at home full-time. Study Participant 2 reported that she remembers a time when she first had her baby and her boss wanted her to cover a news story that just broke. She reflected on “the expectation to cover the story, nurse a three-month old, move my office...all on my first day back to work. I would have never done that to somebody” (Participant 2). As the interviewer, I asked if her boss was a mother (because of her lack of empathy) and the study Participant 2 said,

The shocking thing is that she was a mother and she had two children but, she was never a stay at home mom. So, I guess what I am saying is having been a stay at home mom I would’ve know that is not the right thing.

Patience. The second highest reported response with a score of eight with qualities gained while at home was patience. The study participants reflected on how their capacity to be in the moment and have more patience with the children and people in general was acquitted while being at home full time. One example came from study Participant 8. She reflected on her time before she was a mother and in a supervisor position at work:

I was very controlling I guess I would say and I was thinking that things had to be done a certain way and that was the only kind of option and being a mom and staying home with my babies all day you really don’t have that structure...I realized that I’m not really in control anymore...I’m softer, more patient and have empathy. (Participant 8)

Compassion. Seven of the study participants reported that they acquired more compassion while at home full time. They responded in detail how they saw the world

differently were more aware of how they treated those around them. One study participant reflected on her time at home with her only son. *“I saw a lot of abused children working in law enforcement... and to be around this pure baby, that pure child that’s not tainted in the evil of the world, you know what I mean?”* (Participant 6).

Experiential (timing, boundaries, appreciation) and big picture perspective. The next most reported answers, with a score of six, was for both experiential life experience and big picture perspective. The study participants shed light on the qualities that they gained at home such as their ability to know from first-hand experience what that mother’s intuition felt like. Study Participant 9 reported that there is a tradeoff that happens when staying at home by stating: *“Although you work hard to get where you were in your career before...it’s a trade-off but, to me it was a choice and never ending.”*

Another example came from study Participant 2 who reflected on her time at the newsroom,

I was sitting in a room, in a conference room and these were women that were chosen by top executives to be developed into becoming you know, the top performers. And everyone had on them their list of accomplishments...and one women said my “Mommy MBA,” and there were audible snickers, and I thought...I really want to get to know this woman and I don’t understand why everyone is laughing.

Study Participant 1 reported she now sees herself and the decisions she made are different after having children and staying home:

The biggest thing I think is I was recognizing myself as a whole human being...How is that going to affect me in five minutes from now to two days from

now...what are the decisions that I am making right now for my family...or for this company, what's the impact that it's going to have?

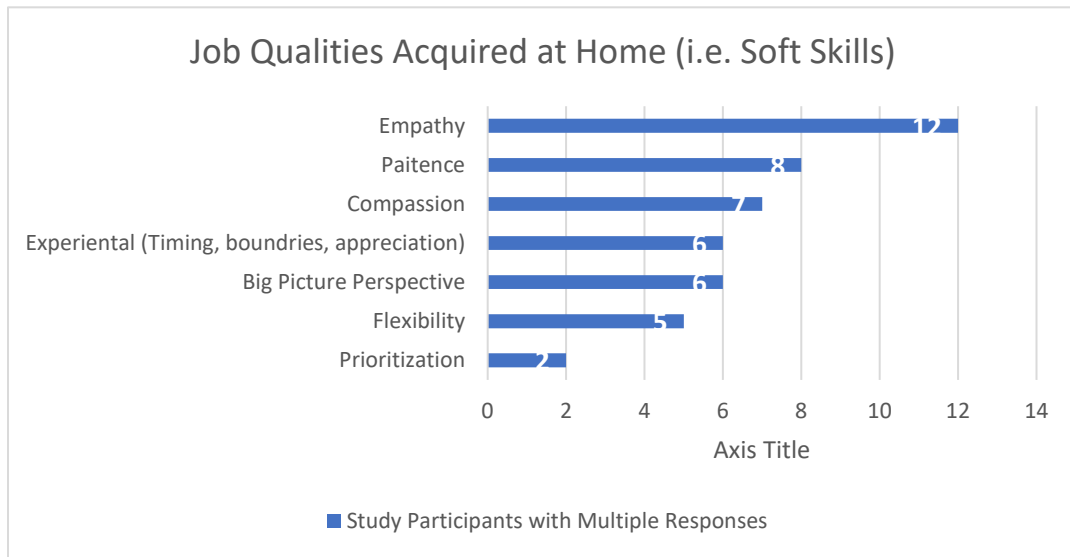
Flexibility. Five study participants reported that flexibility was a quality that they gained while being at home full time. There were many answers that were given that made up the theme flexibility. Examples were: (a) balancing, (b) stamina, and (c) slowing down. The study participants reported that after having their first child their ability to adapt to the situation improved very quickly and they were able to move on with their day without missing a beat. Participant 4 reflected on her time as a professor and how she is more flexible with her students by stating: *“I’m like okay, let’s be flexible, look at this from a different angle but we’ll figure out a solution together. Let’s get you to class, let’s hope you succeed.”*

Prioritization. The last of the responses was prioritization that two study participants reported is a quality they gained while at home. Study Participant 12 reflected that she let go of her teaching position at a University to be able to stay home part time with her son. She wanted to keep her private therapy practice but knew that she wouldn’t be happy spreading herself too thin. Another example of prioritization was from study Participant 9, who reported that her children were her main priority in her life so she needed to reenter the workforce with a career that still allowed her to be able with her children as much as possible. She reentered the workforce as a high school counselor in the same district as her children so that she could be on the same school and vacation schedule as them.

Table 8 displays the findings from Sub-Question 2 with a focus on the soft skills gained as a stay at home mother.

Table 8

Soft Skills Acquired as a Stay at Home Mother



Preferred skills acquired. The 12 participants were asked to identify what job preferred qualities were acquired while working as a stay at home mother.

Time management. The reports were unanimous with all 12 of the study participants reporting that time management was a “hard skill” gained while at home full time. The stories that were reported all involved how to get the most done in a small amount of time. Study Participant 5 a woman with three children reported,

Just because I have three children going in all different directions and I have a work project in front of me...I knew that I only got a specific amount of time to complete that task, I was much more precise in carrying it out.

The stories reported were very similar in nature from all 12 study participants. Mothers who are tasked with different tasks, children going in different directions, and time constrains seem to make it all work. All this juggling and time management are legitimate hard skills that are invaluable in the workplace.

Organization and efficiency/focus. The next theme that emerged was in the same hard skill family as time management but delves in closer at the focus and streamlining that takes place in the day- to-day operations within the home. Study Participant 2 reported:

Time management is a huge one, I'm definitely more efficient, I know when I'm productive and how to fix things, I'm also great with logistics, I know how to get the children from point A to point B...even with children going in different directions...I can figure it out on most days but, I do my best.

Study Participant 6 reflected on her time at work and was amazed at how much work she could actually get done in a day:

I think being a mom has taught me to be able to stop and listen more...have better communication skills but also know how to filter out the loud noise and be able to focus. Also, when I have really short period of time where I won't be bothered, I am absolutely shocked at how much work I can get done which is more than I ever did before I became a mom.

Decision making and budget planning. Running a household requires minute-by-minute decision making skills and financial planning throughout the day. Seven of the study participants reported that they gained decision making skills and budget planning skills while at home full time. They agreed these hard skills can be transferred to the workplace as well. Study Participant 12 reported that she keeps very detailed calendars and is very organized with her schedule. She mentions that she is more aware "*of what I can pull off in a day*" (Participant 12).

Study Participant 2 also reported that she has a new value for running a family of six on a budget:

I think a lot is thrown at you as a mom... we've had different financial situations over the years and I learned the value in a budget and when you need to make changes. Budgeting is very real, and I think I would appreciate it more when a manager came to me and said you need to do this on a budget. Right? Saying "oh, we've got it" then you know "X" more because we're used to appreciating the value of how much things cost and understand that when you spend money here you've got to take it from there to get it in "Mom terms." But I think that it's a skill and I think that you learn from experience and I think that you appreciate the skill more when you go through that experience in a real way and moms do it every day.

Networking and multi-tasking. The last two themes that emerged from the interviews for "hard skills" were networking and multitasking. Multitasking came up time and time again as a hard skill that was used throughout the day at home full time.

Study Participant 3 reflected on her time as a mother at home full time and had a new perspective for planning for the future:

I think not isolating yourself and getting to know people in the community or Chamber of Commerce, you know going to networking events and going places outside the home...I would say form alliances and relationships, get to know ways to strengthen your life and bring people into it. Be advocating for each other because there are going to be times where you're going to need someone to have your back.

Multitasking goes hand-in hand with all the hard skills that the mothers reported they gained while at home. Study Participant 2 reported:

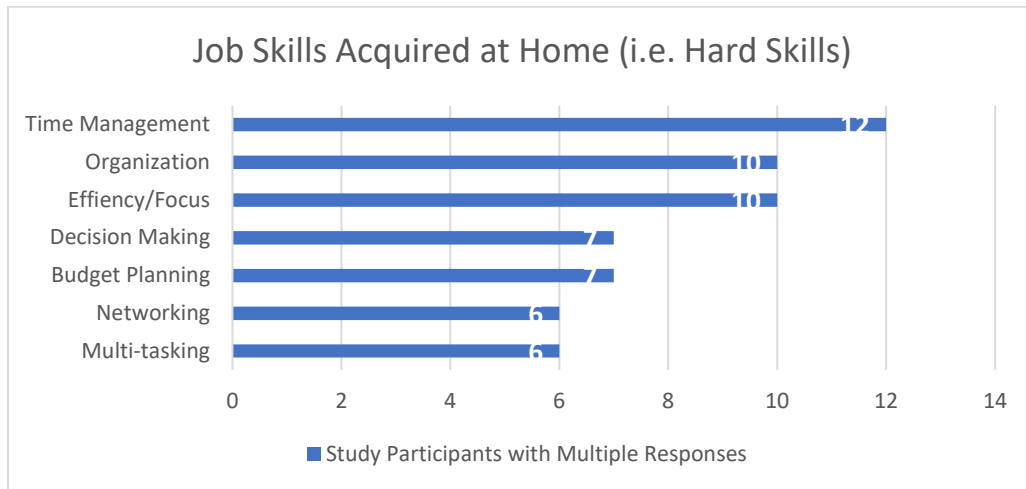
Multitasking is just you know, part of it...I'm thinking about the various things in my head, I'm thinking of four different children and what their needs are...you have to think about those people, what they need to get done and how to manage them right and how to make sure everything gets done in a timely fashion.

The majority of participants believed this hard skill is an invaluable asset that will benefit the women as they begin the next step in their career reentry journey and interact in a professional environment.

Table 9 displays the findings from Sub-Question 2 with a focus on the hard skills gained as a stay at home mother.

Table 9

Hard Skills Acquired as a Stay at Home Mother



Results for Sub-Question 3

Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce.*

Assertiveness. Ten out of the 12 study participants reported they gained assertiveness while at home that aided in their career reentry.

The ability to find your voice, speak up and be an advocate for your family also had a positive effect on the study participants when they began their reentry process. Study Participant 10 reported that she became more assertive when she reentered the workforce as a blogger in a primarily male dominated newspaper environment by stating:

I could figure out what was going on very quickly...there was this one “chucklehead” from advertising who was trying to “mansplain” things to me about what blogs were...I was ready to break him in half, I couldn’t believe it. So, I called him out in front of everybody, I figured if he was allowed to stand there and be a sexist pig...I was allowed to stand up and defend myself and my job...I let this guy know I got stuff to do and don’t get in my way!

Prioritization. Seven out of the 12 study participants reported that prioritization was a skill that aided in their career reentry. The women reported that their ability to identify what was most important and effective for them and their family was a skill that helped define their next phase in life. Study Participant 4 reported that her priority was to make sure that she had the same hours teaching during the day while her daughter was in school. *“My priority is creating my school schedule around her school schedule”* (Participant 4).

Education/learning and adaptability. Six out of 12 study participants reported that going back to school and getting more education was a skill that aided in their transition. Also, six of 12 study participants reported that being able to adapt to a new situation aided in their transition back into the workforce.

One study participant reflected on her decision to go back to school to get her Master's Degree in Counseling after her divorce was finalized and also adapting to a new role as a student:

At first I kinda put it aside because I wanted to make sure I had the energy to go back...I was excited but also intimidated because it had been a long time since I had been in school and everything is done so differently now...I knew it was going to be a big challenge trying to get a counseling position and because going through a divorce I was really scared that I was going to go through all the schooling and not be able to find a job...It was definitely persistence, persistence, persistence...also a kind of soul searching too, personally for what I wanted versus what was right for my family. (Participant 9)

Networking. Five out of the 12 women reported that networking was a skill that aided in their transition back into the workforce. Their ability to keep in contact with their former employers as well as join local charity and networking events was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews. Participant 11 reported that she was involved in several fundraising and charity events while her sons were in private school that led to her position now as a marketing and special events manager for a university.

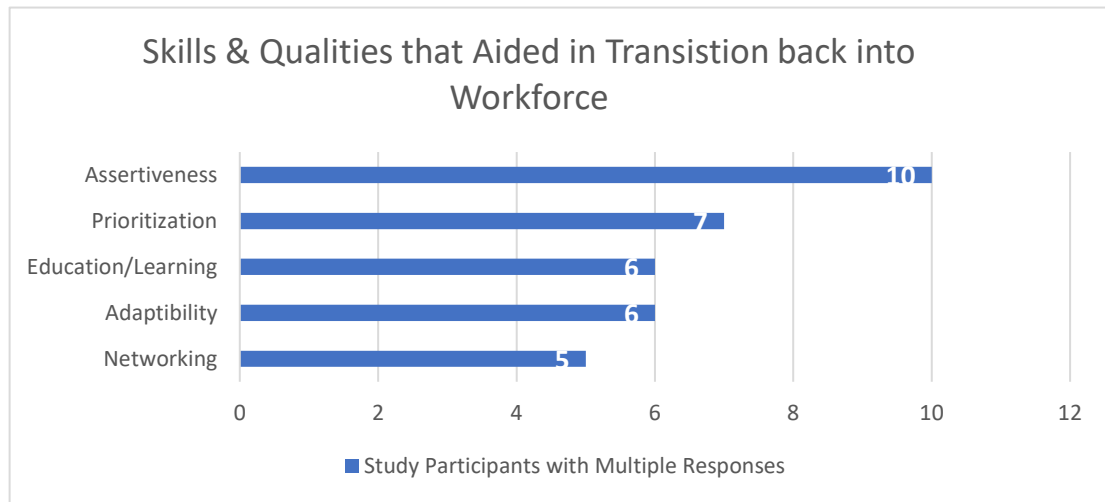
Participants 7 and 5 were both recruited to return to their former careers by keeping in touch and having open communication with their former employers.

Participant 5 reported that she returned with more certification as an analyst for a mortgage banking software company. She reported that the company wasn't concerned with a gap in her resume and they recruited her back based on their positive history of working together.

Table 10 displays the results for Sub-Question 3.

Table 10

Skills and Qualities That Aided in Stay at Home Mothers Transition Back Into the Workforce



Results for Sub-Question 4

Research sub-Question 4 asked: *What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?*

Increased Empathy within the workplace. Empathy and compassion were common themes that emerged with eight out of the 12 study participants noting that they have an increased empathy in the workforce that has helped improve their current job effectiveness.

Study Participant 9 who went back to school and is now a high school counselor reported, *“For my students I naturally have empathy and compassion...you feel for them and want to guide them along the future path.”*

Increased time management/organization and patience/perspective within the workplace. The next two themes that emerged were tied with seven participants each reporting they are more effective in their workplace in regards to time management/organization and patience and perspective. They believed the ability to apply all the tricks and techniques that were sharpened at home have now been put to use in a professional setting.

Study Participant 8 reported she is now more patient and organized at work. She works for a health food company as a sales representative and has over 250 stores in San Diego that she is responsible for. Study Participant 8 stated the following:

I have to be very organized on how I manage my time and how I make sure I get all those stores into my route’s monthly...you know I have to drive to North County a few days a week and make sure that I’m you know seeing the stores to make it worth my day...it’s 50 miles away. Time management and being very organized and patient...to be back in a job where I actually deal with traffic because it was one of the things I hate but, it is being patient with it and just kind of accepting that’s part of the day-every day.

Resilience and passion/meaningful work. Study Participant 1 reflected on how she left her isolating corporate job that was in a male dominated environment to create her own boutique business that sells high-end olive oil, honeys, and vinegars. She reported that *“having a family made me want to recreate some of that in the workforce*

because I know that I was not getting that in my corporate life...I needed meaning...we have created a family at work" (Participant 1). She knew she wanted a change from the cold-corporate environment for her and her family; one that would provide meaningful work, a chance to get out in the community and bring that passion back to her life. Six study participants reported they have gained this new quality from being at home and now back in the workforce and six study participants reported they now are working in an environment that gives meaning to their life.

Study Participant 6 and mom to a teenage son conveyed this message about passion:

I see people who are passionate in my son's life whether it's a teacher or a coach...my son is into water polo and jujitsu and I see the instructors and coaches that are very passionate and give of themselves. It makes me want to do that too you know because I really see the difference that it makes, it helped him grow as a person. So, I think you know having put more of myself into what I view as having higher quality and level of excellence and passion for what I do I think definitely directly relates to being a mom because I see those people in my child's life...it makes me not settle for mediocrity.

Increased flexibility. Five study participants reported flexibility is a new quality that has positively affected their current job effectiveness. Study Participant 8 reported that when she comes home from work she is happy to see her family after a long day:

I'm excited to come home to my family and my home, to have the time we have together in the evenings...and luckily, I have some flexibility in my schedule to still work with my kids' schedule so we're able to kind of work around when they

have something that comes up during the day like if I need to go to a sports game...I can go.

Increased foresight/vision, negotiation, confidence, and listening skills. The next four themes that emerged were all tied with four study participants reporting these were a skill or quality they gained while at home full time.

Study Participant 12 shared she had the foresight and vision to know she didn't want to take on her private therapy practice, teaching position, and be a new mom all at the same time. She stated that she gave notice to the university to step down from her position and only focus on her private practice therapy part time once she returned to the workforce.

Confidence and negotiation were also reported by the study participants when they were back in the workforce. Study Participant 7 was able to successfully negotiate her return to the workforce on a part time basis with her former employer. She was more confident to ask for what terms she wanted to her reentry and what days of work would be best for her and her family. She conveyed that she gained a lot of confidence while negotiating treatment plans with doctors when she brought her adopted son home from Russia. She mentioned now she's a mom, she gained those skills at home while advocating for her son with special needs for the first time.

Improved multi-tasking skills. A reoccurring theme throughout this study was multitasking with three study participants reporting they gained that skill while at home which now has a positive effect on them in the workplace. Study Participant 5 described how she is able to schedule meetings in the car while driving to pick her three daughters up from after school sports events or classes. She realized that she has been at home as a

stay at home mother *and* now back in the workforce she can handle a variety of tasks at the same time, like never before.

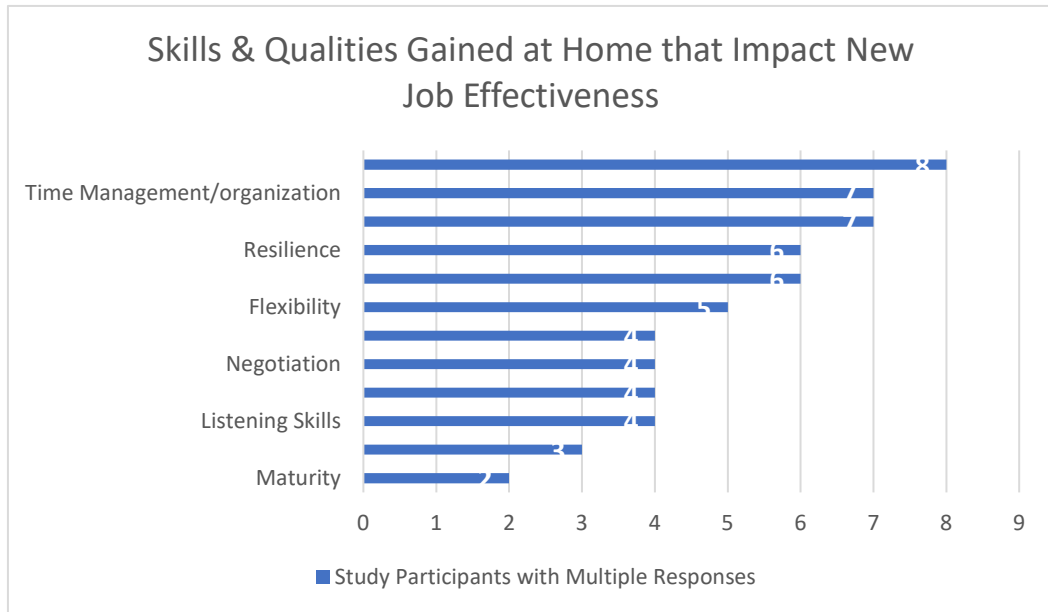
Maturity. Study Participant 5 mentioned that being at home with her family changed her for the better by stating:

When I came back to work, the skills I had before, I still had but brought back more...I've matured, I was older. Really enjoying your family makes you mature...In any fashion, I think just mature in general and your way of dealing with people improves.

Table 11 displays the results for Sub-Question 4.

Table 11

Skills and Qualities Gained at Home That Impact New Job Effectiveness



Results for Sub-Question 5

Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?*

The final phase of the interview turned the tables on the study participants and asked them to offer recommendations for stay at home mothers who desire to reenter the workforce. The interview's energy shifted from personal stories to introspective thinking about other mothers who are still at home.

In an effort to thoroughly explore Sub-Question 5, five separate interview questions were developed and will be presented as such: (a) results for Sub-Question 5, (b) Sub-Question 5A; (c) Sub-Question 5B; (d) Sub-Question 5C, and (e) Sub-Question 5D.

Sub-question 5. Sub-Question 5 asked: *What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?*

Relationship management/networking. Almost all the study participants, 11, reported that relationship management and networking were key to begin the process of reentering the workforce. Study Participant 11 recommended “*network a lot!*” She conveyed that networking is what led to having the career that she has now, by being out in the community, volunteering, and networking. Study Participant 9 reported, “*I would recommend maybe if you can...keep your foot in the door. It's really about networking*

and who you know in the field. Keep in contact with your connections and keep your network alive.”

Flexibility/balance. Seven of the study participants recommended that women should aim to find a career that offers flexibility in their schedule. This recommendation is similar to the scenario of study Participant 8 who shared she is able to plan her work schedule around after school activities and sports and further reported she has flexibility in her career she didn't have before when she was a supervisor and didn't have children.

Work/life balance. Six of the study participants commented that returning to the workforce part time gave them more opportunities to have a work life balance. A few of the study participants who went back right away to work and then left again had a renewed appreciation for what was required to have a work/life balance and they made sure to have that balance when they returned to the workforce again. Study Participant 7 reported that she found her “*sweet spot of work*” being three days a week. When she started working more than those three days she felt that she was spread too thin and had to pull back to find more balance and recommended that women reentering start off slow to find out what will work for them and their families.

Pace yourself. Five of the study participants recommended a woman should pace themselves when beginning their reentry journey. Study Participant 12 recommends, “*Honor and look at what you want or need for your family...keep an open mind and pace yourself when building back your confidence to get back out there.*”

Open-minded/new challenges. Four of the study participants recommended keeping an open mind to the next chapter in one's life and any challenges that may arise. Study Participant 11 recommended starting or joining a “mom-support group” that could

help process the challenges that comes with beginning something new in life would be beneficial.

Study Participant 6 offers advice on working outside the home as well as sharing in the duties of the work within the home. She reported:

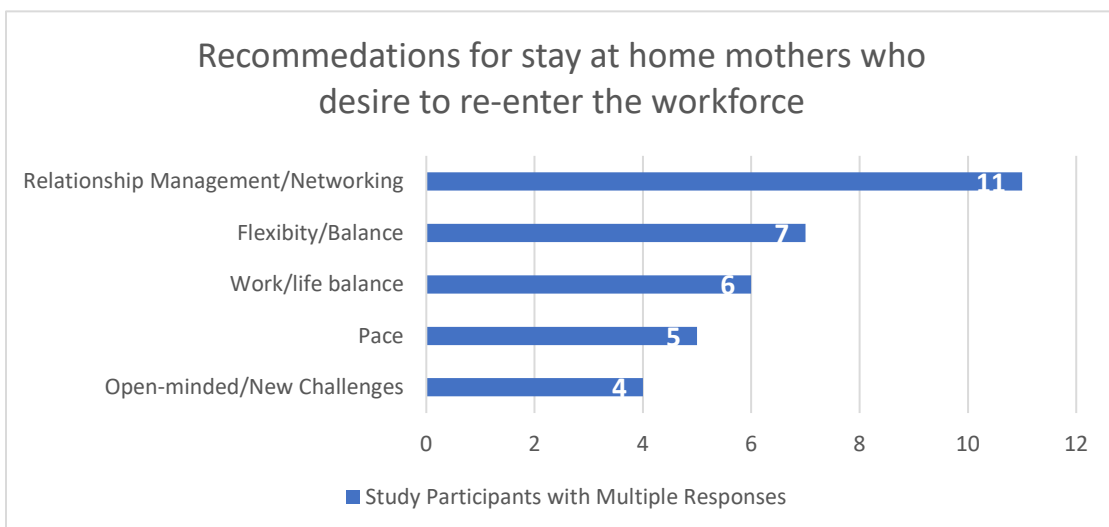
I think in my profession-law enforcement, and I think for any profession...the home work has to be shared. If you go from all the work at home is on your shoulders and then you go back in the workforce and still all the work at home is on your shoulders...you've got a lot of work and you don't have a plan...who's going to get the groceries? Who's going to help with the homework? (Participant 6)

She recommended that women should talk with their spouses and have communication for the new challenges that will arise once they reenter the workforce and have a plan that shares equally the duties of the household and childrearing.

Table 12 displays the results for Sub-Question 5

Table 12

Recommendations for Stay at Home Mothers who Desire to Reenter the Workforce



Results for interview question 5A. Interview question 5A asked: *What would educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother do differently upon reentry?*

The personal nature of asking someone what they would do differently elicited several different responses and stories. Study Participant 1 said *“There’s not much I would do the same, I would do it all differently. I hate to say that but, I think I would do it all differently”*.

Ask for help/childcare. Five of the study participants reported that if they had to do something differently it would be to have asked for help sooner and plan better for childcare. Study Participant 12 mentioned that she did have childcare set-up within her family, but it was never a long-term plan when she first left the workforce and then reentered. She reported, *“I would have organized a more structured plan for long term childcare instead of just asking family members as needed”* (Participant 12).

Have confidence/fearless. Four of the study participants recommended that the mothers at home have confidence and be fearless when reentering the workforce. The recommendations offered from these women came from a place of sincerity and honesty. The study participants wanted to emphasize the importance to other mothers who desire to reenter the workforce, do so with a sense of confidence that they did not report they had themselves when they reentered the workforce.

Step back but not out/start part-time. Four study participants recommended that before they left the workforce they would have not left the job completely. They recommended women should keep their foot in the door and possibly work only part time. Study Participant 9 mentioned, *“The main thing I would do differently is not*

completely getting out of the workforce. Keep your foot, toes, something...a little bit on it if you can.”

Identify right opportunity. Four study participants reported they would have taken more to identify the right opportunity for their family to avoid the false starts, stress, and unrealistic expectations that came with their reentry experience. When study Participant 1 reported that she would have done everything “differently” she was not clear as to what she really wanted for herself as a working mom. She was unable to identify when an opportunity was not right for her. Participant 1 stated:

I didn't research the company, I didn't realize what I was going to be walking into...an organization filled with men and it was a small company. It was excruciating being there...I was looking for a kind of social piece that I wasn't going to be getting there...I was competing with them, I felt like I had to constantly prove myself...So here I was working but just not in the right place.

Avoid false starts. Several of the women in the study reported that they started right back in their careers after their children were born only to leave again after they realized that decision was not best for their family. One example came from study Participant 2:

I think I wouldn't have put as much pressure on myself to reenter the workforce so soon after my children were born. I think those early years are so key and I learned so much from being at home with my children. There are often times where I had one foot in and one foot out and I think I learned the most the times where I had two feet out. But, I also know that you learn from your mistakes and so those moments where I had one for them (work) and one at home...I realized

that my balance was off, and I needed to make changes... Giving myself permission to transition to be a mom and it doesn't take two or three months, it's not just on maternity leave, it can be five or six years. So, I think we all need to reflect on what it means to be a mom and give ourselves that permission, that time to really transition into the role of being a mom.

Realistic expectations. When asked to give examples of what study Participant 6 would do differently she told a story about when she first became a mom:

I was pretty naïve when I first became a mom... I thought "oh I could be super mom", like no problem, I can you know do all this and go to crime scenes and so on... Like I had no clue what I was going to feel. I think having better communication skills, planning-ahead and being able to ask for help.

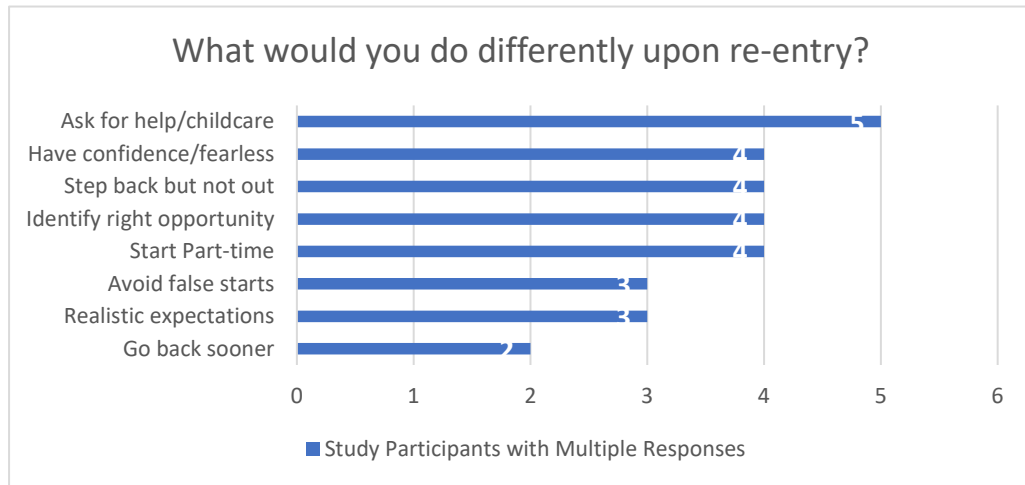
Go back to work sooner. Study Participant 4, a professor at two different universities mentioned she would have gone back to work sooner had she known how good it would be for her family by stating:

I would have gone back to work sooner if I had known how well it would have gone. However, it's really hard to say that too because what made it go so smooth was my daughter was older and starting kindergarten and I didn't have to worry about back up child-care.

Table 13 displays the results for Interview Question 5A.

Table 13

What Would Study Participants do Differently Upon Career Reentry?



Results for interview question 5B. Interview question 5B asked: *What would educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother do the same upon reentry?*

No regrets staying home. Nine of the study participant reported they would have stayed home the same and had no regrets about it because that time at home was so meaningful and special. Study Participant 10 reflected on her time at home with her three children and how innocent they are from the outside world:

My house is always just looks like a bomb hit it. It's just a disaster, but look at these three happy little people who are not damaged by the world yet. So, I get to hang out with these three-little people who didn't know anything about the hurricane that hi".

Study Participant 9 reflected on her time at home full time in regards to being involved with her girls' school:

I would do it all over again, I would definitely stay home and raise my children and I would be involved in everything I could to help and volunteer in their school. I would do all of that the same, I loved every part of getting to know their teachers.

Study Participant 2 reflected upon how very proud she was of those years at home full time by stating:

The time that I spent with my family is one of my proudest accomplishments. I'm so proud that I made the difficult decision to spend those early years with my children...and if someone asks, "Why did you leave?" I'd say, because it was the best decision for my family.

Start reentry part time. Six of the study participants reported they would start off their career reentry part time the same. One example came from study Participant 8 mentioning she went back to work part time which then turned into something full time when her children were older.

The thing that really helped me was because I had a part time job. I had you know, my foot in the door with the company that I'm with now. That's what led to my full-time position that I have now.

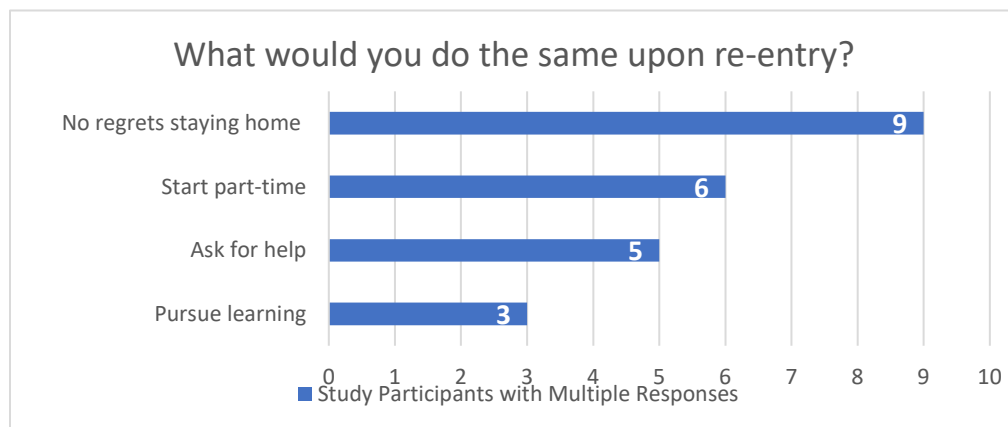
Ask for help. Five of the study participants reported they would still have asked for help with babysitting and emotional support when they reentered the workforce. When study Participant 12 went back to work in her private therapy practice she realized she needed a live-in nanny at one point and found that between family and the babysitter she really was supported in a way that made her and her family successful.

Pursue learning/education. Three of the study participants who went back to school to pursue higher education reported that going back to school was the best decision for them and their family. They found a new level of accomplishment and pride in achieving that higher education and report that they would have done it again if they had to do it over.

Table 14 displays the findings for Interview Question 5B.

Table 14

What Would Study Participants do the Same Upon Career Reentry?



Results for interview question 5C. Interview Question 5C asked: *What was most difficult for educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother?*

Starting at entry-level/pay cut. Seven of the study participants reflected that going back to work in the beginning was difficult because in one way or another they were starting over and received a pay cut.

Study Participant 8 reflected on when she returned to work despite the flexibility with her schedule, she struggled with feeling over qualified for the position she was hired for:

When I first went back in as a part timer, it was really difficult, I felt very humble...I felt like I was overqualified for the job I was doing, and I was kind of, you know it was disappointing I guess because I felt that this is all I can do? You know I didn't want to have the responsibilities of my full-time career anymore but, I struggled with the only thing that was available was a really entry-level part time job. It was something you know, enough for me to get out of the house and interact with other people.

Spread thin/double bind and missing out. Seven study participants reported they felt spread too thin when they returned to the workforce. Another seven also reported they felt that they would be missing out on activities with their children.

One example came from study Participant 4. When she returned to work she realized that her universities' orientation was also being held on the first day of her daughter's school. Her response touched on feeling guilty and also how she missed out on several events in her daughter's life. When asked "What was most difficult for you," she responded:

Feeling guilty. I was afraid that I was making the wrong choice because my work obligations sometimes make it impossible for me to attend some of her things that she has to do. Like for instance...I missed her first day of kindergarten and I felt terrible about that. (Participant 4)

Adjustment/learning curve. Six of the women expressed they experienced an adjustment and there was a learning curve when they returned to the workforce. Study Participant 6 also reflected on missing out on events with her children.

Now that I am working I feel very disconnected and I don't like that feeling...that's been a big challenge, for instance there is a fourth-grade field trip tomorrow and I can't go...I've always been so fortunate and have been able to interact and do those fieldtrips before.

Guilt and crying/emotional. Four of the study participants mentioned they struggled with guilt and four more reported feeling very emotional when reentering the workforce.

Study Participant 8 told a story about what other mothers said about being very emotional and how she would feel guilty:

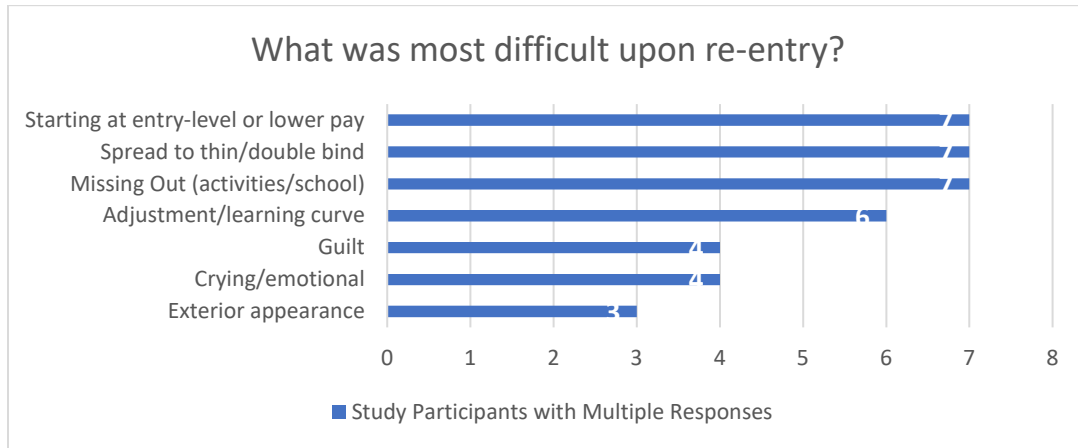
I was feeling guilty about not being home with my kids...people kept telling me "Oh you're going to cry...Right? But I did, like every day at that time, we all cried like sobbing tears. It was a very emotional time, I was unhappy for the first couple of months.

Exterior appearance. A few of the study participants touched on a new difficulty in their life which involved presenting themselves in a professional manner now that they were back in the workforce after staying home full time. Study Participant 10 reflected about getting ready for work. "*It's a different culture...Just getting up early in the morning and always making sure that my hair is done and was wearing clean clothes which sounds really ridiculous.*" Study Participant 8 also mentioned that she needed to completely reinvest in her wardrobe because she didn't have enough professional clothes to wear comfortably throughout the week.

Table 15 displays the findings from Interview Question 5C

Table 15

What was Most Difficult for Study Participants Upon Career Reentry?



Results for Interview Question 5D. Interview Question 5D asked: *What final words of wisdom do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother’s at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?*

Know your worth and needs. Eleven out of the 12 study participants were very passionate about offering their final words of wisdom for future reentry mothers. It was very important to the study participants that mothers who are looking to reenter the workforce know how much they are valued and appreciated for all their hard work raising a family. They unanimously mentioned that by knowing your worth and needs you can have a secure foundation to begin the next professional phase in life.

Don’t feel guilty. Study Participant 4 offered some final words to future mothers encouraging them to not feel guilty.

I would say the biggest lesson that I’ve learned is not to feel guilty about returning to the workforce...it can bring so many positive into our lives and into our children’s lives. So, don’t be scared if you want to back to work. Don’t be

scare to do it. It's like the story about me feeling guilty about being away from my daughter but, then it turned out that I was actually a great role model to her and she was super proud of me...but we make sure that we always keep the family a priority.

Study Participant 6 reflected on her time at home:

I'm very thankful, that I was able to stay home with my son. I value that very much. I don't ever want to make any woman feel bad who didn't get time at home...I know moms are so good at making themselves feel guilty about everything. I truly thought that I was walking away from my career and I had this overwhelming sadness, like grieving over that loss. But, still I believe I made the right decision for all the dynamics that we were dealing with.

Find your passion. Seven of the study participants mentioned it was important for women to find their passion and suggested it would help to counteract all the other struggles that may arise when a mother returns to the workforce. The study participants reported that if a working mother has passion and self-determination then the work will become more enjoyable and those around them will be pleased for them as well.

Support network/help. Seven of the study participants mentioned it is important to have a strong network and support system in place as well as being able to ask for help. Two study participants stated they asked family members to babysit and help with childcare. In addition to the childcare both mentioned they hired help within the home to assist with the cleaning and chores around the house. Study Participant 6 remembered when she went back to work full time, "*I'm like yep...sign me up, I need help. So, I did*

get help with having a housekeeper come twice a month and help with the clutter...one other thing...I stopped worrying about my house being perfect anymore.”

Don't compare yourself to others. Five of the study participants offered final words of wisdom warning working mothers not compare themselves to others. Study Participant 8 advised:

Be realistic with yourself. Don't be too judgmental on yourself or too hard on yourself because I think everybody has a different path that they're on and what works for one person isn't going to work for every person. I would try to compare myself to other people and beat myself up over it many times...and you know something did work out in the end, the job I have now, I think that it's the right job for me at this time in my life.

Lead by example for your kids. Four of the study participants reported it was important to be a positive role model for the children. The women offered up several scenarios where their children were proud of them when they returned to work. The study participants who mentioned that they felt guilty for missing out on events in their children's life also mentioned that now *“my children are my biggest cheer leaders”* (Participant 3).

Ignore negativity. Three of the study participants offered the advice to ignore negativity. The advice that they gave was not necessarily from personal experience but spoke to the potential pushback or negativity that can arise from those in the workforce or in their personal life.

Study Participant 6 elaborated on her advice by stating:

Don't compare your family to another family...there is no perfect family, there is no perfect school...there is no perfect childcare...I think there is no perfect anything. And so, you've got to not compare yourself and not listen to those people who give you bad advice that makes you feel condemned and judged.

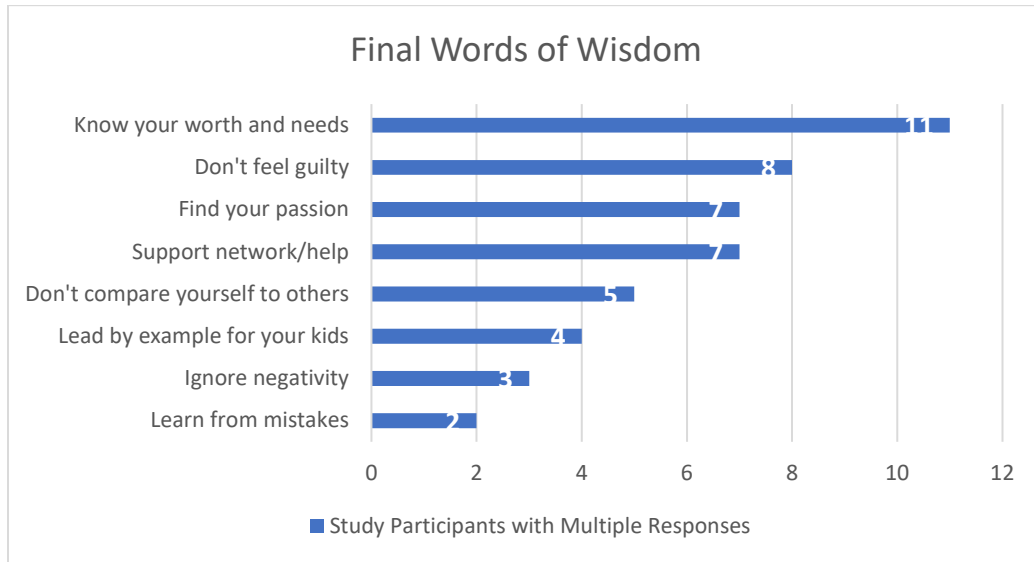
Learn from mistakes. Study Participant 2 and mother of four reported how she has learned from her mistakes over the years at home and learned to say no to taking on too many tasks that would spread her thin:

When you are overloaded as a mom...when you're asked to be involved in your kid's lives whether it be volunteering for a school event or you know helping out with soccer snacks...you can over volunteer and over-do it. I tended to do that at first because I think that in a job situation you are expected to say "yes, yes, yes," and I would find a professional way of being able to say "no." I'm thinking in my producer terms before and I would just take it all on when I should have been home breastfeeding my child. I think about it now and maybe this is just being a little wiser as a mom, I know that if I give too much in the end the product suffers...and in that case, it would have been my family.

Table 16 displays the results for Interview Question 5D

Table 16

Final Words of Wisdom from Study Participants to Current Stay at Home Mothers



Summary of Major Themes and Patterns in the Findings

The major themes that emerged were specific to the questions asked and told a story of each participant’s lived experience in chronological order from when they left the workforce, life at home, and finally reentered. The study participants were very thoughtful, sincere, and passionate about their answers. Three of the mothers began to tear up and cry when asked to recall certain periods of their time at home and reentering the workforce. The authenticity and raw responses made for very rich and detailed data.

Increased Empathy

The overarching theme for the first half of the interview questions was empathy. The working women answered unanimously that they have a profound sense of empathy and compassion that is directly related to becoming a mother and staying home for an extended period of time. Because of that experience at home, the study participants have

been able to take that empathy and apply it as a crucial soft skill to current working conditions that make them more effective in the workforce.

Increased Time Management/Efficiency and Multitasking

The second major theme that emerged from the women staying at home full time and then reentering the workforce was their efficiency and time management. This hard skill reportedly made them more effective in the workforce by being able to handle several tasks within a certain amount of time efficiently. These hard skills were developed and strengthened during their full-time job at home and now are continually utilized at home *and* in the workplace.

Increased Patience and Assertiveness

Patience and assertiveness surfaced as another major theme throughout this study aided in workplace effectiveness and developed while at home full time. These soft skills were reported to have a profound effect on the workplace experience but, only after having stayed at home were they fully recognized as a valuable skill.

Timing of a New Career Opportunity and/or Child Starting School

Workplace reentry for the stay at home mothers in the study was contingent on timing. There were examples reported such as a child entering Kindergarten and age of the child but, the overarching theme for career reentry was timing. The timing for the study subjects own career reentry was unique to each woman but they had the ability to recognize when the timing was right.

Asking for Help

Once back in the work force a major theme emerged to *keep* women in the workforce was that of being able to have a support system around them to help with the

day-to-day running of the household and childcare. The transition back into the workforce carried with it several catalysts but in order to keep the mothers back in the workforce they reported and recognized it was going to take asking for help along the way.

Double Bind-Spread too Thin

Along with asking for help another major theme that emerged from the research and previously identified in Chapter II, involved the double bind of the working mother. Study participants reported that once returning to the workforce that if they did not ask for help or have a plan to maintain the household and work load they felt they would be spread too thin. This experience by the study participants was recognized and then corrected once they were able to make the appropriate changes in their personal and professional lives to not burn out. Examples of fixing the double bind were reported as: (a) equal domestic responsibilities with your spouse, (b) hiring a nanny, (c) hiring a housekeeper, (d) being able to say “no” to too many obligations, and (e) working part time.

No Regrets in Life

Now back in the workforce the study participants had time to reflect and look back at their time spent at home. An overwhelming theme emerging from this study was that during the time these women served as a stay at home mother, the majority had no regrets. The time spent with their children full time was reported as the most precious and valuable time in their life and they did not regret that time with their children despite a reentry pay cut or difficult transition back into the workforce.

Know Your Worth

The final take-away from this study was that all the participants wanted other mothers to know their worth and value themselves as hard working mothers. The study participants' sincerity in their answers was obvious and they felt passionate about telling other women to recognize their self-worth. Some examples of advice were: “*allow yourself to be okay with your own journey*” (Participant 8), “*be proud of the years spent with family*” (Participant 2), “*your kids will learn from your example*” (Participant 1), “*take care of yourself-physically, mentally, spiritually*” (Participant 12), and finally “*choose what works best for your family...don't let guilt over take you*” (Participant 4).

Summary

Through extensive analysis of the data, major themes, patterns and findings were identified and placed into four themes: Empathy, Compassion, Multitasking, and Efficiency. Chapter V includes a detailed analysis of the data as it relates to the review of the literature, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

In conclusion, Chapter IV presented rich data that explored the lived experiences of 12 women that reentered the workforce after working as a stay at home mother. Their candid responses and thoughtful advice shed light on the unique journey that women go through when they become mothers in the career world. The pairing soft skills and hard skills along with the timing of reentry has shown that stay at home mothers who reenter the workforce do so with a refined skill set that has reportedly benefitted them in their current career.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter V is a culmination of the work in the prior sections and will focus on the major findings identified by the researcher from the data collection, conclusions and unexpected findings. Also, implications for action, recommendations for further research and concluding personal reflections from the educated mothers in the study who left the workforce and later returned after working as a stay at home mother.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

Research Question

This study was guided by one central research question and five research sub-questions:

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother?

Research Sub-Questions

1. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?
2. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?

3. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce?
4. What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?
5. What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative design was chosen to be the most appropriate research approach for this study. To gather the data, a phenomenological perspective was the best method for the type of research that was needed to collect data from the women in the study. This method is described as, "Phenomenology aims at gaining deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences..." (Patton, 2015, p. 115). The way in which the data was gathered was through a series of one-on-one interviews in person or via video chat. The one-on-one interviews were based on the criteria the sample participants met for the study. Techniques to ensure good qualitative questions included a field test that was conducted first, interview script critiques, and revisions as needed to get to the final phase and approved questions (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Population

The study population consisted of educated women who have a bachelor's degree or higher in the United States and were employed in a career prior to leaving the work place to raise their children. These educated women then decided to reenter the

workplace after an average of 4.79 years serving as a stay at home mother based on the median of the 12 study participants. The opting out and opting back into a career is a generalized experience for women but it is the goal of this study to narrow down the population of women in order to gather information on their personal experience and life lessons from transitioning back into the workforce.

Target Population

Creswell (1998) states that the target population is the “actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). The target population for this study consisted of educated career women with a minimum bachelor’s degree who reside in the United States. Their age is between the 30 and 45 years old. The women had been in the career field prior to leaving the workforce and have at least one child under the age of 15. They were a stay at home mother for a minimum of one year and have since reentered the workforce for a minimum of one year and are working in an environment that is a paid position outside the home within the United States.

Sample

The sample population consisted of 12 women. The sample population was taken from contacting women from specialty websites that were specifically dedicated to women’s career reentry as well as word of mouth requests which led to a snow ball referral effect. These agencies were located in the Midwest and East Coast regions of the United States. Reentry women had posted their testimonies regarding their reentry experience and subsequently their names were posted on the agencies website. After reading their testimonies and verifying their criteria for the study the subjects were sent a request from the researcher via LinkedIn to accept an invitation to connect with the

researcher. Once the subjects accepted the request, the next step in communication began via personal email. The personal referrals were contacted the same way using email and telephone to schedule an appointment time to conduct the interview. Those personally referred subjects lived in Southern California.

Major Findings

Below is a summary of the major findings identified by the researcher. Findings were organized by research questions and stemmed from the common themes described in Chapter IV. The major themes that emerged were specific to the questions asked and told a story of the study participants' lived experiences in chronological order from when they left the workforce, life as a stay at home mother, and finally a mother who reentered the workforce. The study participants were very thoughtful, sincere, and passionate about their answers. Three of the mothers began to tear up and cry when asked to recall certain periods of their time at home and reentering the workforce. The authenticity and raw responses made for very rich and detailed data.

Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 1

This section highlights findings to Research Sub-Question 1: *While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in educated career women's lives that served as a catalyst for their reentry into the workforce?*

Finding 1: Timing of a new career opportunity and/or child starting school.

Workplace reentry for the stay at home mothers in the study was contingent on timing for 50% of the study participants. There were examples reported such as Kindergarten and age of the child but, the overarching theme for career reentry was timing. The timing for

the study subjects' own career reentry was unique to each woman but they had the ability to recognize when the timing was right.

Finding 2: Desire for independence/validation and socialization outside the home. In addition to the timing and their children starting school, 42% or five out of 12 women reported that independence and validation were imported catalysts for their career reentry which tied with socialization for the second highest answer. The study participants reported it was important for them to get back into the workforce not only when the timing was right but also for them to start feeling that validation and independence generated from working outside the home.

Finding 3: Desire for self-discovery, financial gain, and mental stimulation outside the home. The next most reported responses had a three-way tie at 33%, with four answers each. The study participants reflected deeply they wanted the mental stimulation. One study participant mentioned she started developing a “mommy brain” and that she realized that she needed some adult stimulation outside the home.

Finances also played a role in the catalyst for career reentry. Study Participant 5 reported that “*my husband lost his job...we have three daughters to support...we both just started applying for jobs.*” Debt played a role in study Participant 4 as one of her catalysts for returning to work,

I made a lot of sacrifices to stay home with my daughter and we had accrued a lot of debt because of that...now that I started working again it feels so good to be able to contribute to my family, to our child...to paying off debt and still be doing something I love doing, it's really fun.

Major Findings from Research Sub-Question 2

This section highlights findings to answer Research Sub-Question 2: *While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities and skills acquired by educated career women?*

Finding 4: Increased empathy. The overarching theme for the first half of the interview questions was Empathy. One hundred percent of the study participants answered unanimously that they have a profound sense of empathy and compassion directly related to becoming a mother and staying home for an extended period of time. Because of that experience at home, the study participants have been able to take that increased empathy and apply it as a crucial soft skill to current working conditions that make them more effective in the workforce.

Finding 5: Increased time management/efficiency and multitasking. The second major finding that emerged from the women staying at home full time and then reentering the workforce was their efficiency and time management. This hard skill has reportedly made them more effective in the workforce by being able to handle several tasks within a certain amount of time efficiently. These hard skills were developed and strengthened during their full-time job at home and now are continually utilized at home *and* in the workplace.

Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 3

This section highlights findings to answer Research Sub-Question 3: *While working as a stay at home mother, what were the acquired job qualities and skills perceived as aiding their transition back into the workforce?*

Finding 6: Increased assertiveness. Assertiveness was the most reported skill that aided in the transition back into the workforce with an 83% response. Being able to be assertive with the career reentry process allowed for work schedule negotiations and the ability to speak up for what expectations the study participant was looking for from an employer and their home life.

Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 4

This section highlights findings to answer Research Sub-Question 4: *What acquired job qualities and skills do educated career women now back in the workforce perceive they acquired as a stay at home mother that impact their current job effectiveness?*

Finding 7: Increased empathy, time management/organization, and patience/perspective within the workplace. The major findings that emerged were 100% study participants reported that Empathy impacted their current job effectiveness. The next three findings tied with seven participants each reporting they are more effective in their workplace in regards to time management/organization and patience and perspective. The study participants reported their ability to apply all the tricks and techniques that were sharpened at home have now been put to use in a professional setting.

Major Finding from Research Sub-Question 5

This section highlights findings to answer Research Sub-Question 5: *What recommendations do educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother offer to other educated career mother's at-home who desire to reenter the workforce?*

Finding 8: Confronting the double bind. Fifty-eight percent of the study participants reported that once they returned to the workforce if they did not ask for help or have a plan to maintain the household and work load they would be spread too thin. This experience by the study participants was recognized and corrected once they were able to make the appropriate changes in their personal and professional lives, so they wouldn't burn out. Examples of fixing the double bind were reported as: (a) equal domestic responsibilities with your spouse, (b) hiring a nanny, (c) hiring a housekeeper, (d) being able to say "no" to too many obligations, and (e) working a part time schedule outside of the home.

The transition back into the workforce carried with it several catalysts but in order to keep the mothers back in the workforce they reported and recognized it was going to take asking for help along the way. This finding supports the research that suggests corporations make changes in their strict work structure to support the working family lifestyle.

Finding 9: Mothers have no regrets. Now back in the workforce the study participants have had time to reflect and look back at their time spent at home. An overwhelming theme emerged from their time as a stay at home mother, 92 % had no regrets. The time spent with their children full time was reported as the most precious and valuable time in their life and they don't regret that time with them despite a reentry pay cut or difficult transition back into the workforce.

Finding 10: Mothers need to know their self-worth. The final take-away from the major themes was 92% of the study participants wanted other mothers to know their worth and value themselves as hard working mothers. The study participants' sincerity in

their answers was obvious and they felt passionate about telling other women to recognize their self-worth. Some examples of advice were: “*allow yourself to be okay with your own journey*” (Participant 8), “*be proud of the years spent with family*” (Participant 2), “*your kids will learn from your example*” (Participant 1), “*take care of yourself-physically, mentally, spiritually*” (Participant 12), and finally “*choose what works best for your family...don’t let guilt over take you*” (Participant 4).

Unexpected Findings

The unexpected findings that occurred were based on the high statistic that study participants returned to the same career field despite Chapter II research which revealed upwards of 95% of women who return to the workforce reenter in a new career field. According to a study by Hewlett and Luce (2005), 93% of women studied want to rejoin the workforce, however only 5% want to return to their original employer. This unexpected finding, as shown in Figure 14, demonstrates that 41% of the study participants returned to the workforce in the same career field.

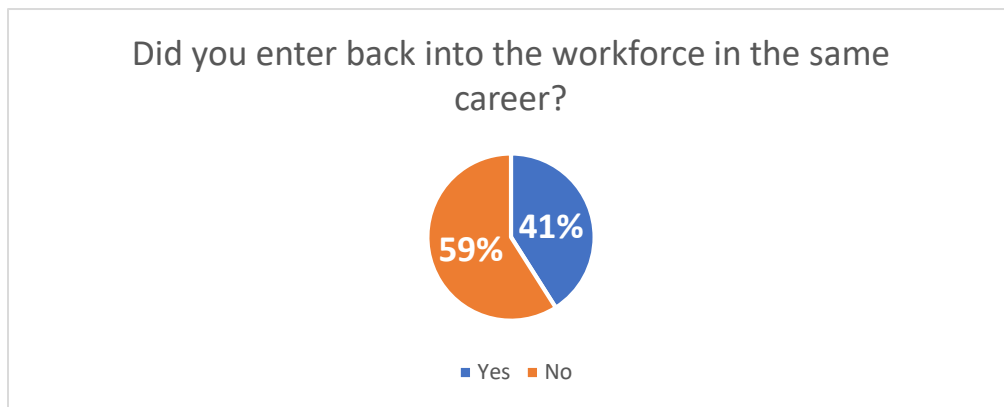


Figure 14. Percentage of participants who re-entered the workforce in the same career.

Another unexpected finding was several former employers formally sought after the stay at home mothers to return to their establishment. Four of the study participants reported that their former employers contacted them and were willing to renegotiate part

time reentry working conditions. This finding goes against the research that suggests corporations are anti-flexible and part-time working conditions. The study participants who went back to work at their former employers were not only able to renegotiate a part-time and project based work environment, they were *not* penalized or perceived as a liability for a gap in their resume. Study Participant 5 recalled her time going back out on job interviews before being hired back in her current position and stated:

I had an interview and I pretty much thought...Oh, there this is a big gap in my resume...I had employers tell me “we know you’re concerned about that”...they were like “No, it makes perfect sense and we see that a lot”...I was looking for all these ways to explain my gaps in employment and I found that employers really didn’t care.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were surmised based on the study’s findings:

Conclusion 1: Stay at Home Mothers Develop a High Degree of Empathy at Home and in the Workforce.

Based on the findings of this study as supported by the literature it is concluded that 100% of the mothers interviewed display a high degree of empathy at home and in the work-force that has enabled them to be more successful in their jobs and with their families. The mothers have realized that their time at home has given them a new perspective on working with other people and the effectiveness of having increased empathy towards others in their life.

All the women gained empathy for other mothers who have gone through their own struggles personally or professionally and a new sense of compassion for those

people in their life that they interact with every day. One example is from study Participant 6 who stated, *“I think being a mom has taught me to be able to stop and listen to my students more...be more empathetic and understand the problems that they are going through.”*

Women in the workplace, in particular the mothers in this research reported that empathy is a crucial skill gained while at home full time that has positively affected their performance in the workforce. According to Gentry et al. 2007, empathy in the workplace is a crucial soft skill for effective leadership. These authors went on to note that empathy is a skill that can be learned and improved on but, having empathy is not the same thing as demonstrating empathy.

Dr. Simone Ahuja, an innovation expert noted that empathy is a feminine trait you should maximize at work. She was quoted in an article Forbes magazine by Rezvani, 2014:

Women tend to have greater empathy than men, a key innovation competency in their approach to problem solving. Empathy helps them to be truly user-centric and focused on whether there is a real value-add in the solutions they are providing - and to remove assumptions, an innovation killer. (p. 1)

Conclusion 2: Stay at Home Mothers Develop a High Degree of Compassion at Home *and* in the Workforce.

Based on the answers reported from the study participants, 58% of the study participants reported they acquired more compassion while at home full time. They responded in detail how they saw the world differently and were more aware of how they treated those around them. One study participant reflected on her time at home with her

only son, “*I saw a lot of abused children working in law enforcement... and to be around this pure baby, that pure child that’s not tainted in the evil of the world, you know what I mean?*” (Participant 6).

Ruiz (2016) interviewed a mother who opted back into the workforce through Morgan Stanley’s return to work program providing an example of a woman who used her newly acquired skill set to gain access back into the workplace. Galvin Casey’s time as a stay-at-home mom wasn’t a weakness, but a secret weapon. Despite an 11-year gap on her resume, Casey who has an MBA from Duke was offered a Vice President position in the wealth management division. According to Casey she learned:

Years of caring for children and elderly parents was the perfect preparation for project management at the fourth-largest investment bank in the world...It’s a lot of juggling. It’s a lot of putting ducks in a row, marshaling resources, pushing people in directions they perhaps don’t want to go...Anyone with teenagers knows exactly what I’m talking about. (as cited in Ruiz, 2016, para. 4)

Conclusion 3: Stay at Home Mothers Develop Advanced Multitasking Skills at Home *and* in the Workforce.

The research has concluded that adding motherhood to a woman’s title has opened up many new skill sets. According to all 12 study participants they are more efficient and effective in the workforce after becoming a mother. Study Participant 6 reflected on her time at work and was amazed at how much work she could actually get done in a day:

I think being a mom has taught me to be able to stop and listen more...have better communication skills but also know how to filter out the loud noise and be able to

focus. Also, when I have really short period of time where I won't be bothered, I am absolutely shocked at how much work I can get done which is more than I ever did before I became a mom.

Many researchers and career specialists convey that the skills educated women acquire while at home have added to their qualification to reenter the workplace (Casone, 2016; Keller, 2008; Stone, 2007). While some suggested these are considered soft skills, Allison Kelley, Founder and CEO of MomCorps, suggests that women should not undermine and sell themselves short. Kelley mentions that, "It is possible to find a company that will value your previous work experience and what you've learned during your time out of the workforce" (as cited in Parent, 2016, p. 4).

As Light (2013) mentioned in her online article in *The Atlantic*:

Soft skills are a positive qualifier for employment. Consider the management, negotiation, budgeting skills we gained in our years out of the workforce and the skills that many of us never lost. Highly qualified parents could do strategic analysis, build financial models, write legal briefs or PR pieces, generate blog posts or plan corporate conferences. (p. 5)

Conferring with several business networking groups and career advice books women have accomplished many work relevant skills while at home which qualify them for career reentry. The skills have been identified as: (a) organizational leadership, (b) proficient planner and organizer, (c) key decision maker, (d) communication skills, (e) budget and time management, (f) teacher, and (g) chair or committee member to name a few (Casone, 2016; Lawrence, 2015; Raye, 2013).

Conclusion 4: Stay at Home Mothers Develop Increased Efficiency at Home *and* in the Workforce.

The research results concluded that women who have stayed at home and have now reentered the workforce have an increased efficiency in their job performance.

Study Participant 2 reported:

Time management is a huge one, I'm definitely more efficient, I know when I'm productive and how to fix things, I'm also great with logistics, I know how to get the children from point A to point B...even with children going in different directions...I can figure it out on most days but, I do my best.

According to a 2014 CareerBuilder survey, an overwhelmingly high response for soft-skills was reported as just as important as hard skills, 77% to be exact. The national survey was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder from February 10 to March 4, 2014, and included a representative sample of 2,138 hiring managers and human resource professionals across industries and company sizes. These findings are consistent with the skills that stay at home mothers have acquired while working from inside the home (Canfield et al., 2012). Rosemary Haefner, Vice President of Human Resources at CareerBuilder reports that:

Along with responsibilities, it's important to highlight soft skills that can give employers an idea of how quickly you can adapt and solve problems, whether you can be relied on to follow through and how effectively you can lead and motivate others. (as cited in CareerBuilder, 2014, para. 3)

Conclusion 5: Stay at Home Mothers Need to be Assertive and Have a Plan That Will Work for Their Family and Themselves When Reentering the Workforce.

Based on the findings of the research, the mothers realized they need to be assertive, organized, and have a strategic plan when they leave the home and reenter the workforce. The pressure for mothers who work outside of the home is felt negatively if they do not have a solid support system in place or have an active role in negotiating the terms of their career reentry. Study Participant 7 was able to successfully negotiate her return to the workforce on a part time basis with her former employer. She was more confident to ask for what terms she wanted to her reentry and what days of work would be best for her and her family. Study Participant 10 reported that she became more assertive when she reentered the workforce as a blogger in a primarily male dominated newspaper environment:

I could figure out what was going on very quickly...there was this one “chucklehead” from advertising who was trying to “mansplain” things to me about what blogs were...I was ready to break him in half, I couldn’t believe it. So, I called him out in front of everybody, I figured if he was allowed to stand there and be a sexist pig...I was allowed to stand up and defend myself and my job...I let this guy know I got stuff to do and don’t get in my way!

There is a certain rhetoric that describes the workplace as a hostile environment for women but especially mothers. A study of top executives from 10 United States based corporations, found that gender was an obstacle in the workplace and that women were passed over for promotions, excluded from networking groups, and had limited role models to reference (Galinsky et al., 2003). The discrimination working mothers

reported was subliminal at times but nonetheless felt in the climate of the workplace despite the inclusion of the FMLA in 1993 in which working mothers would not be penalized for taking time off for maternity leave (Stone, 2007).

Conclusion 6: Stay at Home Mothers who Reenter the Workforce Need to ask for Help and Surround Themselves With a Supportive Work/Life Balance Environment to Prevent Them From Leaving the Workforce Again.

The research findings conclude, to *keep* educated former stay at home mothers in the workforce, need to have a support system around them to help with the day-to-day running of the household and childcare. Examples include: (a) equal domestic responsibilities with your spouse, (b) hiring a nanny, (c) hiring a housekeeper, (d) being able to say “no” to too many obligations, and (e) working part time.

Women who have kept up the pace in the demanding male centered structure of grueling work hours, limited flexibility, and constant technology accessibility have left women reeling from the side-effects. Women who have a highly stressful job have a 40% increased risk for heart disease, heart attacks, and a 60% increase in type 2 diabetes (Novak et al., 2013; Slopen et al., 2012).

Along with the physical side-effects of the work-related stress on women, their reported happiness and positive emotions were low and depression was high. Some researchers suggested that women who worked themselves into a lifestyle of imbalance and constant rat race found that once they hit a desired goal, the outcome was not worth the climb getting there (Huffington, 2014; Kushner, 2001, Sandberg, 2013).

About three-quarters of adults (74%) say the increasing number of women working for pay has made it harder for parents to raise children, and half say it has made

marriages harder to succeed. At the same time, two-thirds say it has made it easier for families to live comfortably. While the vast majority of Americans (79%) reject the idea that women should return to their traditional roles, the new Pew Research survey finds that the public still sees mothers and fathers in a different light when it comes to evaluating the best work-family balance for children. About half (51%) of survey respondents say that children are better off if a mother is home and doesn't hold a job, while just 8% say the same about a father (as cited in Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013, p. 1).

In an article for the Huffington Post, Norma Carr-Ruffino, a professor at San Francisco State University and an expert on women in management, argues that it is important to focus on the issues that women in the workforce are still facing but, she questions why we are still having the same conversation in 2013 as she did back in the 1970s (as cited in Mehroz, 2013). Carr-Ruffino mentioned another issue specific to women's experience is the work-life balance, arguing that society needs to shift its cultural understanding of the role of mothers and fathers (as cited in Mehroz, 2013). Carr-Ruffino went on to note, "I would like to see the culture move to a place where the fathers could be as responsible [as mothers] so it wouldn't be such an expectation that the mothers have the primary responsibility [for child rearing]" (as cited in Mehroz, 2013, p. 2).

Implications for Action

By understanding how women are motivated in their decisions to reenter the workforce, society will benefit from their return (Zwirn, 2016).

Based on the findings and conclusion from this study and an extensive review of the literature, the following implications for action are recommended for career women transitioning back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

Implication 1: Strategies Women Employ to Re-enter the Workforce

Experts in the career counseling field have identified many strategies to be most effective for women who begin their plan to return to the workforce. These strategies can begin the process of career reentry for a woman and assist in the next phase of a working mother's life based on seminal research (Casone, 2016; Eriksen et al., 2007, Hannon, 2013, Parent, 2017).

Strategy 1: Personal assessment. Undertake a personal assessment which can begin with the mother's reentry to the workforce conceptual framework and hire a professional to provide career counseling and resume writing (Parent, 2017). An example from the website Apres (2017), a women's recruitment and career placement agency has posted several video clips online from women who detailed their journey back into the workforce. All the stories mentioned begin with a personal assessment of where they were in their life and what new direction they wanted to explore. These women noted that hiring a professional in the career counseling field was an invaluable asset.

Strategy 2: Workplace options. Explore all facets of work reentry such as, volunteering, freelancing, examining your personal passions, and flexibility in the workplace. The women who were interviewed for the book *The Comeback*, reported that they worked for non-profits and performed pro bono work while at home full time and

how rewarding that experience was and how it helped shape a new passion for community service work (Keller, 2008).

Strategy 3: Networking. Network and reach out to alumni associations, former colleagues, and online social networks, community job fairs. Another example from the women's agency Apres (2017), involved an attorney who found herself at home for eight years. She did pro bono work part time but when she was ready to transition back into the workforce full time networking was her number one suggestion to other mothers looking to on-ramp their careers. This mother describes her experience by saying she wouldn't end a conversation without a new name or lead to follow up with. This strategy paid off and she was able to effectively return to work through her networking efforts.

Strategy 4: Updating your hard skills. Update education, hard skills, technology efficiency, and computer skills. Another example from the book *The Comeback* involved one mother's description of her experience getting back into the workforce by going back to school. Her passion was with children and she wanted to be an occupational therapist. The university she applied to had a program she could qualify for to get her teaching credentials and begin the process of a new career path. After completing the program, this mother went on begin her new career working with children and living her passion (Keller, 2008).

Strategy 5: Resume overhaul. Revise and recreate a resume that highlights soft skills, volunteer work, committee obligations, and update credentials and participate in pro bono community work. The strategy women utilize in beginning their career transition is by recreating a resume that reflects their work at home as a productive experience. One suggestion from a head hunting agency was to create a consulting firm

while you are working as a stay at home mother to highlight all the volunteer work that was done during their time at-home. This strategy legitimizes all the efforts, volunteer hours, and community work that was performed (Robinson, 2016).

There are several ways in which women can harness their self-determination and get back to finding what motivates them. In order to achieve that result, research has suggested utilizing the support available from companies that “specifically focus on back-to-work moms to organizations that offers skill-building “enternships” which is essentially an internship for entering back into the workforce for women of all ages” (Santos, 2016, p. 1).

Implication 2: Employers Need to Embrace the Reentry Mother

The research from the 12 study participants identified their strengths from working at home full time and honed-in on the development of crucial soft *and* hard skills that match the same ones identified by CareerBuilder as the top 10 skills employers looks for in new hires. Their determination, razor sharp efficiency, and immeasurable amount of empathy makes the highly educated reentry mother a top contender for new hire consideration.

Implication 3: Employers Need Adjust Their Support Systems to Keep Mothers From Leaving the Workforce

In 2009, the Center for Work-Life Policy surveyed women with advanced degrees and found that among those who left the workforce, almost 70% mentioned that they would not have done so if their workplace offered more flexible work arrangement (as cited in Hewlett et al., 2010).

The female CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi, noted recently in an article by FastCompany, that her company is investing \$100 million dollars to support women and girls. She has also invested in the advancement of work-life balance for their employees. For example, they are creating day care facilities at work, allowing paid paternity and maternity leave as well as giving people flextime:

PepsiCo does not have an entry-level problem with women...they do very well in the early stages...then they get married and have kids, that's the time they have to build a career, and most companies don't have support systems that allow women to have a life and a livelihood. We almost force people to choose...If we don't provide the support system for employees in their thirties and forties to have a family and work, there is no way we are going to build a pipeline to the C-suite. (FastCompany, 2017, p. 79)

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the study's findings and limitations for this study, the following recommendations for further research are suggested:

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation is that a replication of the study should be conducted researching the lived experience of educated working mothers who *never* left the workforce.

This will determine if the qualitative research in a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of educated working mothers shows any variance to the mothers in this study who left to be a stay at home mother and then returned to the workforce with and increased soft and hard skill set.

Recommendation 2

A second recommendation is that a similar study should be conducted on the lived experience of educated stay at home mothers who never *returned* to the workforce.

This will provide further insight into the lived experience of educated stay at home mothers perceptions of their soft and hard skill sets. This will also determine if the qualitative research shows a variance in their daily stimuli and catalysts in their life that have motivated them to stay at home.

Recommendation 3

Another recommendation is that a future study should be conducted on the lived experiences of hiring managers who have hired a reentry mothers into the workforce and the mothers subsequent career effectiveness.

This will provide further insight into the current study and be able to assess any variance in the skill sets that the reentry mother is returning with to the workforce. This study would also shed light on any biases hiring managers may experience in their interview process.

Recommendation 4

It is also recommended that a replication of the study be conducted researching the lived experience of educated career fathers who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home father.

This study could shed light on the personal and professional experience of fathers and their reported increase in soft skills. It will also be important to understand any variances that fathers may experience while home full time versus mothers.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that a future study be conducted on the lived experiences of hiring managers who have hired reentry fathers into the workforce and the fathers' subsequent career effectiveness.

This will provide further insight into the study and be able to assess any variance in the skill sets that the reentry fathers are returning with to the workforce. This study would also shed light on any biases hiring managers may experience in their interview process.

Recommendation 6

Lastly, a future study should be conducted using a quantitative research approach to measuring the soft skills that educated career women reported they gained when they became working mothers.

This study would show a greater sample result than a qualitative one and also reach a greater number of mothers in the workforce through surveys. Questions could be multiple choice to provide a greater return on the conclusions.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated women who opted back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother. It explored how the women utilized their time as a stay at home mother building soft and hard skills necessary to effectively transition back into the workforce when the timing was right. This study considered the internal and external motivations that women experience as they move throughout their motherhood journey by way of interviews. The need to research and interview these

working mothers to discover how they effectively returned to the workplace was not only necessary as a resource for future women to reference, but critical for businesses who will benefit from their increased empathy and vast skill set. Educated working mothers were selected for this study as a reference to describe their journey from opting out of the workforce to working as a stay at home mother, and their ultimate return. Findings from this study revealed that women are motivated by a deeper intrinsic level to return to the workforce, the need to find personal fulfillment not only in their home life but in their careers and lastly, pay attention to when the right opportunity and timing presents itself.

This study has taken me through many highs and lows and I cherished each and every interview with the women that I met. I learned some very personal and insightful stories and at times my heart broke hearing the struggles that the mothers in my study went through in life such as divorce, children with chronic diseases, and financial hardships, when they cried, I cried with them. The overwhelming theme that prevailed was family first, no regrets, and make no apologies for that priceless time spent at home.

I took away more than I can even put into words, I personally have struggled as a stay at home mother for seven years when I sold my publishing company in 2010. I lost my professional identity and purpose outside the home. When it came time to interview the mothers in my study I hung on their every word. I ate up every last bit of advice, and ferociously took notes on their career reentry stories in the hopes that it would inspire me in the planning my own career entry journey. What I learned was grace, forgiveness, and to enjoy the fleeting moments of motherhood despite the stigmas from negative outside voices. Self-confession, the loudest negative voice was my own. What I also learned

was, I didn't have a plan when I left the workforce that led to my ensuing struggle and internal warfare.

The final take-away from the major themes was the study participants wanted other mothers to know their worth and value themselves as hard working mothers. The study participants' sincerity in their answers was obvious and they felt passionate about telling other women to recognize their own self-worth. Some examples of advice were: *“allow yourself to be okay with your own journey”* (Participant 8), *“be proud of the years spent with family”* (Participant 2), *“your kids will learn from your example”* (Participant 1), *“take care of yourself-physically, mentally, spiritually”* (Participant 12), and finally *“choose what works best for your family...don't let guilt over take you”* (Participant 4).

What the women in my study reflected on was; plan or no plan, career or no career, let the universe play out its destiny for you, advice I have since taken.

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APPENDIX A

BUIRB Approval

Dear Gina Albertini-Bennett,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: <https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf>.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you.

Doug DeVore, Ed.D.

Professor

Organizational Leadership

BUIRB Chair

ddevore@brandman.edu

www.brandman.edu

APPENDIX B

Formal Invitation Letter

Hello, my name is Gina Albertini-Bennett. I am currently working on a dissertation to complete a doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership and this interview will be a part of the research I will use to complete the dissertation. I am looking to interview women on their lived experience as a working mother who effectively transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

Through this study, I am hoping to gain a better understanding of the motivating factors that led to your career reentry as well as the job acquired skills that you obtained while working as a stay at home mother. As a mother who has effectively transitioned back into the workforce, your perspective is instrumental to this understanding. I am interested in learning about your experiences, perspectives, and advice for future mother's potential career reentry.

The qualifications for this study are:

1. The subject would have to be a female and a mother.
2. The age of their child/children was under 15 years old.
3. The subject had a minimum of a bachelor's degree.
4. The subject had been back in the workforce for a minimum of a year.
5. The subject was out of the workforce for a minimum of one year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warmly,

Gina

xxx-xxx-xxxx

galbertinibennett@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

Participant Bill of Rights



BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form



DATE: 09/13/17

INFORMATION ABOUT: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Women who Opted Back Into the Workforce After Working as a Stay at Home Mother: A Phenomenological Study

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Gina Albertini-Bennett, M.A.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Gina Albertini-Bennett, M.A., a doctoral student from Brandman University School of Education Organizational Leadership program. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of educated career women who transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother.

This study will address the gap in research and help identify the skills mothers acquired at home that will be vital to the new phase of their professional lives. This study will also address the importance of women's reentry into the workplace and recognize the skills that stay at home mothers identified as necessary in the reentry process. The study is designed to report on the lived experiences of women's lives and provide a working logic model of identified inputs and outputs of skills acquired at home. The comprehensive research will yield a strategic plan aimed at mothers looking to reenter the workplace and ensuing employers looking to hire and welcome back women to the workplace.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a one-on-one audio and/or video recorded interview with the researcher. The interview will last approximately: 30 minutes. Completion of the interview will take place in October and November 2017.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by storing any research materials collected during the audio interview process in a locked file drawer and in which only the researcher has access to. Additionally, I understand that the researcher and transcriptionist will protect my confidentiality by storing any digital research materials collected during the audio recording process in a secure and encrypted cloud based storage facility.

- b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add depth and understanding to the experience of the educated stay at home mother who transitioned back into the workforce. Also, by highlighting the soft skills that I have gained at home I may be educating employers as to the qualifications and relevance stay at home mothers

now possess. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study.

- c) I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation in this study.
- d) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Gina Albertini-Bennett. She can be reached by email at xxxxxxxxxx@gmail.com or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Also, the committee chair for this study is Dr. Ryder. She can be reached via email at ryder@brandman.edu or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
- e) I understand that the interview will be audio taped using two forms of an audio recording device. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. Upon completion of the study all transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcriptionist from the interview will be shredded and destroyed.

My participation in this research study is voluntary. I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. Also, the researcher may stop the interview at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive

Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX E

Audio/Video Release Form



VIDEOTAPING RELEASE FORM

RESEARCH TITLE: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Women who Opted Back Into the Workforce After Working as a Stay at Home Mother: A Phenomenological Study

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618
RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Gina Albertini-Bennett, M.A.

Personal/Professional Advice- Video Recorded Question: I understand that the last question of the interview may be video recorded per the granting of my permission. I do not have to agree to having the last interview question video recorded and that it may just be audio recorded. In the event that I do agree to have myself video recorded the purpose will be to solely add depth and visual emotion to answering the last question of the interview. I also understand that only my head shot will be visual in the recording.

Permission to use Videotaping: I hereby give my permission to Gina Albertini-Bennett to use any photos or videotape material taken of myself during her research on *Exploring the Lived Experiences of Women who Opted Back Into the Workforce After Working as a Stay at Home Mother: A Phenomenological Study*. The photos and videotape material will only be used for research purposes and for the presentation of the research. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for photos or video footage of me to be used in this research project.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Interview Script

Participant: _____

Date: _____

INTERVIEWER SAYS:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today in order to interview you on your lived experience as a working mother who effectively transitioned back into the workforce after working as a stay at home mother. I am currently working on a dissertation to complete a doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership and this interview will be a part of the research I will use to complete the dissertation.

Through this study, I am hoping to gain a better understanding of the motivating factors that led to your career reentry as well as the job acquired skills that you obtained while working as a stay at home mother. As a mother who has effectively transitioned back into the workforce, your perspective is instrumental to this understanding. I am interested in learning about your experiences, perspectives, and advice for future mother's potential career reentry.

Your participation is completely voluntary and will greatly strengthen the study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to end the interview or not respond to a question, please let me know. Your information will be kept confidential and your name will be changed to protect your identity. In addition, I have provided a copy of the questions that I will ask for your reference; however, I may have follow-up questions if clarity is needed. The duration of this interview will take approximately: 30 minutes. Do you have any questions about the interview process?

CONSENT FORM:

The document I am providing is an informed consent form. It explains much of the information I have shared as well as outlines the benefits and risks of your participation. Please take a moment to read through the form and sign showing your consent.

INTERVIEWER SAYS:

As we get started, I would like to record this interview for transcribing purposes so that I can access it at a later time. I would like to be able to accurately represent you experiences, and at no time will your name be shared. I would also like to be able to video record only the last question that asks your advice to be offered to other mothers who may be considering career reentry. Your video recorded advice will be used to add depth of emotion as well as genuine sincerity in your answer. Again, I will make sure that your confidentiality is kept at all times. Do I have your permission to continue with this interview and record it and video record last question? (Obtain permission and turn on recording devices)

APPENDIX G

Instrumentation

1. Background Information-Audio Recorded Question

- a. Can you tell me a little about your family and children?
- b. How long were you a stay at home mother?
- c. How long have you been back in the workforce?
- d. What can you tell me about your current career?
- e. Is that the same career you were in prior to your exit?
- f. (If answer is a career change) What caused the change in career field?
- g. (If answer is same career) What drew you back to the same field?

2. Career Driving Forces--Audio Recorded Question

- a. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the driving forces in your life that served as a catalyst for your career reentry?

3. Job Preferred Qualities-Audio Recorded Question

- a. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred qualities you acquired while at home?
- b. How were those job preferred qualities acquired?
- c. While working as a stay at home mother, what were the job preferred skills you acquired while at home?
- d. How were those job preferred skills acquired?
- e. How would you describe the skills and qualities you gained while at home aided in your transition back into the workforce?

- d. What examples can you give of how those skills and qualities you gained while at home impacted your current job effectiveness?

4. Personal/Professional Advice- Video and Audio Recorded Question

- a. What recommendations or words of wisdom do you have for stay at home mothers who desire to reenter the workforce?
- b. Can you give an example of what you would do differently/same?
- c. What was most difficult for you? Why?
- d. Can you offer any words of wisdom from your own experience?

Possible probes that can be added to any question, for clarification:

- 1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
- 2. “Do you have more to add?”
- 3. “What did you mean by”
- 4. “Why do think that was the case?”
- 5. “Could you please tell me more about.... “
- 6. “Can you give me an example of”
- 7. “How did you feel about that?”

APPENDIX H

Field Test Participant Feedback

After the interview ask the field test interviewees the following questions. Make it a friendly conversation. Either script or record their feedback.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked? If the interview indicates some uncertainty, be sure to find out where in the interview it occurred.

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

6. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview... (I'm pretty new at this)?

APPENDIX I

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions for Facilitator

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Discuss the following reflection questions with your 'observer' after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, sharing your thoughts with the observer and considering their feedback will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?
2. Were the questions clear or were there places where the respondents were unclear?
3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the respondents?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?