

PERSONAL FACTORS OF HIGH-ACHIEVING WOMEN
THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE LOW NUMBER OF
EXECUTIVES IN CORPORATIONS

by

MARCIA REYNOLDS

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Marcia Reynolds

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This dissertation by Marcia Reynolds is
approved and is acceptable in quality and form:

William Bergquist, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

Linda Page, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Jeff Spar, Ph.D.
Committee Member

The Professional School of Psychology

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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There are two generations of women holding management positions in numbers in U.S. corporations. Most of the research and books have focused on the difficulties and needs of the first generation. The second generation of women leaders, born between 1955 and 1980, are better trained, more savvy and have a stronger sense of self than their pioneer predecessors. However, women still hold only 16 percent of corporate officer positions in the United States. Though subtle and not-so subtle discrimination still exists, the beliefs and choices made by women with high leadership potential also contribute to the low number of leaders. This study defines the personal factors that are keeping the current generation of high-achieving women out of the executive board rooms of corporate America. Combining surveys and in-depth interviews with 47 women who matched a personality profile of “high-achievers,” this study presents their stories and the five themes that emerged. Each theme produced a set of subthemes and a list of possible

negative behavior patterns that could affect the women's ability to become successful executives. Recommendations based on this study include developmental strategies for the women and suggestions for the mentors, managers and coaches who act as their partners. Recommendations are also provided for organizational developers who are working with leaders to create corporate cultures that play to the strengths of these women in an effort to retain and promote them to executive levels.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The 1990's saw the first generation of women launching professional careers and entering positions of senior management in significant numbers. Many hit the glass ceiling. Others smashed through it. According to a 2006 report from Catalyst, a nonprofit organization tracking women's success in the world of work, women hold 16.4 percent of corporate officer positions in the United States, up from 8.7 percent in 1996. (Catalyst, 2006, p 2)

However, the researchers at Catalyst did not celebrate this data. The report also found that the rate of increase had significantly slowed from 2002 (up only .07 percentage points) and in some corporations, declined. (p. 3) This rate is disheartening when considering that in 2006, they reported that women made up 46.4 percent of the labor force and 50.6 percent of the management and professional workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). In addition, a large number of companies have instituted diversity and inclusion policies that aim to increase the retention and advancement of women. (Catalyst, 2006, p. 3)

The Conclusion and Call to Action on the Catalyst report placed the balance of the blame on the corporations. (p. 36-39) In an attempt to look at what is keeping the Fortune 500 from becoming meritocracies, Catalyst researchers interviewed ten successful women holding senior positions in corporations about the blocks they had to overcome and their views about current inequalities in the workplace.

The Catalyst researchers concluded that few companies have been able to “remove the barriers that prevent women and other diverse employees from achieving the same successes as white men.” (p. 36) Ilene Lang, the president of Catalyst, did admit in the Foreword of the report that the conclusions published by the Catalyst staff went beyond the data examined to include their years of experience working with diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The inferences made were meant to provide explanations “for dealing with the findings in an effort to drive positive change for women and business.”

This perspective places women as “victims of the system.” Although it is true that there are still formidable roadblocks for women in the workplace in the forms of both explicit and implicit stereotyping (McCracken, 2000; Regine & Lewin, 2003; Hoyt, 2005; Anderson, van Dam, Lievens, & Born, 2006; Mavin, 2006; Morison, Erickson, & Dychtwald, 2006), what responsibility do the women take in creating this dilemma? Is it possible that women are also constructing their own ceilings on success? If the psychological and cognitive development of women is truly different from men (Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1978; Schulz, 2005; Brizendine, 2006), are there corresponding behavioral styles that hurt their professional growth and derail them as executives? And when it comes to high-achieving women, do they burn the candle on both ends until they burn out completely on corporate life? (Gersick & Kram, 2002; Hollands, 2002; Fels, 2004)

Whereas the Peter Principle indicates that people reach their highest level of competence and then stop growing, maybe there is a “Patty Principle” at work where high-achieving women reach a certain level in management then either opt out of or cannot make it to the top tier. Is it that they do not have the energy or desire to keep going? Or do they not

get the coaching necessary for successfully playing the “boardroom game” in a way that matches their particular developmental needs, values and strengths? (Reardon, 2001; Fels, 2004) If the Patty Principle exists, then many women who aspire to move up the corporate ladder need guidance to help them through their stages of professional maturity. If we knew what was holding them back, we could better help these women to adapt and reinvent themselves at work in a way that honors their strengths and needs while maintaining their energy and drive.

In my twenty five years of experience in leadership training and executive coaching, I have found that most companies send their new female leaders to generic leadership programs that tend to be “politically correct,” meaning they do not recognize the difference between men and women as leaders. This gives little guidance to high-achieving women on how to be authentic *and* successful, and it reinforces the subtle message that they should “act like men,” a fallacy that has been hurting female leaders for years. (Holland, 2002; Ely, Meyerson & Davidson, 2006)

Gerick and Kram (2002) said that the root of the problem is not about how women need to integrate their behaviors and desires with the prevailing corporate cultures, but more about the difficulty for women in learning “who they are.” It remains unclear what really drives women to succeed at work, especially in the midst of the active changes in roles and relationships in our postmodern society. (Gergen, 1991) And it is even more unclear what is keeping the “brightest and the best” women out of the executive board room. The first generation of women in senior management opened many doors for the hordes of women

behind them. What is really stopping the second generation of female high achievers from marching through?

Literature Review

In an attempt to grasp the complexity of what is hindering the success of high-achieving woman in today's corporate environment, a review of recent articles, books and research was done to determine if the factors that are hindering women from moving into the executive ranks are clear. The review included:

1. Subtle and obvious discrimination practices (gender biases, attitudes and behavior) in organizations that keep woman from earning top corporate positions. This includes how organizations measure leadership success and how this helps or hinders female leaders.
2. Personal reasons why women are jumping off the corporate ladder, self-selecting the interruptions in their career ascension.
3. Personal factors that impact the effectiveness of women who stay in their positions, hindering them from rising to the top positions or being effective once they are there.
4. Definition and criteria of being a "high achiever" and how this behavior differs in men and women at work, affecting promotional opportunities.
5. An examination of the relevancy of identified self-defeating behaviors of high-achieving women in U.S. corporations in light of the current generation to determine if these behaviors have evolved or completely changed over time.

This review will include a retrospect over the past 40 years to identify any generational shifts in the behavior of high-achieving women. However, except for the classic studies and

seminal books that deal with women achievers and leaders, the focus will be on current research, done after 2000, to keep up with the active changes in roles and relationships in postmodern organizations.

1. Subtle and manifest discrimination in today's workplace

Whether out of good faith, legal action or economic necessity, most U.S. corporations claim to have or are working to be “politically correct.” This means they promote equity in hiring and promotions across gender, race, sexual preference and religion and maintain standards for civility and respect in people's day to day interactions. (Ely, Meyerson & Davidson, 2006) As a result, overt prejudice and discrimination in the workplace are not acceptable behaviors today.

However, even though this commitment to shifting norms and behavior is laudable, it seems to have driven discrimination underground. It is harder to point to specific behaviors. Yet discrimination is still alive in subtle, less-talked about biases and attitudes that are still keeping women, people of color and those who belong to “deviant” social groups from reaching the top corporate ranks. (Myerson & Fletcher, 2000)

When concerns and fears can't be discussed, they come out as subtly divisive behaviors that, over time, diminish people's sense of how much others value and respect them. (Hoyt, 2005) For example, you might find a manager constantly confusing two Asians and calling them by each other's name, a female executive getting interrupted more than her male counterpart or a black person's innovative idea is misattributed to a white colleague. When these insults are brought to the table, those accused of the discrimination feel unnecessarily

attacked and retreat behind a slew of rationalizations. They later find sympathizers in the company to bad-mouth the “entitled minorities.”

Nothing gets resolved. The result increases polarization, self-righteousness, suspicion and over-protective behavior while doing very little to increase the self-image and positive outlook among women and minorities. (Ely, et al., 2006, p. 30)

After surveying 286 male and female executives, Carlson, Kacmar, and Whitton (2006) found that only 31.7% of men thought women had to be exceptional to succeed, while 69.4% of women felt that way. These women executives said they still encounter barriers to success. Either the men didn't see the barriers or they gave the politically correct response. Yet, with women still holding less than 20% of corporate officer positions in Fortune 500 companies with only 8 of those positions being CEO, the researchers concluded that “Executive men may be saying the right words, but if the gender composition of the typical boardroom is any indication, they're probably not behaving accordingly.” (p. 140)

In 1991, senior executives at Deloitte & Touche found that only four of 50 candidates for partner were women, even though they had been heavily recruiting women from colleges and business schools since 1980. (McCracken, 2000) It wasn't that the women weren't qualified, but that they were leaving the firm at a significantly greater rate than men before they could be considered for partner. When interviewed about the findings, most of the executives didn't see the statistics as a problem, assuming women were leaving to stay home with their children and there was nothing they could do about it. (p. 160) However, the CEO at the time, Mike Cook, decided the high turnover of women was an urgent problem that needed to be fixed.

Cook created the Initiative for the Retention and Advancement of Women against massive resistance from the predominantly male management who kept insisting that nothing was wrong. (p. 160) First, a task force interviewed women who had left the company. They found that most of them did not leave to raise families. Instead, they stayed until they felt that the male-dominated culture at Deloitte was hindering their career growth. They left to go find greater opportunities that matched their personal and professional goals.

Armed with this perspective, the task force then spent 12 months gathering data that identified many gender-based assumptions. These included suppositions that male leaders held that kept women from getting premier client assignments, from being invited to networking functions, from getting informal mentoring and from receiving support for family obligations. (p. 161)

A year later, all management professionals were required to attend sessions where they participated in dialogues, watched videos and discussed case studies designed to dig deep into the gender attitudes affecting their work environment. The men came face to face with the unconscious assumptions they held that affected their decisions. As a result, a majority of the male leaders saw the errors in their perceptions and was converted. (p. 168)

The male managers recognized that they needed to ask women more about what they want or don't want before making wrong assumptions. Dialogue became an essential tool for managers. In addition, plans for promoting flexible work arrangements and lighter travel schedules were started, easing the strain on both men and women. They created coaching and mentoring programs for all potential and new partners, male and female. A program for the development of women leaders that includes networking, training and other support elements

was created. Subtle discrimination still exists but is much less tolerated and more openly discussed when it appears. (p. 163-165)

The Deloitte program for women is still active today and has expanded to include an online network, webinar sessions, Inner Circle networking for female senior executives and ongoing local events for women. (Deloitte & Touche, 2006) The 2005 Women's Initiative Annual Report stated that women made up 18% of the firm's partners, principles and directors, the highest percentage among the Big Four accounting firms. In actual numbers, there were 116 women selected as partners, principles and directors, up from 3 in 1992. In addition, 39% of managers were women, 45% of new hires and 51% of rehires were women and the gender turnover gap decreased to -0.7% indicating a higher retention rate for women than men. In 1990, only 1 in 50 candidates for partner was a woman. In 2005, 1 in 3 candidates was female. The program is working.

However, this was a financially-, mentally- and time-intensive program to enact. Cultural changes at most corporations are not simple endeavors. At the core of this problem is that the qualities that measure leadership success are still heavily defined as masculine. (Regine & Lewin, 2003)

The most widely used psychological measure of femininity and masculinity is the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) designed at Stanford University in 1974. (Bem, 1974; Powell & Graves, 2003) It has been suggested that the current validity of the BSRI instrument is low due to the changes in the roles of men and women in American society over the past 30 years. However, after twenty years of using the inventory, Bem (1993) said that even though the roles are evolving, the beliefs about what makes a person "masculine" or "feminine" are

not. She said that until the lenses created by these beliefs are rendered visible, we will continue to judge the sources of power incorrectly, “for it is only when Americans apprehend the more subtle and systemic ways in which the culture reproduces male power that they will finally comprehend the unfinished business of the feminists agenda.” (p. 2)

The BSRI adjectives that describe masculinity are: self-reliant, strong personality, forceful, independent, analytical, defends one’s beliefs, athletic, assertive, has leadership abilities, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, self-sufficient, dominant, willing to take a stand, aggressive, acts as a leader, individualistic, competitive, ambitious, and masculine. The feminine traits, in addition to “feminine,” include yielding, loyal, cheerful, compassionate, shy, sympathetic, affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others, flatterable, understanding, eager to soothe hurt feelings, soft-spoken, warm, tender, gullible, childlike, does not use harsh language, loves children, and gentle.

These traits may seem as laughable as watching *Leave it to Beaver*, but the deeply-rooted cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity create unconscious stereotyping by both men and women that show up in expectations and judgments about behavior at work. (Daly & Ibarra, 1995) This can be seen when choosing who should be a leader and who is a good leader, and in labeling men as “appropriately aggressive” but women who demonstrate the same behavior as “bitches.” (Powell & Graves, pg. 136-137) Overall, the stereotype, “think manager—think male” remains strong. (Sczesny, 2003)

Fanning the fire, Fletcher (2002) said that there is a deeply ingrained prejudice that equates feminine behaviors such as sociable, compassionate, sensitive to the needs of others, eager to soothe hurt feelings and warm with being female and being female with being

powerless. Eagly and Karau (2002) called this “role congruity.” From their perspective, women are seen as less qualified to be leaders because the competencies required are described as male attributes and incompatible with the communal qualities associated with women. In addition, women leaders who demonstrate the suitable leadership characteristics (male) are looked at less favorably than their male counterparts because their behavior is inconsistent with appropriate female behaviors.

As a result, women not only face subtle obstacles in getting promoted into leadership positions, it is difficult for them to earn praise for the work they do once they are there. It appears that misogyny, in the sense of demeaning and dismissing women and excluding them from positions of power, is alive and well in business as well as in our government. (Regine, et al., 2003, p. 351; Anderson, van Dam, Lievens & Born, 2006, p. 566)

Men are not the only offenders. Mavin (2006) found in her research that there are still many women who expect more feminine behaviors from their female bosses, such as being more nurturing of them in their careers, more rule-bending for personal needs and more forgiving of their mistakes. “When female bosses fail to meet this stereotype, they are blamed for becoming ‘male’ and when they don’t champion women’s issues, they are negatively labeled ‘Queen Bees.’ (p. 13)

In addition, many women executives are not supportive of those climbing behind them. A survey done by a professional women’s network called the Downtown Women’s Club (Danielson, 2007) found harsh opinions and “even thinly veiled hostility” expressed by women who fall into the baby boomer category when speaking about Generation X and Y women. (p. 84) Unfortunately, these women did not see anything wrong with voicing

negative opinions about the younger generation of “entitled, impatient and disrespectful” women. However, the younger women who work for them felt the older generation of women posed bigger roadblocks than the older men. They felt that since the older women had to fight for their positions, they expected the younger women to “serve time” before they were promoted even if their performance was exceptional.

So far, this review has looked at psychological theories and studies that emphasize attitudes and beliefs. Situational theories do not argue that these attitudes and beliefs exist, but they suggest that the on-going differences in power, status and opportunities for women are an artifact of the lack of representation in organizational settings instead of a result of our cultural upbringing. (Kanter, 1993) These theories suggest that women struggle because of the continued lack of power and pathways to progress. (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990) The corporate cultures themselves drive them to display self-defeating behaviors. Therefore, the problem arises from all levels and interactions of the still-patriarchal male-dominated corporate cultures. (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

For example, Kanter (1993) found in studying bureaucratic behavior that the struggle to operate in powerless situations drives both men and women to lean toward rigid, controlling and possessive behaviors. If people are considered “token”—they are the only one or they are one of a few who represent their category—they tend to overcompensate by overachieving, overly seeking acceptance or recognition, or turning against people of their own kind. According to situational theories, the difficulties women have in performing managerial roles are more about organizational structures and powerlessness than about their sex. (Kanter,

1993, p. 6) The tragedy is that the behaviors that result from feeling powerless often set up a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. (Hoyt, 2005)

However, in studies of actual managers and their subordinates, subordinates typically express an equitable level of satisfaction with both female and male managers. It appears that many employees who have been supervised by a woman have a more positive attitude about their female bosses than those who work with these women as peers or those leaders who manage them. (Ezell, Odewahn & Sherman, 1981; Eagly & Karau, 2002) In fact, when researching the emergence of leaders in leader-less groups, Eagly and Karau (1991) found that in the men and women who emerged as leaders, there were no significant differences in their performance levels and outcomes. Cleveland, Stockdale and Murphy (2000) also found little difference in how men and women perform as leaders when judging them by outcome instead of behavioral traits.

Therefore, it is obvious that stereotyping needs to be addressed at both the organizational/situational and personal/psychological levels. (Daly & Ibarra, 1995) Yet, whether they are based on unconscious, psychological assumptions or on situational factors, it is well-known that stereotypes are resistant to change. The question remains, if high-achieving women entering the ranks of leadership today were allowed to cultivate their natural abilities—instead of trying to be “leadership appropriate” they developed their own “voice” and strengths—would they be successful in today’s corporations given the prevailing stereotypes and structures?

In recent years, Fels (2004) found the results of the BSRI with college women in the US indicate an increased identification with more of the masculine traits while only dropping a

few of the feminine ones. Apparently, women are becoming more confident, assertive, independent, athletic, self-reliant and willing to take risks. Yet they are still compassionate, sensitive, flatterable and understanding. Is a new style of “femininity” emerging? Is it possible that the workplace will embrace these women when they become leaders more than they did the women of previous generations? Or will the predominate power structures continue to hold them down? It’s possible that an evolution is occurring in our society that will eventually support a rise of women in power and a true meritocracy. In the meantime, women need strategies for holding their own and organizations need programs that support and encourage their efforts. (Kanter, 1993)

2. Personal reasons why women are jumping off the corporate ladder, self-selecting the interruptions in their career ascension.

Many of the beliefs that keep women from rising up in the corporate world center on the perceived desire for women to put their family priorities before work. (McCracken, 2000) If they are married, it is assumed that they will want to take time off to have babies and/or resist responsibilities that might have them traveling away from home for too long. As a result, they are often overlooked for plum assignments.

Even with efforts to uncover these beliefs and provide opportunities for women, the numbers show that the rate of increase in women taking senior management positions has significantly slowed from 2002 (up only .07 percentage points) and in some corporations, the numbers have declined. (Catalyst, 2006, p 2) In 2002, Harvard Business School professor Myra Hart found that only 38% of the women graduates from the classes of 1981, 1986 and

1991 were working full time, with similar trends reported from Sharon Hoffman, the Stanford University MBA program director. (Conlin, Merritt & Himmelstein, 2002) Some 61% of those Harvard graduates said they planned to return but that their goals were different from when they graduated so they would likely choose free agency, working as entrepreneurs or as part-time executives. (p. 103)

The Conclusion of the Catalyst report (2006) placed the balance of the blame on the corporations. The report concludes that few companies have been able to remove the barriers that prevent women from achieving the same successes as men. (p. 36)

This perspective places women as “victims” of the system that does not support their lives as mothers and caretakers. Is this true—are those that jump off the corporate ladder leaving because they feel they are forced to choose family commitments over work? Or is it possible that they are self-selecting, making conscious choices to do something else? Maybe they are just giving up, unable to play by the current rules or feel frustrated with their companies’ unwillingness to honor their values and needs. To better understand the factors that are affecting the retention of women in today’s workplace, we have to better understand their needs, values and drives. (Wagner & Wodak, 2006)

Generally, it is assumed that women are either pulled or pushed off the career ladder. (Hewlett, Luce, Shiller & Southwell, 2005) They are pulled off due to family demands that include raising children, caring for elderly parents and managing a household. Or they are pushed off due to a lack of promotions or high-profile job assignments.

However, Hewlett, Luce, Shiller and Southwell (2005) also found some of the women leaped off on their own accord. In 2004, they worked with Harris Interactive to survey a

nationally representative group of 2,443 working women with graduate or professional degrees or a high-honors undergraduate degree to see how many had taken a voluntary sabbatical from their career since graduation. They found 37% of the women had opted out, with 43% of the women with children taking a break from work. However, only 44% of those who took a break gave family time as the reason for leaving. Twenty-three percent of those who took a break left to further their education and 16% to reposition themselves for a career change. More significantly, 17% said they found that their work was no longer enjoyable or satisfying. This included feeling understimulated and lacking in a sense of purpose. Simply, they outgrew their jobs.

In fact, these days the economics of family obligations force women to stay in jobs for the money instead of leave them, and many stay even when they no longer care about the work. (Morison, et al., 2006) Since there is still a bottleneck to the top positions, they are stuck in middle management positions, feeling burned out, disillusioned, anxious and bored. (p 80-81) Due to the economics of raising children and elder-care, whether they are married or not, they either stay in their positions or if they are courageous, they practice job hopping for stimulation.

Currently, most women in the US describe their careers as “nonlinear.” (Hewlett, et al., 2005) For men, the traditional career trajectory sees a steep gradient in one’s 30s then a flattening out thereafter. In other words, once they find their “home,” they stick around to climb the corporate ladder and then settle in wherever the ladder stops. The average career pattern for women looks very different.

Women are more inclined than men to switch industries as well as jobs, start their own businesses, define new roles and jobs for themselves within a company and sometimes, they do a complete job “makeover” along the way, making the path look like a zigzag both horizontally and vertically. Their workplace wish lists rarely state “being promoted” as a prime motivator. Instead, they look for “the ability to associate with people I respect (82%), freedom to be myself at work (79%), the opportunity to be flexible with my schedule (64%), the opportunity to collaborate with others and work as a part of a team (61%), the opportunity to give back to the community through my work (56%) and recognition from my company (51%).” (p. 49)

In the U.S., many of the women who leave their jobs start their own companies. Growth in the number of women-owned businesses has significantly outpaced that of overall businesses. (Center for Women’s Business Research, 2004) In 2004, 48% of all privately held U.S. businesses were women-owned. The fastest growing sectors include traditionally male-owned companies such as construction, transportation and agricultural services. Some career experts believe the exodus will only intensify as young businesswomen describe corporations as places to hone skills, but not to make long term careers. (Delaney, 2003)

Ruderman and Ohlott (2002) found that many high-achieving women often feel confusion and distress as they wonder how to blend a significant career with their other needs, which are more than just family-based. Women have a strong social drive that goes beyond the corporate walls and high-achieving women have strong needs for feeling valued and significant while doing meaningful work. “As women strengthen their foothold in the

executive world, their issues are shifting from gaining access to the boardroom to gaining comfort in the personal life choices associated with a managerial career.” (p. 2)

What drives women out of corporations is often associated with career-family trade-offs, but also include the high value placed on friendships, community involvement, leisure or avocation activities, commitments to a healthy life-style and religious attachments.

(Levinson & Levinson, 1996) Research that focuses on these factors relies heavily on phase theories, proposing age-linked “road maps” of a woman’s typical life cycle. (Gallos, 1989)

However, it also appears that high-achieving women are making choices based on personal preferences, such as what will increase their satisfaction, self-esteem, contribution, autonomy, value and a sense of purpose. These women want to feel significant and they want to be recognized for the value they give. (Hewlett, et al., 2005)

These needs often run counter to the traditional view of “ambition” focused on a self-centered drive for more titles and money. (Fels, 2004) Although most women, like men, embody a drive toward mastery which is selective, directive and persistent, (Erikson, 1950), they, more than men, would rather cooperate than battle to achieve their goals. (Fels, 2004) Even aggressive high achievers seek to complement rather than compete with men directly. (p. 54) However, since most corporate cultures are still fashioned around recognizing individual effort, after spending time in the workplace, high-achieving women are more likely than men to conclude that their goals aren’t rewarding enough to justify the effort required to reach them. They then make new goals, rarely following the paths they envisioned when they started their careers. (p. 57)

It appears that women are spending less time worrying about attaining prime corporate positions and more time on lifestyle choices and on their personal definitions of “being successful” and “being a leader.” (Ruderman, et al., 2002) Although they are often judged as not being ambitious or not caring enough about pursuing personal power, it could be that they define “ambition” and “power” very differently than traditional characterizations. (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb & Corrigan, 2000) These perceptions would affect their choices to stay or opt out of a company or career path, and if they stay, what behaviors they would present.

Therefore, when it comes to determining the crucial choices women make for their careers and their lives, it is important to study their inner as well as their outer journey to provide them with clarity and insights that will help them be successful leaders. In other words, we need to know more about what factors into the difficulties women face in perceiving themselves as successful professionals in addition to the obstacles in the outside world. (Wagner, et al., 2006)

3. Personal factors that impact the effectiveness of women who stay in their positions, hindering them from rising to the top positions or being effective once they are there.

What about the women who chose to stay in their corporate positions? As we have seen, they deal with on-going subtle discrimination in society and the workplace (McCracken, 2000), ambiguity about their life choices (Ruderman, et al., 2002) and the situational constructs in organizations that render them with less power than men. (Kanter, 1993) In

addition, the fast-changing roles and identities of women in the workplace lead to internal conflicts that affect how they engage with the world. (Gersick & Kram, 2002)

Until recently, most of the research that focused on psychological issues of women at work dealt with self-induced effects, such as the constant moral reasoning when faced with ambiguous life choices, the fear that their feminine traits will get in the way and the lack of clarity of self-concept, of “who I am” as a woman and a leader. (Gilligan, 1978; Kegan, 1982) However, many studies now suggest that the perception of women as being less powerful and capable in the workplace is actually one of the major causes of the lack of self-esteem in women, not the result. (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989) The workplace itself is a major drain on the confidence that the women bring in the door with them. They start out strong but their power is sapped.

Heim and Murphy (2001) said that when compared to men, “Women are more likely to ‘be hard on themselves’ and ‘beat themselves up,’ therefore lowering their self-esteem.” Their self-evaluations tend to be highly vulnerable to negative feedback which leads women to being overly dependent on others’ approval rather than relying on their own internal standards. (Roberts, 1991) As a result, they frequently question their choices and abilities to succeed which ultimately affects their decisions and leads to destructive presentation strategies in the workplace. (Hollands, 2002)

Does this behavior indicate that women will always struggle with success and leadership, or would they thrive in environments that were truly supportive? Do they carry this baggage with them when they enter the world of work, causing on-going doubt and

indecision? Will the majority of women ever have the confidence it takes to be renowned business leaders?

It is possible for people to push through their fears and act confidently even when they don't feel like it. However, the belief in one's capabilities (efficacy) plays a powerful role in influencing one's choices, setting goals, coping with adversity and persisting and completing difficult tasks. (Lindsey, Brass & Thomas, 1995; Bandura, 1997) It has also been found that leadership efficacy is strongly predictive of leadership potential ratings (Hoyt, 2005), further leading to the deleterious perception of women as being unfit to perform well as leaders at the senior levels since they demonstrate less self-confidence than men. (Chemers, Watson & May, 2000)

On the other hand, Hoyt (2005) found that women who measured high on efficacy (belief in one's ability to perform) seemed less resistant to stereotype activation. When subjected to both subtle and blatant gender-demeaning remarks, they demonstrated resiliency and competence under pressure.

Regardless of skill level and experience, it is clear that the impact of low confidence and self-esteem affects both the leadership ability of women and the predictive evaluation of their effectiveness as leaders. (Martell, Parker, Emrich, & Crawford, 1997) The good news is that the studies mentioned above indicate that women are capable of developing the confidence and presentation strategies they need to move up in leadership in spite of the way men and women are treated differently at work with the help of supportive leaders, teachers and mentors.

Alfred Adler (1978) was one of the first psychologists to declare in writing that it is society, not genetics that keeps women from developing high self-esteem. He declared that women's inferiority to men is a myth. He said that both men and women are always striving for significance, for power and for superiority. According to Adler, the number one goal that drives us is our desire to reach perfection, based on whatever we view perfection to be. As children, we form the image of this future possibility. Then we set our life in motion to achieve it.

However, when there are occurrences of male superiority as exists in many of our corporations today, men will, consciously or not, "influence the female position in the division of labor, in the production process, to their own advantage." (p.5) As a result, women are constantly dissatisfied, upset psychologically and very likely to demean their own value. This undermines their hopes of ever performing competently. They react by 1) overcompensating—stressing their masculine over feminine traits, 2) undercompensating—adapting and resigning their will to others, or 3) rebelling with a sense of self-righteousness to right the wrongs and render justice. (p. 14-15, 23) These behaviors then become self-defeating behavioral strategies.

Adler (1956) relates these reactions to what he termed an "inferiority complex" which as humans, we are always struggling to overcome. Since, according to Adler, the number one goal of humans—to achieve the image of perfection we created for ourselves when we were children—is rarely achieved, the number two goal for all humans is to decrease their feelings of inferiority. What may appear as a "superiority complex" is actually a façade created to hide the fear of being seen as inferior. The actions of people with superiority complexes

show up in many forms of dysfunction, including narcissism and addictions including workaholism, bullying and self-righteousness.

Adler is also very clear on the ways humans can overcome inferiority and gain true power and significance in life. However, he said that because of how our society has been structured, women need the help of men to do this. Leaders in the workplace must create conditions that will enable women to reconcile with their feminine traits—capitalizing on the communal aspects women tend to bring to the workplace—and for everyone to respect women as leaders and honor their relationships with these women. (p.24)

Martell and DeSmet (2001) also predicted that behaviors in a female manager might positively influence respondents' perceptions of her, including those who held previously negative stereotypes. Thus, evidence also exists showing that woman, by their own means, can rein in negative stereotypes and influence participants to evaluate them more favorably. Work needs to be done on both sides, with the women on their identities and behaviors and with the organizations on how to value women more in their structures and management behavior.

4. Definition and criteria of being a “high achiever” and how the presentation of this role might differ in men and women at work, affecting promotional opportunities.

Achievement is one of the strongest values in the United States. Being an “American” is often compared to the overcoming of obstacles and to the persistence in striving towards goals. People who take this path generally receive social support.

However, there are some inconsistencies of what constitutes a successful high-achiever between men and women, both in those evaluating the achievers and in the women themselves. For example, high-achieving women at work are expected to show higher relational values than men, such as leading teams and mentoring subordinates, in tandem with agentic values. (McAdams, 1988; Eagly, et al., 2002) And even though high-achieving women are on par with men in accumulating accomplishments, they tend to make greater sacrifices in their personal lives, such as avoiding intimacy and self/ego development while overworking. (Helson & Srivastava, 2001, p 1008) For example, 42% of high-achieving women in corporate America at the ages of 41-55 are childless, while 89% of high-achieving women between the ages of 28-40 believe that they will be able to get pregnant in their forties so they are delaying childbirth for their careers. (Hewlett, 2001)

Women seem to be caught in the middle. On one side are the societal values of individual achievement and power. On the other side are the women themselves, trying to manage their careers while facing subtle discrimination in the workplace and accommodating non-work related priorities. (O'Neill, Bilimoria & Saatcioglu, 2004) The result is a high level of stress-related diseases and burnout. (Sapolsky, 1998)

It is no wonder that as high-achieving women penetrate the ranks of upper management, they struggle with their identity. The expectation to focus on interpersonal relationships and to look outside of themselves for evidence of success creates tension and conflict for women who seek personal recognition for their ongoing accomplishments. (Marcia, 1980) This confusion creates an imbalance that affects their levels of self-esteem, causes excess anxiety and distorts their self-perception. (p. 159) This psychological distress shows up in how they

behave, with many feeling angry and disillusioned and displaying destructive patterns such as passive-aggressiveness and self-righteousness. (p. 161)

It is true that women often have difficulty trying to integrate their behaviors and desires with the prevailing corporate cultures. However, women tend to be flexible when adapting to differing social situations. Instead, the emotional turmoil and behavioral self-sabotage that plagues women versus men stems from the difficulty with figuring out “who” they are and feeling both comfortable and strong with this concept. (Gerick, et al., 2002) Women can adapt. They are just not sure if they want to and who they will be if they do.

Until high-achieving women can feel secure about their choices, positive about their work and safe enough to establish close relationships with authority as well as with their peers and subordinates, they will wrestle with how to think, feel and act at work. It remains unclear as to how women individuate and mature professionally, especially in the midst of the active changes in roles and relationships in our postmodern society. (Gergen, 1991)

Therefore, since there is no clear delineation in the literature as to what causes the internal struggle of high-achieving women, for the purpose of this study, I chose to define “high-achieving” women by their behavioral tendencies toward accepting and completing tasks at work. However, the internal factors—their needs, values and beliefs—will be explored as a result of the study to better understand the dynamics and coaching implications of high-achieving women in today’s workplace.

As mentioned in the previous section, recent studies reflect the existence of less-traditional career paths for women than the old images of climbing an upward ladder. (Lyness & Thompson, 2000) Gersick and Kram (2002) found that high-achieving women at

mid-life defined their career paths as “zigzags that followed opportunities as they arose.” (p. 31)

In order to reflect the dual reality of the continuing existence of traditional career ladders as well as the more fluid, disordered career paths, O’Neill, Bilimoria & Saatcioglu (2004) characterized women’s career patterns as a range between ordered and emergent. Ordered reflected more traditional linear climbs. Emergent patterns reflected lateral, downward and upward leaps as a result of new opportunities as well as pausing to accommodate aspects of one’s life other than traditional work.

However, regardless of the career pattern, the high-achievers were characterized by a belief in personal responsibility for making choices and directing one’s own career success. (p. 450) Therefore, no matter what the path looks like, when it comes to making career decisions, high-achieving women act autonomously, meaning that the career choices they make for themselves are based on their own criteria. (Ryff, 1989) They may solicit input from others, but they make decisions for themselves.

As to their behavior on the job, high-achieving women are more goal-focused than relationship focused, though they may be very good at mobilizing people since they have learned how important this is to achieving good results. (McClelland, 1975) This means that high-achieving women tend to choose social power over personal power more often than men, even though the focus is still on completing the task successfully. They tend to work through others by creating strong teams, providing coaching and focusing on increasing the capability of the entire organization, not just their department. (Hegelson, 1990) They remain

goal-focused but are more apt than men to see work from a collective rather than an individual perspective.

However, both high-achieving men and women pull out all stops to achieve a goal they are given if they understand the purpose and their personal values are in alignment with that purpose. (Spreier, Fontaine & Malloy, 2006) They vie for new and short-term projects where they can see fast results and they seek challenges that call forth and stretch their capabilities.

However, achievers avoid high-risk situations where chance is more predictive of success than effort, and where there is more than a 50% chance of failing no matter what they do. (McClelland, 1975) This is because they have a higher need for showcasing rather than testing their strengths and they do not cope well with failure. McClelland (1975) also suggested that achievers are more interested in seeing the fruit of their results than in the material or financial rewards they earn. However, many do regard financial rewards as a measurement of their success.

Although they avoid high-risk situations, achievement is the prime motivator more than security. They are constantly on the move, calculating as they go. They seek feedback on their work to help them succeed, not to make them feel better.

Since they are always mobilizing to get things done, high-achievers appear to others to be directive, dominant, ego-centric, demanding, decisive, and aggressive. (Marston, 1979; Target Training International, 1986) Although high-achieving women will show a variation on the intensity of these traits, and may demonstrate traits of other behavioral styles, the traits defined above match the DISC Style Analysis Instrument based on the work of Marston

(1979) and McClelland (1975). Therefore, this instrument was chosen to help identify candidates for the study.

5. An examination of the relevancy of identified self-defeating behaviors of high-achieving women in U.S. corporations in light of the current generation to determine if these behaviors have evolved or completely changed over time.

Erving Goffman (1959), in his classic work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, said, “In our society, the character one performs and one’s self are somewhat equated...” (p. 252) He explained how producing and maintaining selves depends on the stage where we are performing (the situation), the audience (who is present), and the available props. “The self is a product of all of these arrangements,” Goffman said, “and in all of its parts bears the marks of this genesis.” (p. 253) Therefore, how we present ourselves at work relates to how we would define our identity. (Wagner, et al., 2006)

If the self is truly malleable, fluctuating with current life situations, and we shift and evolve our identities over time, then we can only begin to know our selves by being present to who we are being in the moment. (Ibarra, 2004) To know ourselves, we must begin by unearthing the basic assumptions about how our world operates. At work, the basic assumptions that formulate our presentation strategies include “our emotional relationships with institutions, our benchmarks for success, and our preconceived notions about viable work arrangements.” (p. 83) Only then can we determine what is possible from today’s viewpoint and use this as a launching pad for expanding the view of possibility for tomorrow. We start with “who am I” but then end with “who I might become.” (p. 162)

Do the women have to start from scratch in defining “who am I” or are there studies that can help them articulate how they see themselves in relation to their work today? Although there are many self-help books that describe destructive personality styles of women in today’s workplace and then advise women on what they should and shouldn’t do to succeed, few research studies have been published on the presentation strategies of women at work in the 21st century. As mentioned in this review, psychological factors (personal priorities, satisfaction and self-esteem) and social factors (upbringing, cultural and organizational norms and family demands) have been the focus of most research on women in the workplace. Yet evidence on how these factors shape particular, observable and replicable behavior patterns of the second generation of women leaders in the workplace is scarce.

One of the well-known studies that identified a particular self-presentation in high-achieving women was done by Clance and Imes (1978). They identified the “imposter phenomenon” among women who were either respected professionals in their fields or who were recognized for their academic success. Despite their accomplishments, these women persisted in believing that they were really not bright and had fooled anyone who thought otherwise. They attributed their success to luck, timing, overestimation of abilities and faulty judgment by decision makers. (p. 241)

Overall, the women who demonstrated this phenomenon feared that they would be exposed and labeled as “imposters.” They worried that since they will never have sufficient knowledge, skills and ability to be good leaders, they would eventually be “found out” and ousted from their positions. They reported clinical symptoms of generalized anxiety, lack of

self-confidence, depression and frustration related to the inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement. (p. 242)

The study was done with primarily white, middle- to upper-class high-achieving women between the ages of 20 and 45 in academic and professional settings. Many studies have since been done that have identified the same phenomena in women in other work settings and in government positions (Fels, 2004) and in high-achieving women of color (Bell & Nkomo, 2001)

However, the social factors that Clance and Imes (1978) identified as helping to form this phenomenon have progressed over the past 30 years. Women who show independence and mastery are no longer viewed negatively in the U.S. (Wagner, et al., 2006) There are greater societal expectations for achievement in girls. Parents are better at building self-confidence in their daughters. These factors serve to strengthen self-reliance and self-expression in women.

However, as workplace discrimination is brought out in the open and the “think manager—think male” behaviors are uncovered (Sczesny, 2003), many women have replaced their fear with anger and their feelings of intimidation with actions of antagonism. (Hollands, 2002; Vohs & Heatherton, 2003)

As a result, many female leaders have grown out of the Imposter role into roles that have been given negative labels such as Bully Broad and Ice Queen (Holland, 2002) However, women displaying more aggressive, intimidating and impatient behaviors often test out as being similar to imposters psychologically. They still fear that they will never be able to meet the inflated expectations of their performances and they exhibit clinical symptoms of

anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression and frustration. (p. 23-28) It is possible that these women are demonstrating the “superiority behaviors” of an inferiority complex (Adler, 1956)

On a brighter note, more recent research suggests that the current generation of women in leadership and professional positions has had many more experiences that have helped them develop a stronger sense of self than the previous generation of women in the workplace (over age 55). (Wagner, et al., 2006) As a result, some new role patterns are emerging in high-achieving women. They exhibit strong behaviors when carving out their own space, they seek recognition for their good work and actively campaign for and work with their teams to achieve success. It is as if they have taken up the sword of the Warrior Queen (Leonard, 1982), fighting for what is right in the name of their personal honor and that of their contingencies. The high-achieving warrior is confident in her abilities, can stand up for herself when demands are unreasonable and can say no to standards and practices that do not serve her “honorable goals” or the needs of her team. (p. 143)

However, although she may be less aggressive than her angry predecessors, the Warrior might still be disconnected from her relationship-based feminine strengths, may sacrifice her time and health “for the cause” and may not know how to maneuver within the inner circle of management who she sees as the enemy. (Reardon, 2001) Thus, the “warrior phenomenon” can be self-defeating, causing the woman increasing duress as she moves up the ladder of success. (Heim & Murphy, 2001)

Therefore, as the workplace evolves, the presentation strategies of high-achieving women are evolving as well. Typical self-destructive behaviors of the first wave of women managers demonstrated either resignation and passivity, or hostility and aggression. Today’s

high-achieving women seem to be tougher in their stance but softer in their approach. Yet they still hit walls when trying to reach the highest levels of management, face ambivalence about their career decisions and leave corporations in droves. Therefore, there is a need to discover what personal factors are driving the behaviors of high-achieving women today and how they serve or detract from their success.

Less than thirty years ago, Georgia Sassen (1980) said that women “are unable to take competitive success and construct around it a vision, a new way of making sense, to which they can feel personally committed.”(p. 18) Has this changed? Is it not possible for today’s high-achieving women to fulfill their childhood dreams of running companies and holding high positions in society?

Wagner and Wodak (2006) define behavior at work as the performance of identity in the workplace. (p. 391) To determine their identities and then adapt and shift them, women must begin to see their patterns of behavior and talk about how these patterns contribute to or detract from their definitions of success. They need to talk about how they perceive and contend with their organizational cultures, opportunities and available choices. The stories they tell—how they define and explain their perceptions and performances—will help to shine a light on, understand and shape their identities so they can make their visions come true. (p. 391)

Justification

At least 30 years have passed since women became managers in significant numbers in the United States. Today, they account for over half of the management and professional workforce. This rise has been fraught with difficulties and roadblocks. Yet the causes of the struggles cannot be attributed solely to the explicit and implicit stereotyping in the workplace. There are also social pressures, family issues and psychological factors such as low self-esteem, a lack of confidence in their abilities and conflicting values and identities that factor into the mix.

In the 1970's and 80's, the dominant themes surrounding women in the workplace centered on the conflict between women fulfilling traditional roles of wife and mother—required for their financial and psychological survival—and those women deciding to explore anti-traditional roles, seeking to repudiate their mother's generation and, with extreme intention and focus, create autonomous control over their own lives. The middle ground was fairly vague. (Gersick, et al. 2002)

However, the 1990's saw active changes in women's and men's roles in society with a slow but consistent acceptance of these changes in the workplace. Men are more active with birth and family responsibilities. More women are the breadwinners in households even in those with two incomes. As a result, more career doors are opening for women, corporations are more eager to support women seeking leadership positions and more work cultures are better accommodating of the diverse needs of all people. (McCracken, 2000; Morison, et al., 2006)

Therefore, the professional growth for women in the late 1900's centered on becoming comfortable and confident in their new roles. Now, in the 2000's, new themes are arising for women. Popular books focus on "rediscovering the feminine side" so women can couple their natural feminine tendencies with the more active and decisive male tendencies they have learned to use. (Holland, 2000) Workplace cultures are moving to accommodate and actually use the strengths women bring to the table. Recent studies show how the female brain has evolved in the past fifty years, with drastic differences in how women today see and deal with the world when compared with their grandmothers, allowing for different identities as "who I am as a woman." (Schulz, 2006) Yet little has been done to track the emerging roles, identities and behavioral strategies of women in the workplace, especially in the past twenty years as the numbers of women in management positions steadily grew.

Gersick and Kram (2002) saw this gap and created a study to see if women's behaviors were changing at work. However, they only interviewed ten executive women from one company between the ages of 35 and 45.

Nevertheless, they found some consistent behavioral patterns across the sample of women. All the participants felt that their career tracks were essentially based on fortuitous events instead of planned choices before the age of 25. However, between the ages of 27 and 33, these women became serious about their careers and formulated plans whether they were married or not. The researchers concluded that the existence of new options for women in the workplace had them thinking more about personal fulfillment/identity issues than the traditional conflicts between marriage and work priorities. (p. 109)

This does not mean that the women were no longer juggling family responsibilities and making trade-offs in their careers to accommodate their outside obligations. However, these women had more resources at their disposal to create solutions, such as having money for housekeepers and nannies. Additionally, many of the women were seen as primary, not supporting players at work and at home. They saw themselves as equal partners with the men, which changes the rules when it comes to roles and responsibilities. Finally, the women in the study described similar personal themes at work described as, "...gaining confidence in one's abilities, knowing what one wants, and being able to go after it." (p. 109)

The researchers concluded that women's stories about their careers are heavily shaped by the era in which they come of age. (p.110) Women today have a higher standard of living to maintain than ever before, a chance to do work they love and support in the home for following their dreams. (p. 112-113) Perhaps the greatest proviso the researchers found was the overall sense of confidence, pride and zest for life in the women they interviewed not present in the literature that described their predecessors. (p. 120)

As our society is shifting, so are the key dilemmas, costs and rewards shifting for women in the workplace today. They approach work very differently than the women who came before them. There are still glass ceilings and roadblocks on their paths but as the external obstacles are receding, the internal battles are changing.

Women are more responsible for their choices, and have many more choices to make. They have invented new patterns to deal with their lives and their careers. Some of their strategies have helped them to cope with the complexity. Some of them have helped them to

get ahead. Yet some of the things that have helped them to be successful early in their lives end up hurting their careers as they progress.

Unfortunately, resources have not kept up with the changes. Women who enter the workplace full of confidence, pride and passion are not getting the help they need to navigate their professional journeys. In particular, high-achieving women, who have been evolving in the workplace at a fast pace, have even fewer role models or books written about their needs and behaviors to call upon. In order to help these women stay and succeed on the leadership track, it is critical that high-achieving women get more guidance that pertains to how they work and see the world.

These findings suggest that both the women and the organizations they work for would benefit from an analysis of some of the typical needs, perceptions and behaviors of high-achieving women in today's US corporations. Given the results of the Gersick and Kram study (2002), it is likely that the second generation of high-achieving women in the workplace bring with them different values, concerns and thus, different needs and desires than the first generation of women that rose to fill these positions. As a result, these new themes and behaviors need to be identified with a focus on what is hindering as well as what is helping high-achieving women who aspire to succeed at work today.

Purpose and Objectives

The numbers of women who reach the highest ranks in corporate America are still appalling. Although they hold half of the management positions, they only hold 16.4% of corporate officer positions. (Catalyst, 2006) The situation is worse in Fortune 500 companies.

Only 6% of those who hold titles such as chairman, president, CEO or COO are women. (Eagly & Carli, 2007)

What is to blame for this pronounced lack of women in positions of authority and power? A review of the literature shows that while discrimination is still a factor, women themselves are also to blame for their low numbers in the board room. The literature shows that many high-achieving women jump ship to start their own businesses and families or they job hop for satisfaction as well as meaning. If they stay for the money, they either burn out before reaching the top or lose interest in playing the corporate game.

Unfortunately, the literature primarily places women in either roles of victims or self-saboteurs. Is it possible that the problem has been misdiagnosed, that other factors have emerged keeping high-achieving women out of the C-suite? If so, it is unlikely that corporate leaders can prescribe an effective cure. This seems to be the case when considering how few corporations have programs that are effectively stopping the “brain drain” of women who leave before accepting top management positions.

Given both the high cost of turnover and the imminent loss of talent with the retiring baby boomers, U.S. companies have very high stakes in understanding and revisiting their development strategies for high-achieving women. **If companies are misreading the reason high-achieving women are absent from the boardroom, the solutions they invest in will not make a difference.** It is critical that corporations listen and learn what these women want out of their lives and what assistance they need to get it.

Additionally, and possibly even more importantly, **the women themselves need to better understand the complex and sometimes contradictory interweaving of their**

shifting desires and identities. They need to hear their own voices as they discover what criteria they use to make choices—as they explain how they show up in relationships and how they represent themselves in particular contexts and activities at work. In some cases, they need to recognize the salient contrasts between what they think they are presenting and the actual behavior that other people observe.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to address the following questions:

- How do high-achieving women present themselves in the workplace today? How are they making decisions? How would they define their relationships with their work and their colleagues? What drives them to give “their all” and what drains their motivation, eventually driving them away?
- How do high-achieving women define success? Do they think their definitions of success are in conflict with what the rest of society would call “a successful businesswoman?”
- As high-achievers, do they feel they are different from other men and women? How do they manage this difference?
- Are they aware of any of their behaviors that have or will hinder their career aspirations?
- Are they aware of any changes they have made since they started their careers that have helped them to get ahead? What adjustments have they made as a result of their experiences and “lessons learned?”

Women who read and discuss the findings will find new ways to manage their careers and their lives. They might also find ways to adjust their styles to better serve their career

goals in the corporations they work for. The organizations will benefit by learning how to better support, develop and retain top talent in their senior ranks. Coaches and mentors who work with these women will have a useful guide to help them with their work.

Hypothesis

Because this study deals with mostly understudied phenomena at the time of this research, the following list is more a set of assumptions guiding the research than a list of hypotheses to be tested. The results will be used to see if all or parts of the assumptions are valid. These results can then be used to develop clearer hypothesis and a grounded theory.

The assumptions include:

- High-achieving women in today's workplace may still exhibit imposter and bully behavior. However, their confidence is more solid than previous generations. This has led to new presentation strategies, including roles such as the Warrior, Queen, Revolutionary, Pioneer, Rebel, Seeker, and Visionary. These roles have emerged as they demand to be significant players in the workforce and seek to be recognized for their gifts instead of needing validation for their courage.
- The definitions of success given by high-achieving women today are varied and complex. They are not single-focused up the ladder of success. They include other life factors and "whole-life" visions. Also, their sense of success is based more on feelings of accomplishment and fulfillment than on the number of degrees acquired, positions held and possessions accumulated.

- High-achieving women still feel the pinch of discrimination in the workplace. However, many of them feel it is just something that exists but doesn't affect them. They do not worry about proving that a woman can do a job. They focus on proving that they are the best person for the job. Discrimination does not have the cultural relevance it once had. These women feel they have to find their way on their own regardless of what a man or woman puts in their way.
- On the other hand, they still feel that they are measured by a harsher standard than men. However, this tends to mobilize instead of demotivate them. They love a good challenge. This behavior is very different from many of the women of previous years who just felt victimized.
- High-achieving women today are more aware of their behaviors and the impact than ever before due to self-awareness and the personal growth activities available to them. However, they have blind spots that justify certain behaviors they believe serve them when in truth, these behaviors hurt their advancement. On the other hand, high-achieving women are reflective enough to identify lessons learned and are open to feedback to better understand the impact of their behavior so they can adjust and adapt to more quickly achieve their goals. Therefore, they will embrace this research as a much-needed tool.

CHAPTER 2

Method

Research Design

In order to understand the behavior of high-achieving women in organizations, we cannot simply observe them in action. We have to take into account what the women feel and think to grasp both the ways they see the world and the motivations that drive their actions. We need to understand, from their perspectives, the meaning they give to their experiences at work, in the past and present, and how they foresee their possible futures. Only then will we be able to understand the personal reasons why the women are not in executive positions in U.S. corporations.

A Qualitative Approach. Assuming that most high-achieving women aspire to hold some type of leadership position, there is no definitive literature that outlines the exact behavior of a good leader in organizations. Too many factors inhibit a static definition of an ideal workplace much less a particular corporate role. With the growing global marketplace changing how we do business, the evolving nature of work and family roles, and the shifts in values and needs each generation brings with them to work, it is not possible to define the one, best way of “being a leader.”

Nevertheless, there have been attempts to design leadership instruments that measure exemplary behavior in particular situations based on lists of traits and competencies identified by survey research and previous successes. But it would be difficult to prove these

studies valid or reliable in establishing how and when leadership emerges, or even more important, in revealing what it actually means to be a good leader.

On the other hand, people can often identify for themselves what environments they like to work in, the types of managers and employees they like to work for and what work assignments motivate them to give their best efforts. They can talk about how they see and define their world. They can reflect on the emotions and factors that drive their behavior. They can be coached to identify the reasons for their choices. However, there are few benchmarks or criteria to help them judge if their choices will be effective or not until they are given hard evidence in terms of outcomes and effects. Each person has to test the waters and reflect on the results to truly understand what works and what doesn't work for him or herself. (Ibarra, 2004)

Therefore, in order to discover what high-achieving women need to excel in today's corporations, a phenomenological research design was chosen. The design was based on in-depth interviews with 10 high-achieving women under the age of 53 (parameters defined in the *Interview Participants* section, page 45) with at least 10 years of corporate experience. Using transcripts of the interviews, the researcher deduced a number of themes and subthemes and behaviors that could have a negative impact typical of today's high-achieving women. A questionnaire was then created defining these themes and sent to a group of 65 high-achieving women that fit the profile to verify the themes and self-perceptions.

In the end, common themes and behaviors emerged that both served and detracted from the women's goals and ambitions. Some of the recurrent responses matched the hypotheses, others revealed some surprises. The results are broken down into five major themes with

subthemes that emerged. Quotes and examples from both the interviews and surveys are used to demonstrate how the themes play out in the lives of the women.

It is the intention of the researcher to present the results in a way that provides new insights for the women themselves, for executive coaches to use with their clients, and for organizations to better develop, provide for and retain the vast pool of talent they have in high-achieving women. These insights are included in the Discussion section.

A Phenomenological Approach. Phenomenology is a method that seeks to uncover the meaning that people attribute to a particular experience and to translate that understanding into words. (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003) It is not focused on discerning what is right or good or to predict what will happen in the future. Instead, the intention is to allow core concepts, essences and themes to emerge through interviews that encourage the open and honest dialogue about the experiences of everyday life. A reduction process is then used with the transcripts to pull out these themes and develop a structure that can provide useful information for researchers, for coaching and organizational development professionals, for leaders and most importantly, for the high-achieving women looking for insights and direction.

The Biographical Interview. The aim of the biographical interview is to develop an understanding of the person's present and future behavior based on life events and opportunities, choices made and coping strategies used. It is most used to understand a person's life-long struggle with a particular problem. More recently, the biographical

interview has been used as a “reflexive project” to dig through the maze of assumptions and prejudices that surround a situation to learn more about the behaviors that have emerged. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) It can also be used to explore the underpinnings of the identity formation in women and the cultural institutions where their identities were formed, including their experiences in high school and college. (Marcia, 1980)

The biographical approach helps us to gain a fuller and richer sense of how a person views and interprets her life course, including how her socially-defined roles change over time. (Denzin, 1989) The tendency to focus only on current workplace situations leaves out factors such as the changing nature of sex-role orientation, the significant life events that foreshadow current choices and the family dynamics that play into behavior. (Bell, et al., 2001) It is difficult to draw conclusions about current thoughts and feelings if not considering the past events and relevant experiences encompassing a women’s life.

However, the intention here was not to take a person’s history in the academic sense, focusing on chronological events. The focus is on the word “story” to help the participant to feel fully engaged and safe enough (not fearing evaluation or judgment) to include emotions, interpretations and underlying messages. (Levinson & Levinson, 1996) The story is the medium where the participant can give a fuller, more textured, more coherent account of joys and sorrows, times of abundance and times of depletion, the sense of wasting one’s life or of using it well, and efforts at building, maintaining and ending significant relationships. (p. 9)

Therefore, the interviews were conducted in an open, narrative way based on questions intended to stimulate the person to tell stories. (Polkinghorne, 1989) The interview

encouraged reflection, supporting the person in “remembering, making connections, evaluating, regretting or rejoicing.” (Wagner, et al., 2006)

The interviewer’s task was to facilitate the storytelling by actively listening, by affirming the value of what was heard, and by offering questions and comments that help the participant to more fully describe her experiences. The intent was for the participant to feel more like she was having a conversation with a friend instead of recounting facts with a researcher. (Gersick & Kram, 2002)

The questions were open-ended. Although the bulk of each interview focused on career choices and behaviors at work, questions were also designed to explore particular life issues that impact her later career choices, such as how her parents encouraged her achievements, specific school-age experiences that played into career choices and significant adult relationships and events that affected occupational decisions.

In particular, the interview questions were designed to look for six dimensions of insights and awareness from the women:

1. What does a typical career path look like? What does theirs look like now? What will it look like in the future? What has helped them the most to get where they are now? What do they need to help them to succeed in the future?
2. How do interviewees define success? Has this definition changed with experience? What characteristics do they attribute to success in general and to their own success?
3. How do the interviewees label themselves? Do they use any metaphors to describe their behaviors? What reasons do they give for taking on these roles and characters? Do they act differently in different situations, both at home and at work?

4. What are their views about how women are treated in today's workplace? How does this affect their choices and decisions?
5. Are they aware of any of their behaviors that get in the way of achieving their goals?
6. What lessons have they learned about succeeding in the workplace that have helped them to be who they are today?

The actual questions are listed in Appendix C. They were designed to elicit stories instead of concrete answers. As a result, the women provided a very real depiction of their perceived roles and behaviors, with reasons, arguments and justifications for each.

The Questionnaire. Since the research was based on the views of only ten women, a follow-up survey was sent on-line to 65 women who matched the profile assessment and the age and work requirements to confirm or disconfirm the themes that emerged from the interviews. A copy of the survey is included in the Appendix D.

Interview Participants

Because the focus is on the women and not the organizations they work in, nine women were randomly chosen to be interviewed from the pool of 75 who matched the profiling described in this section. Since the researcher fit the parameters, she counted as the tenth participant. This allowed her to interpret the data from her own perspective as a former high-achieving leader and currently, an executive coach who works with high-achieving women in corporations.

It is often very difficult for people to conjure up the details of past experiences and the emotions felt in those moments (Gilbert, 2007) What happened in the past is always distorted by the emotions felt in the present. Current events always get the “emotional right of way” making it almost impossible for someone to perfectly recall the “what and why” of any event, and how the “what and why” makes you feel. (p. 135-136)

Therefore, since the purpose of a phenomenological study is to capture what people experienced, it is critical that the inquiry process is conducted by a researcher who can discover the nature and the meaning of the data through the lens of her own experience. (Patton, 2002) Since this type of research is concerned with meaning, not measurement, it requires the researcher to have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon. (p. 107) Using the perspective of the researcher in phenomenological research can provide a deeper understanding of the significance of the experiences described by all the participants. Patton said, “A sense of connection develops between the researcher and research participants in their mutual effort to elucidate the nature, meaning and essence of a significant human experience.” (p. 108)

The 46 women who participated in the interviews and completed the final survey which provided the data for this study occupied a variety of executive and managerial positions in private sector corporations. Their job titles ranged from CEO to specialist. Counting the researcher, the total number of women who participated in the research was 47.

To determine if they were achievement oriented, they were each given a DISC Style Analysis Instrument based on the work of Marston (1979) and McClelland (1975).

Participants had to score at least 75% as a “D” (dominant, active, achievement-oriented) and less than 25% as an “S” (steady, passive, relationship-oriented).

The researcher chose not to use academic degrees or salaries to qualify the participants. This study defines high achievement as a behavior, not as an accomplishment. Since the focus was to discover why women aren’t selecting, being promoted into or staying in executive positions, the results should apply to any high-achieving woman working in U.S. corporations whether or not she has advanced degrees, officer titles or make an income of six figures or more.

The women were between the ages of 28 and 52 with at least ten years of corporate experience. Women born before 1955 were the trailblazers in the history of American corporations, marking the first generation of women to launch professional careers and fill senior management seats in numbers. (Bell, et al., 2001) Therefore, the upper limit of the age range was set at 52.

The age of 28 was chosen based on Daniel Levinson’s (1996) analysis which states that after the age of 27, women develop a fairly clear, coherent sense of self in response to their tasks and challenges. Prior to that age, they are in a time of exploration. Their identity is not fully formed, their environment changes more frequently and they experience more events that are new to them so they cannot rely on their own experiences for direction. (Roberts, Helson & Klohnen, 2002)

The researcher used her own clients and network of executive coaches around the United States to locate 92 women willing to participate. A copy of the Call for Participants letter is included in the Appendix A.

Once a pool of women was identified, they were given a DISC assessment and short questionnaire to ascertain if they met the criteria for inclusion. After 30 days, 75 women were selected who matched the DISC profile, age and experience requirements (thus, 17 women did not qualify). This list included married and single women, childless women and mothers with children, and women of color.

From the 75 women, nine were randomly selected and invited to participate. All accepted. They were all interviewed in person with the researcher in five different cities. The Consent Form is included in the Appendix B.

The researcher was the tenth interviewee since she matched the criteria and would be adding her perspective to the collected data, particularly when it came to determining the possible negative impact of the behavior of the women on those who make leadership decisions in corporations. The researcher provided the questions for her interview to a coaching colleague who is also working on a phenomenological dissertation. This interview was completed before the survey and interview results were sorted so her responses could be included.

Following the interviews, an online survey was created and sent to the remaining 65 women to verify the themes found in the interviews. The response rate for the survey was 57%, with 37 women completing the survey. This high response rate for an online survey gives credibility to the process (Hamilton, 2003).

The demographical breakdown of the women showed a diverse sample. Some of the factors included:

Age:

INTERVIEWS—One woman age 29, three women in their thirties, three women in their forties and three women in their early fifties.

SURVEY—One woman age 28, twelve women in their thirties, fifteen women in their forties and six women in their early fifties. Three of the women did not answer this question.

Marital status:

INTERVIEWS—Five women were married, five were single and not living with a partner. Of the five that were single, two were divorced, leaving three having never been married before. Of the five married women, three made more money than their husbands. Two said their pay was equal. None made less than their husbands.

SURVEY—65% of the women surveyed were married with an additional 9% living with a partner. Of the single women, 15% were divorced, separated or widowed and 12% were never married. Therefore, out of the high-achieving women who answered the survey, 74% were married or living with a partner. Of these women, 70% were the breadwinners in their households and 19% said they earned about the same as their partners. Therefore, only 11% of the women earned less than their partners, and two out of three of these women said this had only been a recent adjustment since they were either changing their profession or starting a new business.

Children:

INTERVIEWS—All of the married women had or were recently considering having children. One woman had two children, one woman had three children, one woman had

begun the adoption process, one woman was pregnant with her first child, and one woman had just given up trying to have a child after many years. The single women had no children.

SURVEY—Of the women who answered the survey, 44% had no children, which also means 56% had children. Of the women who had children, 84% had two children with only one of the women having three or more children and two having one child.

Education:

INTERVIEWS—Six had master's degrees. Two had bachelor's degrees. One had an associate's degree. One never went to college.

SURVEY—All of the women who answered the survey had gone to college, with 56% of them holding or in the process of earning advanced degrees.

In summary, the research respondents included 47 women. Their age spread evenly from age 28 to age 52. A little more than half of the women were married and the majority of the married women were the breadwinners in their households and more than half of these women had children. Most of the women had college degrees with more than half of them holding or earning advanced degrees.

Procedure

The following steps were taken for completing the interviews and surveys:

1. Developed a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process.
2. Conducted and recorded person-to-person interviews in casual, quiet, private and interruption-free settings with the ten women who matched the profile as being “high-achieving.” The interviews were transcribed and the scripts sent to the participants to verify results.
3. Organized and analyzed the data into structural and textural themes, meaning themes that relate to 1) developmental and organizational issues and to 2) personal preferences, beliefs, assumptions, habits and goals.
4. Created an on-line survey to validate both the structural and textural themes, focusing on the frequently identified personality traits, behavioral strategies, perceptions and desires found in the interviews.
5. Compared the narrative themes that emerged against both the hypothesis and the review of the literature for additional insights.

The results of the validated themes, points for discussion and subsequent recommendations are presented in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Treatment of the Data

The researcher read the transcripts of the interviews in their entirety the first time around to get “a feel for them” and to hear the “voices behind the words.” Then the data was reviewed for themes and significant statements, metaphors and choices within each narrative and across participants. In addition, notes were taken during the interviews to help interpret the feelings and meanings of decisions and events described by the women.

During this process, issues that needed clarification and ideas that need fleshing out were noted. In addition to these questions, the transcripts were sent to the women so they would have a biography, told in their own words, that they could verify and amend if necessary. (Gersick & Kram, 2002)

The purpose of administering the survey to the remaining 65 women was to validate and enrich the interview data. Their comments served to both validate and invalidate the themes that emerged in the interviews and to suggest recommendations for further study. The themes, as described in the next section, were then fleshed out using quotes and examples from the 47 women who participated.

Themes, Subthemes and Possible Negative Internal Factors and Behaviors

Since the findings are a result of a small sample size, it is important to remember that this was an exploratory study intended to identify specific themes for further research. Yet even though the size of the sample was small, consistent patterns emerged. Some of these

patterns might reflect the times; they may be generational patterns not specific to female high achievers. However, because they consistently appeared in the data, they were considered significant to the career advancement of this group of women: high-achievers within the second generation of women to achieve management status in numbers in US corporations.

The interviews produced personal biographies that enabled the researcher to better understand the interplay between their personal and professional lives over time. Patterns that included successful practices and relationships emerged alongside circumstances that might disrupt their career development. However, the intent of the research was to discover and share the inner factors—the beliefs, needs, aspirations, traits and choices—that are keeping this group of women from moving into executive positions. These factors showed up as patterns defined as themes and subthemes and as “potentially negative internal factors and behaviors.”

Yet this delineation doesn't make implications simple to discern. What might appear as a personal strength, such as the love of new challenges and excitement, can actually be a career path distracter if it causes restlessness and the inability to stay with one company for more than three years. Therefore, interpretations had to be made based on the experience of the researcher. As a result, since the researcher fit the profile of the women studied, held numerous positions including a senior management position in both successful and flailing US corporations, and has 26 years of experience teaching management courses, designing leadership programs and providing executive coaching, she made the choices between what constitutes “positive” from “potentially negative” patterns. She included all patterns that could have a detrimental affect on career advancement in the eyes of today's corporate

leaders, the ones who are making the promotion decisions. The potentially negative aspect of each pattern is included in the description of each theme.

The themes and patterns presented below were matched to the assumptions defined prior to the research in the *Hypothesis* section on page 44. Each theme is titled before the assumption, and then the results are given either validating or modifying the assumption.

Theme 1. Extreme Confidence: *Give me a stick and I'll build you a bridge*

Assumption: High-achieving women in today's workplace may still exhibit imposter and bully behavior. However, their confidence is more solid than previous generations. This has led to new presentation strategies, including roles such as the Warrior, Queen, Revolutionary, Pioneer, Rebel, Seeker, and Visionary. These roles have emerged as they demand to be significant players in the workforce and seek to be recognized for their gifts instead of needing validation for their courage.

Summary of data collected: The "Imposter Phenomenon" and "Devil Wears Prada" behaviors and stereotypes that dominated both the academic and popular literature from the 1980's to the present are passé. High-achieving women under the age of 52 are no longer plagued by self-doubts which resulted in the fear of being seen as a fraud and a vile need to protect their position. Instead, these women belong to a generation brought

up to believe they could do anything they put their minds to. Most of them had at least one person in their lives who told them they could do anything. Many of them had their self-confidence enhanced by competing in sports in school (this generation experienced the acceptance and proliferation of competitive sports for women).

Therefore, this generation of high-achieving women errs instead on the side of overconfidence, rarely worrying about showing weakness. The only time they are concerned about not meeting a goal is after they accept a project, but even these feelings of overwhelm and doubt are fleeting. They are persistent, figuring out ways to bypass any “no” they are given. They get what they want and deserve, but not out of gratuitous entitlement; they work hard to get the recognition they feel is their right to be given.

However, the assumption was wrong about the roles these women take on. They are not fighters trying to change the world or the organization. Even though many of them have experienced gender and racial discrimination in the workplace that added to their desire to succeed, they did not see themselves as Warriors, Rebels, Revolutionaries or Pioneers. The roles they identified most often were Achiever, Change Agent and Innovator, meaning they love taking on problems and finding amazing solutions. They were more concerned about getting results within the confines of their jobs than they were interested in fixing the organization.

Even the women in senior management levels were more interested in performance excellence than in cultural evolution and focused more on proving their self-worth than on their worth as a woman. They aren't fighting the system; they are attempting to work the system to their advantage and reward. They aren't focused on banishing the old ways;

they instead lie awake in bed creating and strategizing how to sell their grand, new ideas to management and to their teams.

This doesn't mean they don't care about people; many of them said they loved mentoring and coaching other employees, and especially like to help others to stand up for themselves and be heard. The adjectives they chose to describe themselves included: passionate, high energy, persistent, assertive, direct, bold, confident and compassionate. These descriptors correlate with the Bem Sex Role Indicator for male behaviors minus the behaviors related to aggression and domination over others. (Bem, 1993) As Fels found in her 2004 study of female U.S. college students, a new style of femininity seems to be emerging based on confidence and assertiveness without losing the strong relational qualities of the previous generation of women. (Fels, 2004) The women in this study were proud to lead by example and hope people will follow with a little instruction and guidance.

Subtheme A. Working and making their own money came early in life, even before they were considered an adult.

Sample interview responses:

(NM) "I graduated high school early. I left home at 17 and went to work, but mostly because I had always worked. I mean I created an office when I was little with my mom's stuff from work. I was about 7. I used to play office every day. I was an insurance company that did claims. So people had like severed arms and I'd figure out how much we were going to pay them. When I moved out to Oswego I took a wheelbarrow and a shovel and went barn to barn to offer my services. I mean really, I did anything I could to try and make money. The market was far so I'd go to the grocery store and buy groceries and then I'd be like a 7-11

on the corner in my neighborhood. I'd double the price and sell milk and eggs and butter. So I guess going to work was the natural thing to do. Never mind that I had no idea what I wanted to be, I just knew I wanted to work."

(EM) "I was about to turn 16 and my father said, 'You got to get a job.' He printed my first business cards when I was 12 years old. I remember it was reflective silver with red writing. I was a babysitter. I would go around my neighborhood...and drop off my card and introduce myself. He taught me how to give a firm handshake and look someone in the eye and all of those things. I remember us going and buying my first interview suit at 15 and a half; had to lie about my age. So he took me around pointing to businesses and saying, 'You'd be great at that; what about bank teller, you've got great presence and personality; what about this, what about that?' But I ended up being a hostess at a Holiday Inn working Saturdays and Sundays....I was the hostess and then put myself through college and graduated by the time I was 21."

(DK) "Actually, I started working at the age of 15...I was skating and my mentor called me off the ice and asked me if I wanted a job as a receptionist. So at 15, I worked as a receptionist and doing traditional secretarial type roles. But in high school, a person came in to a class and talked about medical transcription, and I really wanted to move out of the house, and this was my way out. So that's how I started my career."

Survey responses: 100% of the women left home before they were 23 years old, with 59% leaving home at or before the age of 18.

Survey comment: "Paying for my own education made me appreciate it much more, take it more seriously and ultimately get more out of the experience. It also helped me transition quicker into the professional 'real world' after college and get a great job at a fortune 500 company."

Subtheme B. When the women entered the workforce, which was often before they were 20 years old, they felt pretty confident about their abilities. Generally, they had at least one person in their lives who had told them they were special and that they could do anything.

Sample interview responses:

(AW) “My stepfather absolutely supported me. He’d say, ‘You’re the smartest girl in the world, you don’t need to hang out with these losers, you’re this, you’re that.’ My stepfather gave me a lot of positive reinforcement and made me feel that I could accomplish things.”

(AS) “There was never anything I didn’t think that I could do...I played almost every single sport, was in so many different clubs, I was really lucky to not have to fight to join in.”

(JE) "My grandmother, my mother’s mother...I am who I am mostly because of her influence. She was an ICU nurse and knew her shit. Nobody messed with her. When she was finished with that she volunteered at hospice, in the last years of her life. I always say that if there was anything I want to be it would be to model her compassionate strength...people that are compassionate I’m drawn to, but people that are compassionate and maybe weak don’t always give you that feeling of security that they know what to do and will do it...I think somehow I’ve embodied that...to have my compassion come from strength. And I’m sure this is the source of my confidence...she always believed in me, without ever a doubt in who I was in all of those complicated ways."

(MR) “I wasn’t just told that I was good. I was told I was better. That may have been hard to live up to but it gave me the confidence to plow through barriers, overcome difficulties and succeed at all cost. I don’t even know what it feels like to be a victim. I may have been misunderstood and taken a few wrong paths, but my father had built it into my core that I wasn’t a girl you could keep down for long.”

(BS) “My mom took me to figure skating lessons. While I was at my first lesson I saw the speed skaters. I said, ‘that’s what I really want to do.’ She was probably thinking, ‘No, no, figure skating will give you the balance,’ but she just let me go there. And she supported me...I believe [my parents] think I can do no wrong...Now, whatever I put my mind to in life, I’ve achieved it if I wanted it. Whether it’s making the volleyball team after I got cut or getting the job or my master’s degree. There’s nothing that I wanted that I didn’t get.”

(EM) “But I remember at one point [my father] was talking about that he wanted his kids to take over his company, and he says, ‘And Emily, you can be vice president of this.’ I remember thinking, vice president? Why wouldn’t I be president? I don’t understand. He says, ‘Well because I mean, the boys, they’re men, and the industry is mostly men, and they might prefer...’ I remember being so mad at him. I just hated him for making that comment. It’s not the way I was raised, it was always, ‘You can be anything you want to be!’ So then he’s saying I

can't do that, which I didn't understand. Well he has since apologized 150 times for that day."

(DK) "...my skating coach taught me that my brothers weren't better than me and that I could do anything I put my mind to."

Survey responses: 60% said they had a cheerleader in their life that had helped them to feel special and strong.

Survey comment: "Looking back, I had an entire support system that acted as life cheerleaders encouraging me and my dreams. This list includes my mom, dad, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends."

Subtheme C. When the women entered the workforce, they were persistent in getting their first jobs—not taking “no” for an answer, even in male-dominated fields. In many cases, they didn't even view this as persistence. They viewed it as the way to get what they wanted and deserved.

Sample interview responses:

(NM) "My first fulltime job... I applied on a Friday and went back on Monday at 7:45 to see if I had the job. A man with a cup of coffee and a newspaper came in. I asked him if I got the job. He said he hadn't made up his mind yet. I said, okay, you'll call me correct? And he says yes. So Tuesday morning came and I was there at 8:00. I asked again. He said he still hadn't made up his mind. I know they were thinking I was so young I might not fit in. But I had taken office classes in school so I could do all the secretarial stuff. Wednesday I finally got smart and brought the damn cup of coffee. I waited there with a cup of coffee and the paper. When he walked in, I asked if I had the job. He just cracked up, but said, 'No I still haven't decided.'" I did it again Thursday. He still hadn't decided. Friday morning he says, 'You got the job'."

(JS) "When I got out of high school...I went in and talked to the store manager every single month until he hired me."

(JE) "... maybe it would have been different if I had started my career on the business side instead of on the shop floor. But I'm also proud of the fact that they didn't scare me off. I had managers tell me I couldn't be on the shop floor without

a male escort. I told them, without saying it, by just continuing to be on the shop floor that they couldn't tell me that. I will be on the shop floor when I need to be on the shop floor. I am responsible for these cells, and their quality. So every Friday, I put on a smock and ran a different machine with a different person."

Sample survey comment: "I had a lot of (too much) confidence about my own abilities and my worth to any company. I say 'too much' because looking back it's ridiculous how confident I was, given how immature and inexperienced any 22-year old is, but that confidence - earned or not - really helped me."

Subtheme D. They love saying yes to new jobs and assignments, confidently jumping in. Yet once they jump, they questioned whether they can fulfill their promises. Yet they never let anyone know of this breach in their confidence and just work extra hard to succeed. It isn't long before their good work quells any doubts and restores their confidence.

Sample interview responses:

(AW) "I've never felt afraid to try something. I may put my foot in and then be concerned that I can't live up to the fact that I stuck my foot in. But I've never said no. Unless it was something I didn't want to do like sales. So I choose not to do sales. But I don't doubt that I can complete something and I don't doubt that I can stick to things."

(MR) "My first two companies promoted me quickly to positions beyond my capabilities, both in experience and knowledge. But I rose to the challenge and figured it out."

(JS) "I think the things that have happened to me in my life have been a matter of opportunity meets capability. I have the opportunity to do it and I didn't shy away from it. I make things happen."

(NM) "I'm not fearful. I don't worry about how. I just do it."

Survey response: 44% said they sometimes experience self doubt, and only after they accept an assignment, not before. 16% said they never experience self-doubt.

Sample survey comments:

“The self doubt is fleeting. Every time I accept a new challenge and before I've gotten into it, I do think about how I'm going to master the new challenge.”

“I usually feel when faced with a new position that I may not have the skills or I may not be ready for the challenge. This usually passes once I am in the position within 4 months.”

“For a moment after I accept an assignment, I gasp. But the feeling is fleeting.”

“When I get into a situation where I have a new challenge or I don't know how to approach something, I don't doubt myself. Instead, I automatically get the mindset that there's a way to figure it out; I just need to identify the way/resources to do that.”

Subtheme E. The influence of sports. It appears that most of the high-achieving women in this study had participated in sports in school or outside of school. This is also a generational difference since girls generally weren't required or even encouraged to participate in sports fifty years ago. Many felt that participating in competitive sports not only gave them confidence, but also gave them a sense of both physical power and team power. This taught them many things that they carried into the corporate world.

Sample interview responses:

(DK) “I ended up excelling in sports far beyond my brothers and sisters. Yet any time I did something [my father] knocked it down. I just got better. In fact, sports empowered me. Especially running; I was racing at a very significant time in my life. My running was my positive coping strategy for challenges. When I was training to run my Boston marathon, I'd be running 20 miles and thinking, 'I'll show him.' But it was tough because support is critical to an athlete's success. But on the other hand I think, maybe this adversity or challenge is what moved me forward. Sometime I feel as if I have the power to do anything.”

(MR) “Because of athletics I learned that even a small woman could beat out a big guy. I knew I was smart. But sports taught me that I could win using my skills, my strength and my brains. That feels pretty awesome when you were always the littlest in your class and you never grew past 5 feet tall. I didn’t have to be a cute girl anymore.”

Survey response: 62% said sports had a significant impact on their lives.

Sample survey comments:

“Sports taught me discipline and perseverance.”

“I was raised in a very sports-oriented family. The concepts of teamwork, winning and often losing were good lessons. In addition, it helped with my career as years ago, women were not as accepted in leadership positions as they are today. Being able to participate in traditionally male-oriented sports conversations can create rapport in a more expedient manner.”

“Ran Track/Cross Country. Teaches you perseverance, commitment, sportsmanship, team dynamics, strength of self.”

“Sports taught me many life lessons that I believe give me a competitive advantage in the work place. In addition, they offered health benefits as well as kept me busy and out of trouble.”

“It was great for me to learn at an early age the joy of playing and competing and how to go home as friends at the end of the game.”

“Sports is my release and relief from work - sadly, it is also my addiction to the high from sports that causes my work life imbalances - my hubby would love if I could lie in bed on Saturday/Sunday mornings rather than bounding down the street listening to my Rave iPod music!!!”

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors from Theme #1 Extreme Confidence:

- Burn-out from taking on too much
- Mistakes made from taking on projects beyond their expertise with no available guidance
- Taking on too many projects at once, creating stress and errors

- Not seeing other possibilities while busy persisting down one path
- Steamrolling a project without broadly looking at the total impact
- Risking an addiction to work; always making work the priority over family, friends and health

Theme 2. *Zig-zagging career path. Give me a stick and I'll build you a bridge, unless I've already done that so give me a bigger challenge.*

Assumption: The definitions of success given by high-achieving women today are varied and complex. They are not single-focused on climbing up the ladder of success. They include other life factors and “whole-life” visions. Also, their sense of success is based more on feelings of accomplishment and fulfillment than on the number of degrees acquired, positions held, and possessions accumulated.

Summary of data collected: The interviews and surveys validated the assumption that the high-achieving women of the current generation do not see their career paths as climbing up a ladder. Instead of seeking titles, they seek successive accomplishments that are enjoyable to work on in one company or many.

However, the criteria for making career choices were not necessarily more “whole-life.” They do not leave their careers to take care of children though time flexibility is

sometimes considered when making a job choice. In fact, a few said they served their children better by not staying home.

Also, although some say they would like to find more peace in their lives, they make their career choices primarily based on productive working conditions, i.e. new challenges, recognition for accomplishments, and having a visible impact on company operations. Their pleasure is focused on personal achievement and accomplishing things of value. When asked about factors that played into their career decisions, no one mentioned words like sacrifice, promoting others or company loyalty. Although they may experience fatigue from overworking and disillusionment with corporate traditions, their passion and energy for creating amazing and observable results does not seem to wane with age. They want more peace and balance in their lives...someday.

Unfortunately, satisfaction is a foreign and fleeting word. There seems to be an internal flame that needs constant stoking. If they feel they are not getting the recognition they deserve or that the work is becoming stale and boring, they begin their search for the next great thing. If the company is big enough, they find new jobs or promotions inside. If not, they bounce around from company to company. Golden handcuffs (high salaries and stock options) rarely keep them in positions, though they might stay long enough to feel financially secure enough to do what they really want to do, which is often to own their own business.

Subtheme A. It is not important to have the skills required for a job when you accept a position or project. You can learn those. You just need to have the desire to do the job well.

Sample interview responses:

(AW) “My boss (early in her career)...he treated me like I could do no wrong, just gave me rope to go out and do whatever I could possibly do. They allowed me to learn my own way, and to either stumble or do whatever. That was the best mentoring that I have had.”

(MR) “I was never hired for a job I had done somewhere else. It was always a new challenge in an industry I knew nothing about. It didn’t scare me; it energized me.”

(BS) “I love the autonomy there...they’re an organization that lets you try whatever. There’s not a lot of ifs ands or buts over how I’m trying things. Everything is, ‘Okay let’s try it.’”

(EM) “That’s how I work best, under leadership that says, ‘Just run with it and show me what you can do.’ ...I’m fueled by passion. High energy...I can walk into a situation and see where the holes are and what changes need to be made...then I do it. If I have the freedom to do that, I thrive off that, having the freedom to create and to make things better.”

(AS) “I think my generation does think about our own happiness quite a lot. Yet why not put my energy into something I really want and work towards it? There’s no need to do the grueling 10 years in a position to finally get a promotion; those days are gone. I don’t think you necessarily have to earn a position the hard and traditional way. In fact I think that stifles organizations. It stifles departments. Companies should reward performance, not years of service.”

Survey responses: 73% said they moved up the ladder quickly and it was good for their career. None said they moved up too quickly while 12% said the progression was too slow.

Sample survey comments:

“I have moved up very quickly in comparison to some of my peers, but I feel the pace for me personally has been about right. I’ve never been in a position where I have felt overwhelmed by the job. If anything I feel frustrated if I’m not given a new goal. I’m ready for it!”

“I received promotions and lateral job opportunities earlier than my colleagues with similar work experience. Compared to my colleagues, I have been very successful, but I still feel like I have been ready for even more aggressive promotions/opportunities than I have received.”

“At the time, it seemed slow. In hindsight, however, I enjoyed many promotions in a relatively short period of time.”

“I have had a strong career progression, but in my mind, even now, not near full potential. Even at the VP level, success has come fairly easily.”

Subtheme B. Job jumping is okay. These days, if a person has the experience and knowledge, she can always get another job. So if the job no longer provides new and exciting challenges, mental stimulation, and a boss that allows you to work and flourish on your own, it is okay to move on to the next opportunity.

Sample interview responses:

(AS) “My tendency is to keep my eye out for greener pastures. So far, I don’t see the downside...I can always get work. I’m not worried about it. I could quit today and have a job tomorrow, and probably making the same amount of money... There are lots of opportunities for me with my experience and education.”

(JE) “Until I found my current work, I would work for a while at something new until it got old. Then, before moving on to something new, I’d feel stifled, even like I was suffocating.”

(BS) “...it becomes figuring out how to pull yourself up by your boot straps and get out of there before your psyche gets damaged... When people stay too long, they begin to believe they aren’t worthy enough to find something else.”

(NM) “I was always the top sales person. But then when I was done with sales, I knew I was done, I needed something different.”

(DK) “I’m always on to my next goal or adventure... Some people quit their job or they quit their boss; I think for me I always outgrew my experience... when I start, I have good intentions of staying in a company, but after 2, 3 at the most 4

years...you know, it really doesn't affect you getting another job. There's always another job if you want one."

(EM) When asked about what effect having a baby will have on her career path, she said there was no possibility of that changing the pattern her career has taken. "I need to have challenges. So just absolutely no, I wouldn't stay home. I think I'll be a better mother, probably be a better person...in a position where my office is out of the house and always offering new challenges."

(AW) "We were in Washington a year and a half. Interesting, it took me 8 weeks to get a job once we got there, and I was just devastated because I'd never gone on a job interview where I didn't get the job."

(KP) "After 3 ½ years...I was ready to move up but my boss wasn't going anywhere, so if I stayed I would have been bored to death... I took a risk and went to a high tech telecommunications startup... Yeah, I get bored easily. That's an ongoing problem."

(JS) "My undergraduate degree is in Marketing but I'm one of those people who I think, through trial and error, goes through their lives trying to figure out what they're going to do. So I got that degree...and I thought, 'Okay now what do I want to do?' ...So I took a couple of Education classes, but I thought, 'This is dumb.' So I went and got my MBA instead...I literally would go 4 nights a week and work fulltime, and spend my entire weekend writing papers. And after, I went into retail at a local chain. At 19, I was managing 20 people. Then I went from there to a battery salesperson. Hated that, and then went to a manufacturing company, and was their inventory control manager. Then I started taking these accounting courses, which is how I became an accountant. ... So I took my accounting courses and really fought to get an accounting job, because I thought I needed to make that transition. And all these jobs lasted about a year...So I then went to work for a glass manufacturing company as an Accounts Payable clerk knowing that was a means to an end and I'd be able to get somewhere from there. And at that same time took courses to pass the CPA exam. In the meantime I also knew that the path to get certified was you had to go to a public accounting firm. So I knew someone at a public accounting firm in Fresno...I proceeded to call him every month and ask him if he had a job for me. When he finally did, I quit work at this terrible glass manufacturing plant and went to work at this public accounting firm, passed the CPA exam, and then went to work for a first tier firm...I continued to work my way up. Then I decided it was time for me not to be in Fresno anymore...So I went in and talked to the head of the office and said, 'You know I need to be someplace else other than here. What about one of these national office opportunities?' I had not been there very long... a couple of years. He said, 'I'm not sure that's

appropriate. Usually those people are at a much higher level, much more experienced.’ But then I found out a woman in the San Francisco office needed to [move to Fresno] because her husband is going to go into dental practice with his father, so she took my job and I took hers in San Francisco....So I worked in that office for almost 5 years. Golden Gate University was right across the street...I got an MS in Taxation...I moved down to the San Jose office to do international work....and I got bored with San Francisco and San Jose. I thought, I’m not going to live my whole life here, in California. So I set up a bunch of interviews, and went to Manhattan and went to every major firm that was not mine, and literally went in and talked to [a Big Four accounting firm], was there for probably a half an hour, talked to this guy who was a partner in the firm and got hired...After two years I went to work as the Director of International Tax for a small regional firm that gave me a boat load of money and a big title. I hadn’t been there 10 months when a headhunter called me with a job at [major telecommunications company]... So I went out and interviewed with them, and got the job in International Tax Policy... I was the person who was going down to Washington as the tax expert to talk to Hill staff. Within 6 weeks I had legislation actually written for me, which was nice. I did that for 2 and a half years when things started to compress at [major telecommunications company], there was an opportunity for me to move down to Washington and actually be the lobbyist rather than the person who came in. You know I’ve been in the President’s Executive room. I lobbied the IRS, I lobbied the U.S. Treasury, I lobbied the House and the Senate, the Joint Committee on Taxation. I went to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris. I would make 4 or 5 trips to Paris a year. I even presented. It was really great but you know I hit this point where I realized I just didn’t want to be in Washington D.C. anymore... After a while you really tire of being around people in DC... Anyway I just decided that I don’t want to do this anymore...So after coming out here on vacations, I had two job offers. Of course, it’s unbelievably beautiful down here on the Pacific Ocean. So I decided to take this one and here I am.”

Survey responses: When asked if they felt they would rather leave a job that was not fulfilling than to stay for future opportunities, 60% answered yes with another 15% saying their answer would depend on the situation.

Sample survey comments:

“I tend to change jobs about every two years. That said, I have been fortunate to work in companies that can offer growth and development opportunities, and to

work for managers who recognize and appreciate that I need to be challenged with new and stimulating work.”

“I have quit jobs because they are intrinsically not satisfying and in some cases have become too boring, or they are asking me to use skills that I do not like using and I don't seem to have a strong aptitude for. I have never ‘served time.’”

“Absolutely. I am a firm believer that you do not check a box. It is about growing your expertise and experiences. If I find I am no longer learning, then I seek to move to something that will grow my skills for my ultimate goal.”

Subtheme C. As mentioned, job hopping was normal. If the company is large, they moved around in the company. If not, they moved from job to job. The average length of time in one particular job is about 4 years plus or minus two. However, they usually made this choice because they wanted to LEAVE something behind instead of CHOOSING jobs based on a plan. This shifted slightly with age and family responsibilities.

Sample interview responses:

(AW) “I struggle with people who want to put me in a pocket, make me the stripe person... I prefer they give me the chance to give them a result. But I can honestly say I haven't really had very many of those because I would leave when it gets to that point. You know, this isn't fun anymore.”

(AS) “I think companies are having a really tough time because they're losing their workforce... My generation, we know we don't have to wait around (for new jobs and promotions). So there's no loyalty. I'm not loyal to an organization. I'm loyal to a cause and I'm loyal to certain people that I work with on a team, but I wouldn't stay with one person in a company if there was something better for me somewhere else.”

(JS) “Many times I think I'm escaping something rather than going towards something. It's more of a feeling than what my life looks like on paper. I am always kind of extricating myself... I am either going somewhere else or escaping the thing I was doing. Many times it would just be a matter of, ‘I don't

want to be here anymore' ... I've been here, I've done that, I know how to do this, I have accomplished this, and it's time to sort of move on."

(KP) "I would love to do something wild and crazy. Teach English as a second language, open my own little bookstore or something else entrepreneurial. Wish I would have had that goal in mind a lot sooner so I could afford it now... These days I think I want to quit where I am now, but then what would I go to, the same thing at another company? I don't want to do the same thing I've done in the past... just leave. I want to be mindful about it. I want to have a purpose; I want to have a direction."

(NM) "I fought to get my first job. Within months, I ended up training all the managers. But one day after about a year, it was a really cold day, my car broke down. When I got to work, I gave them my two week's notice and moved to Arizona."

(JE) "I stumbled into coaching (current business). I started exploring coaching last July, and this July I gave my resignation. They might have kept with me if they honored flexible scheduling and allowed me to explore my new passion in my job. But they instead pulled the rug out from under me. Yet this made it easier to make the decision to leave. For the first time, I made a choice instead of taking the best thing that showed up."

(EM) "I used to think it was around 3 years. But it gets shorter as I get older. It's about 2 ½ years now, and I am very antsy to move on to another position. I'm getting to the point right now...at 2 years I will be past my point and ready to move into something else."

(DK) "Moving up the corporate ladder doesn't appeal to me. I would have to morph myself into being someone I'm not just to get ahead...I'm not sure what I want for my future but I am sure that I want to proudly be me."

Survey responses: 59% said they make career choices based on how challenging and interesting a job is. Only 9% said they make their choices based on financial gain or security and 16% said they make their choices based on leadership potential. The remaining 16% said they tended to outgrow their jobs, forcing them to move on.

Sample survey comments:

“Earlier in my career, my motivation would have been financial and level specific. At this time, my motivation is to have a balanced life, find positions that challenge me and are enjoyable. The leaders that I work with play a role in the positions that I accept. I am slightly more "me" driven when choosing the position. Unfortunately, I forget that aspect once in a position.”

“New opportunities were presented to me. Sometimes I would leave a job where I still had more to learn Other times I was seeking a new challenge. But I always jumped on the opportunity.”

“I want higher levels of leadership and more money, but I won't take a job just for these factors.”

Subtheme D. Job hopping is usually a sign that the person has no career plan. Even if the woman chose her career step, it was generally made on fulfilling an emotion instead of moving toward a particular destination. However, by her mid-thirties, many of the women regretted not being more deliberate about her choices, that she could at least be more financially secure if she had created a plan earlier in her life.

Sample interview responses:

(AS) “I was never taught that you actually make a plan. We’re not taught in school. People ask you what you want to do when you grow up, and you usually give the answer that elicits the greatest smile from the grown ups. That’s pretty much it. My parents too, just said to get an education. That was the theme. You’re smart, you get an education...even now I only know what I like to do but I’m not sure where, or how to focus.”

(JE) “We have to have a place to put our energy. The generation before us maybe had a clearer purpose. We run around with raw energy and no defined place to put it.”

(MR) “I regret not having more of a plan, or at least knowing what I wanted to be or to have accomplished in the end. It would have helped me make better choices.”

(KP) “I get so busy with activities that I don’t get focused.” She said that she blows through one job, then moves on to the next with no sense of path or purpose. “That’s the do, do, do, always go somewhere, always do something, always travel, always have trips, always have things in the works...but when I stop to take a breath, I feel shallow, like I’m not contributing to society. I feel self-centered and self-serving...but [I’m] not sure how to create what would make me feel more valued.”

(KP) “I have a pattern of making poor choices, not asking the right questions. In retrospect, I didn’t even know what to ask.”

(AS) “I’ve been too long in this position. Four years in one place is huge for me...I think I will always bounce around, but I feel like it’s time to temper that with some sort of direction. I know I love having new experiences, learning about the business, and once I’ve figured out how things work and make some great improvements, then I like to leave. Can I make a plan with that?”

Survey responses: Unlike the interviewees, 70% said they had a plan when they started their career but it changed as new opportunities came up. However, from their comments, their plan seemed to focus more on discovering and meeting their needs than on completing steps in a career plan.

Sample survey comments:

“My plan has been to develop a fulfilling career that pays me well so that I can enjoy life.”

“I don’t sit still. Yet the last time my turnaround/successes in sales benefited my successor—the two times tier winner went to the guy who inherited my territory the following year!”

“My early career was filled with unexpected promotions that drove my skills and later successes in other companies. I started to drive my career in my 21st year!”

“I know I'm not going to be doing what I'm doing now in a few years. I'll be somewhere else doing something else, but until the opportunity presents itself I won't know what it is.”

“I can strongly see what I am supposed to be doing, although I'm a little cloudy yet on how to make it happen.”

“No, I had no particular plan. Each position built on the previous one.”

“My plan is to play to my strengths and passions, but the ‘end all’ is still unclear.”

“Still working on it.”

Subtheme E. Many of the women felt that they would end their careers owning their own businesses. Either they had a specific plan for accomplishing this goal or they were working on creating financial stability so they would have the freedom to choose this option when it felt right. Again, the criteria for this decision focused more on having autonomy, new challenges, tasks they enjoy and freedom than on financial gain or aspirations of leadership.

Sample interview responses:

(JS) “Teaching and health is what I love. The difference is, I can make \$12,000 a year on my passion, or I can make 12 times that in my career. So I'll work my career until I have the money to work my passion...I won't ever retire.”

(AS) “I'm not a materialistic person; I want money because it buys me freedom.”

(JE) “My rebelliousness fuels me. Even at my desk, I'm a low compliant. I think this will be an asset as an entrepreneur.”

(MR) “Their [previous generation] definition of success was to work their way up in a business or build a business of their own for the status and the money. Ours is more about creating financial freedom and independence to do what we want with our lives. We're working on a different model, self-propelled with no role models to follow.”

(DK) "...you want to be free of being dependent on others, to be able to travel and be able to experience things that you choose in life. So success to me is more about independence and experiences...it is good if it takes me to my next goal or adventure."

(JS) "But the other issue is I have spent my life on this financial freedom bus tour... I travel around with this financial calculator in my brain. I always know how much more money I'd like to have before the retirement money is set and anything after that is gravy."

Survey responses: When asked if they now own or would like to own their own business in the future, 82% responded yes. However, only three women currently own or partner in a business and only two women said they had definite plans for what this business would be.

Sample survey comments:

"I always felt I would start my own business, but I knew I needed to obtain the skills and credibility to make it happen. Only in the last 6 years have I defined what business I would start, but my career has been a strategic plan to move toward this goal."

"I always feel bored and unchallenged. In the back of my head I've always known that becoming a business owner is what I really want."

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors from Theme #2 Zig-zagging career path:

- Not having a career plan until much later in career
- Making impulsive job choices, so some are good and some are horrible
- Not stopping long enough to enjoy the fruits of their successes
- Developing resentments with jobs or managers that started out well but failed to fulfill their needs over time
- Not staying long enough in a company to earn the credibility and recognition needed to earn an executive position

Theme 3. Driven by a need for recognition based on performance, not for gender. *Don't do me any favors; just applaud me when I'm done.*

Assumption: High-achieving women still feel the pinch of discrimination in the workplace. However, many of them feel it is just something that exists but doesn't affect them. They do not worry about proving that *a woman* can do a job. They focus on proving that they are the best person for the job. Discrimination does not have the cultural relevance it once had. These women feel they have to find their way on their own regardless of what a man or woman puts in their way.

Summary of data collected: The assumption proved to be correct. A majority of the women had experienced gender discrimination in the workplace. They even noted age discrimination from older women who seemed to be more interested in making the younger women "pay their dues" than supporting their rise in the company. Some of these acts of discrimination were blatantly hostile and illegal. However, this did not seem to move the women to try to eradicate the discrimination. Instead, they were driven to succeed in spite of these unexpected roadblocks (unexpected because the women seemed surprised that this behavior still exists in this century).

Therefore, it can be said that the women were driven to prove that they were highly competent and even better than their peers. If someone tried to keep them from succeeding

either verbally or through actions, they felt motivated to try even harder to prove they could succeed at all costs.

It is important to note that although the women felt entitled to receive recognition and to be given new challenges (which may mean being given a promotion if that is how they could gain new responsibilities and learning opportunities), they knew they had to work hard in return. They felt they deserved attention and rewards. Yet they deserve this because they work harder than everyone else, get great results and are willing to learn from their mistakes. However, this often makes them sensitive to criticism, susceptible to impulsiveness and burnout. They tend to talk more than listen, are too obstinate and blunt when they disagree, and sometimes overpower people with their passion.

Subtheme A. These women will accomplish great feats in order to prove their capability. In particular, they love to show that they can do something that someone else said they couldn't. Generally, they aren't trying to prove that they can do something difficult in spite of being a woman; being a woman factors very little into their reasons for proving their worth. Mostly, they take great pleasure in proving that people underestimated their ability and their ultimate value to the team and the organization.

Sample interview responses:

(KP) "I need to feel respected and acknowledged. I do what it takes to get that."

(MR) “I’ve already proved them all wrong; I’m living the success they said I would never achieve. Yet there is still something missing. I can still do more. Being a garden-variety success is not good enough.”

(AW) “I did a case for my boss. I showed it to him and he loved it. Then I had to take it to committee. The committee was 12 men. One man did nothing but add up your figures to see if they were right, another man checked your grammar...I mean they really had no overall capability, but they sat in judgment of me. Well my very first case failed. They said, ‘You really did a lot of good work here, but you’ll need to redo it.’ I was mortified. But I did it and within that year I became someone who taught other people how to write cases. I never had another case turned down.”

(JS) “I literally created this life. Every place I’ve been people said to me, ‘Once you take this demanding job you’re not going to be able to do that,’ and I’m like, ‘Watch me.’ I would never tell someone they can’t do something. I don’t believe in that. I think you can do anything you want to do. I’m so bothered when people say that. Where is their frame of reference that they feel like they have to cripple someone else? My challenges aren’t roadblocks...they help me prove what I can do.”

(JE) “Why did I choose to be an engineer? It’s not a teacher (like her mother). Honestly, looking back, I had something to prove. I am smart enough to be an engineer.”

(BS) “I don’t like someone else telling me what I can’t do. Just when you think you know what’s best for me...I’ll do more.”

(DK) “Well I’m thinking now, with 20-20 hindsight...part of my motivation is kind of like saying. ‘I told you so’ in a nice way. There is a sense of proving one’s self...part of it is feeling like someone is always trying to hold me back. I’ve achieved success, I’ve excelled in certain areas, and then there would be somebody knocking me down. But then I come back each time even stronger...Even if I overcompensate in my effort to prove myself.”

Survey responses: When asked if they felt they ever had something to prove at work, 67% said “Yes, and it has mostly to do with proving what I could do that someone said I couldn’t.” Another 13% said they felt they needed to prove that a woman could do a particular job.

Sample survey comments:

“Yes, it mostly has to do with proving that I can take on any challenge and knock it out of the park.”

“I am often driven to do things that seem impossible.”

“Yes, mostly because I am an African American.”

“Proving that I can do it all—demonstrating that a woman can both achieve great things professionally AND be a wife and mother.”

“I want to prove I can make it in a man’s world.”

“I am not competitive per se; I want to over-achieve in order to surprise myself.”

Subtheme B. Although the women who experienced discrimination might be angered into action, they were not angered into activism. The actions just fueled them to prove their value even more.

(JE) “So after I had my baby, I asked for a new role. It needed to be a challenge, but not one where I was leading people. So I chose the Master Black Belt program. The Master Black Belt program was highly benchmarked across the globe... There were 150,000 employees at the time. Of those there are maybe 200 Masters in the organization. So I could prove that I was technically savvy, that I was young and a woman and could still do it. The person who led the program told me on several occasions that I broke the mold in many ways. There were obvious gender and age ones, but also I wanted to be really good at it and step out as a leader. So I set up this program where we all studied ahead of time, and I ended up being the pseudo leader of the whole boot camp experience and I really enjoyed it. After that, I was always seen as a leader and was part of a leadership team.”

(JS) “I’m fond of saying, ‘You really can’t offend me.’ Particularly in Washington...it was all a bunch of old white guys, and I walked in. That was huge. When I saw their shocked faces...it’s not a roadblock, it’s a benefit...there may have been men who wanted more than to just help me, but as long as you play along and have a certain detachment, there’s no real problem. In the end, they respect you and the attention turns positive.”

(JE) “I have struggled with being an attractive woman in a male dominated system when I walked in the door. I was told I had to sleep with somebody to get hired on as an intern. I did get hired without that, but I had to do my boss' dirty work, like filing his papers and ordering office supplies while I'm an engineer. None of the men did that, even the interns who came after me. And men looked up my skirt and left me nasty, sexist voice messages. I thought it was behind me when I left manufacturing, when I went to work for a business unit, but it's still there; it's just more subtle. ... I didn't realize that there were still barriers out there. I really thought that I would walk into a world that would be equal. And I know there were people who called me a feminist early on, and my retort would be, I'm just an 'equalitist.' I just want to be treated fairly. And I don't want to rule the world. I just want to have the same playing field to show what I can do.”

(AS) “I know there is still discrimination but what I've seen is more about age than gender. When I started moving up past your entry level position...the gentlemen I worked with made it well known, 'I've been doing this for as long as you've been alive.' I know there's something to be said for experience. There's also something to be said for new understanding and the perspective the younger generation brings to the workplace. Many of us are better educated. I realized how threatened that man felt. I had to learn to watch out for that.”

(MR) “I didn't get the first promotion I applied for. I was young and inexperienced, but I knew I could do the work and do it well. The CEO took me by the hand and spoke to me like a child when he told me his decision. That wasn't the only time I felt that my age or my gender kept me from moving up. I reacted by moving on to bigger and better jobs elsewhere, proving I could do anything I put my mind to. I was a driver. But their actions fueled my drive even more.”

Survey response: When asked if they had experienced discrimination at work, 44% said they had direct experience with it in the workplace. Another 31% said they had witnessed discrimination but it had not affected them. 19% said they thought it existed but had not experienced it while 6% felt that discrimination is a thing of the past.

Sample survey comments:

“Early in my career, I encountered this more. I have not felt it much in the past 15-20 years.”

“My perception is that men are more highly compensated. Having said this, I don't believe that I am overtly discriminated against as a female.”

“For as long as women are women and men are men, we will always have differences/discrimination; competition and ambition to achieve is innate, not based on sex. The only problem is that women are willing to voice concern and do something about discrimination. Men shrug it off and steamroll on in most cases!”

“I know it definitely existed in the past, but I have never felt even the slightest bit of discrimination. My friends/peers in my age group feel the same way. Across multiple jobs and working with all different types of people, it has just never been an issue for me.”

“I have faced sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Each time I left the company and moved on.”

“I have honestly never seen it, but I wouldn't want to say that it never exists anymore. My experience has been that women can be self-limiting or think there is discrimination when in actuality they may need to readjust how they interact within the business arena.”

“I would say things for women have improved dramatically over the last 20 years. I experienced the glass ceiling in my career, but I'm a baby-boomer who worked in traditionally male dominated industries. I must say, however, that I'm disappointed that the most recent data for this market indicate the highest paid executives are almost all men (97%).”

“Racial discrimination is still alive and well. But it won't stop me from succeeding.”

Subtheme C. It has been said that the current generation of workers enter the workplace feeling entitled to be treated as special. This group of women may feel they are special, but they feel they hit the ground running, so they deserve to be

valued, respected and recognized for their extra effort and superior performance regardless if they do not hold a title or they lack years of experience.

Sample interview responses:

(AW) "I'm really proud of my career. I've been on a steady incline...I have had setbacks, or should say, set asides. I don't believe that I've ever had any setbacks. I've had times when I've reached a little plateau and needed to find that next opportunity, and I've been able to do that. I believe that I have earned the respect of my coworkers in the banking community, and that means a lot to me...I want to earn that EVP... it would mean that I've proven to a bank that they I'm invested in their company and they would invest in me."

(DK) "I like accomplishments. Maybe it's for prestige, it can be recognition, it can be getting the respect you deserve, getting recognized. Yet I love it most when I'm achieving my potential and developing myself fully from my gifts."

(MR) "I always felt I knew as much if not more than my bosses and I should be recognized and rewarded for that. In return, they would get outstanding work from me, beyond expectations. I could help take the organization to the next level if they let me. When this was slow to come, I was angry, irritated and restless. They weren't using my strengths and they weren't acknowledging my brilliance. How stupid could they be?"

(JE) "We've been taught in this generation that we can have it all. The reality is, you can but you have to work really, really, really hard to find it, and no one's going to hand it to you. I remember women coming into my office saying, 'You're so lucky, you work part time.' And I would say to them, luck had absolutely nothing to do with it. I proved myself, and then I asked for it. I learned that lesson."

Survey responses: When asked if they felt they were entitled to anything at work, 83% said they expected to get frequent new challenges and opportunities and 67% said they expected to be recognized for their work. Only 26% said they expected promotions. However, 43% said they expected direct help with their development, such as having mentors or coaches. It is clear these women expect to be given

frequent new challenges and to be recognized for their results, but they don't see it as entitlement since they work hard for their rewards.

Sample survey comments:

“I often feel I should be promoted sooner than others (like many people I am sure). It should be based on the improvements I made and goals I exceed. The challenge is finding a company that empowers its people by promoting them appropriately. Even in companies that allow promotions based on merit (without getting a new role), they typically only allow x amount and there are politics involved, resulting in a slower promotion system than I would personally like.”

“I was fresh out of college when I obtained my job. I have always been a quick study and boredom comes quickly. I was naive about self-directed career development. In the company I joined there was an artificial rule that you had to spend five years in an entry level position before advancement. I challenged a regional sales director who preached this. My challenge was that no two people have the same learning curve and five years can't be applied uniformly. I received my first promotion at the two-year mark.”

“Entitled is too strong a word. I expected help, recognition, and frequent new challenges and opportunities.”

“In general, I don't feel like I am 'entitled' to anything. I do believe that if I work hard, exceed expectations and leave a department better than when I arrived (working with integrity), that I will get more challenges and opportunities, ultimately having a faster than average career climb.”

Subtheme D. Regardless of the personal nature of their motivation, these women feel that they are committed to obtaining outstanding results so their intentions should not be questioned. In addition, since they put more time and effort into finding the best way to do something than most of the people they work with, their voices should be heeded and respected. As a result, their communication style is very direct and passionate. This may serve them in leadership roles. However, their

style can also intimidate others, causing political difficulties and interpersonal conflicts.

Sample interview responses:

(BS) "I'm outspoken so I need to balance when to speak and when to listen."

(NM) "Even as a child I was very direct. My mom used to walk with one hand available because she knew I'd say whatever was on my mind... I'm still the one who always says exactly what she's thinking. It does keep you out of some realms. I've been coached how not to do that but it still happens."

(NM) "I have had to tone down my exuberance so I don't overtake the room when I walk in. That's what I think they meant when they called me 'flamboyant.' It's my energy. A woman who was dressed in bright colors and big flying clothes called me that, and I was wearing my usual black. So it was more about my energy than my appearance. I have to know when to take a break, when to walk away, especially when I'm about to lose it."

(AW) "I do like to be in on things, but if I'm not leading them and they're not going where I want them to go, then I need to work on my patience."

(JE) "I was born spirited, full of will power. When I'm stressed... I'm not the softest person around... I was more abrasive and assertive than I might have needed to be. I think being honest got in my way. There were several occasions I was very clear... Once, when they slotted me into a role, after I said I didn't want it, the VP came in and... I was very, very honest with him. To this day he won't look me in the eye walking down the hallway. ... I'm not sure that kind of honesty is always appropriate... I was actually proud of myself for not ripping him to shreds. I know he was a good guy and he wanted to have a successful organization. I know there was a compliment in there, that he thought I would help him. But he did not honor my request."

(MR) "Sometimes I get so passionate about what I do I just blow people away, you know? They don't ask any questions after I speak. It isn't until later that I find out that they haven't bought on or even understood what I was talking about. So I struggle to enroll people. My boss would always tell me that the ship couldn't turn as fast as I wanted. I needed to adapt to different styles when trying to influence people instead of just getting louder or talking more."

(DK) "...and then we were having lunch with another rep and [my boss] said to me, 'Down girl, down. Have another biscuit.' Now whenever I'm trying to

make changes or give suggestions that are out of routine, they treat me like, 'Down girl, down. Have another biscuit.'”

(KP) “I’m enthusiastic, engaged...but I can be perceived as overbearing.... There are occasions where I steamroll and I don’t have patience and I have to count to 10 to give people time to catch up.”

(AS) “I could probably be kinder and less aggressive in my approach to communicating...I’m outspoken, and I can be pretty bull headed. I’ve really been trying to soften my approach to people.”

(AW) “I’m too emotional for a business world, and I’ve had to struggle with that. Like I said, when I get angry tears get in my eyes.”

(BS) “Letting go and breathing and being patient and knowing... I talk too fast... but I am excitable, and I do have a lot of energy. So if I do get on a roll, I will talk fast.”

Survey responses: The women were asked to describe themselves at work. The words chosen most often were Passionate (78%), Assertive (76%), Confident (76%), Direct (73%), Persistent (73%), Bold (67%) and Compassionate (55%). Less than 25 % described themselves as Restless, Pushy, Rebellious, Impulsive, Steamroller, Self-Saboteur and Competitive.

Sample survey comments:

“I’m collaborative with people who want to be a team, but competitive with those who want to compete. It doesn't matter whether it is a man or a woman. I’m not the initiator, but I will not back down if they want to compete.”

“I have been told that I intimidate other leaders due to my background, professionalism and successes.”

“I like to stay busy but I wouldn’t call this restless. That is when I’m most at ease.”

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors from Theme #3 Driven by a need for recognition based on performance:

- May overlook and even allow discrimination to continue
- Appearing insensitive to other people's needs, desires and solutions
- Reacting harshly to criticism
- Mistaking their intimidating behaviors for persuasiveness
- Holding people to a standard they create without tolerance for differences
- Being susceptible to impulsive decision-making and burnout
- When disagreeing with others, coming across as argumentative, obstinate and blunt and then justifying their behavior
- Not really listening

Theme 4. The workplace is their playground. *Success at work is my sport, just throw me the ball.*

Assumption: They still feel that they are measured by a harsher standard than men.

However, this tends to mobilize instead of demotivate them. They love a good challenge. This behavior is very different from many of the women of previous years who just felt victimized.

Summary of data collected: The assumption is only partially true. Although many people would label these women “competitive,” they actually don’t spend that much energy measuring their success against others. Their confidence is solid, especially by the time they pass thirty years old. Therefore, they don’t need to compare themselves to others to feel good. Being held to a harsher measurement than men does impel them to prove their superior value. However, this should not be used as a means to motivate them. Over time, if they don’t get the recognition and comparable compensation, they will search for a new company or manager that will provide them with what they deserve.

On the other hand, the women tend to view themselves as smarter, faster and stronger, or more assertive, than most of the people they work with. This self-assessment can be perceived as arrogance and their superiority could trigger competitiveness in other people. However, the results indicate that with experience, the women come to recognize the effect they have on others and learn to be more “politically correct” when dealing with people they might intimidate.

Yet no one should take their reserve as a loss of passion or drive. Most of the women see themselves working all of their lives; their personal needs are met by working. The workplace is their playground where they get to be courageous, creative, self-sufficient, amazing, productive, outstanding and the bold savior of all. They will never sit still; work balance means adeptly balancing all the balls. They want to use up all of their resources, including their personal energy, not hold things back for a rainy day. They want to move

mountains and win for the good of all. That is the game they are playing. They don't want to beat anyone. They just want everyone to get out of their way.

Therefore, being micromanaged isn't the only thing they hate. Even worse, they abhor feeling underutilized. They must find outlets for their unbounded energy.

Subtheme A. Since they are experimenting and learning instead of just being busy, they are energized not drained by being in constant motion.

Sample interview responses:

(EM) "I'm fueled by passion. I thrive off of having the freedom to create and to make things better."

(AS) "I don't see it as running... I like to see places, travel, go overseas, study abroad, take fun classes, try a little bit of everything. Above all, I don't get too serious and I don't get trapped in a job."

(AW) "It's not so much that I need to sit a project on a shelf and say, 'I did this.' Because as soon as I'm done with it I'm ready to do something else...once I've accomplished it I feel like, "Well shoot, most people could probably do that. Now what can I do?" I need to be invested. ...and active. I can't see me not being active."

(JS) "I'll tell you I think my whole life has been about persistence, and to never stop trying. Both never stop trying and never stop experimenting, because I think I continue to go through phases where I want to do things that are different or to go someplace different...maybe I'm restless but I think it's more about curiosity."

(JE) "I love to learn and then to be creative with what I learn. I like to make it my own. I did that with Master Black Belt, and that's why they said I broke the mold. I hope to do that in coaching, I hope to make it unique and my own. I can learn what someone else says is coaching, but then I have to take that and make it my own."

(DK) “I was always working two or three jobs to not only take care of myself and save for school, but because there were so many things I liked to do. For instance, when I was a flight attendant I was also a personal trainer and taught group exercise classes.”

(JS) A friend of hers observed that she was always in motion. “That’s sort of the way I’ve been my whole life. I keep wedging things in. So I’m going to work and then I’m going to school and then I’m going to go teach an aerobics class or reverse that order depending on the day... I’m energized by it.”

(AS) “I checked the wrong boxes on their assessment. I wanted to do sales because I work hard, I’m competitive...I like meeting people, talking to people in a fast-paced environment...but when they asked the question, ‘what do you value most—money, education, recognition?’ I answered recognition, education, and money last. I didn’t get the sales job. They made me a Finance Intake Specialist...I cried every night. I hated it. It was awful. It was sitting in front of a desk. It was so confining and restrictive...I lasted in that job 6 months.”

Survey response: The women were asked to comment on this statement, “I am rarely satisfied for long. And often, when I am done with a project I am on to the next thing with little thought about the last thing I did.” 68% of the women responded yes or mostly true for them. 17% said that although it was not true for them now, it was true for them earlier in their career.

Sample survey comments:

“I rarely spend time gloating. I’m on to the next thing.”

“I seem to never be totally satisfied. I look for what’s next to focus my energy and vision on. If I get too comfortable, I look for ways to embrace the spark. This is what I DO. If you ask me what I want, I will project images of quiet, calm, composure. I think about that being what I want, but I sure don’t seem to bring it into my world. I draw in the opposite actually.”

“Yes, I am always looking for new challenges and opportunities to learn—although I try to build on my previous knowledge. As an accountant there is an

element that likes the routine of the monthly, quarterly and annual cycles but I also need the other projects to keep me interested.”

“Absolutely, I get bored very easily and need more to keep my plate filled. I just need to be careful about taking on other people's problems and assignments.”

“Yes - one of my strengths is multi-tasking and I am at my best when I am juggling multiple projects both professionally and personally. My life is often chaotic and I often feel I am moving a million miles an hour and don't have time to step back and enjoy it.”

“This is absolutely true. I love to challenge myself. For me life is like running. Sometimes it's about what is up ahead, sometimes it is about how much better I'm running today than yesterday and sometimes it's about sharing the road with someone. I can change my course or my pace on my own to suit my needs.”

“Yes. In every job I meet the expectations / goals for the role, and then look for ways to maximize the role/opportunities. Once I have innovated & improved a role/project/department and am no longer challenged or feel like I am really moving that department forward, my internal flame seems to go out. This is when I know it's time for me to find a new role. If I am not making a true improvement/difference in my job/project, I feel like I am failing. I could have saved the world yesterday, but if I haven't done anything today to make a difference, I feel like I am failing.”

“This is true for me, although less true than it was when I was in my 20's. Reading this statement makes me sad for myself.”

Subtheme B. The women are confident in their choices and bold in their actions.

They persevere, knowing that they can conquer any challenge they are faced with.

And they want each challenge to be greater than the last.

Sample interview responses:

(JE) “I knew early on that I wanted to be more than just a nurse or a teacher. I was going to make my own choices based on who I am and who I want to be.”

(AS) “I would describe myself as ‘boldly going anywhere.’ I have a couple friends that tease and call me their corporate hippie. I’m either bold or defiant, couldn’t say for sure which drives me more.”

(AW) “I’ve really only worked for three organizations. I’ve been able to walk in feeling that I had value to give them, and then I am able to seize the opportunity to move and grow into other areas. That’s always been really important to me. It is a ‘what can I gobble up today?’ kind of thing. I like to master something and then move on.”

(JS) “My old boss who is now a very good friend said I am the kind of person if you held a cloth up, I’d find a way through. I’m going to start with a little pinhole and I’m just going to pull those threads until I actually get there. I’m not going to see the barrier...no matter how small the starting point is, I’ll be able to get through that fabric.”

Survey response: The women were asked to choose or name the top five things they need to feel good about their jobs. The words chosen most often were: Autonomy (52%), Opportunities to learn new things (49%), New challenges (49%), Making a difference (46%), and Appreciated and Recognized (36%). The items that were chosen by less than 20% of the participants were Support for personal development (18%), Fun (18%), People to dialogue with (15%), and Attention (6%). Clearly the women are task focused, they seek independence and they like to be acknowledged for creating significant results.

Subtheme C. Their definition of success focuses on freedom and achievement.

They want the freedom to do what they define as meaningful and of value, and for many of them this definition broadens with experience (their ‘sphere of impact’ increased with age).

Sample interview responses:

(AS) “I think success for me now is working in a field that I’m passionate about that’s contributing to society. That meets my needs on several different levels. Creating positive change meets my mental, physical, emotional, and social needs. If I could look back and say, okay I’ve created positive change internationally and it’s still contributing back to the greater whole, then that would be success to me.”

(AW) “I want acknowledgment not just for my work, but that I can do more. That’s what I want. I want them to say, ‘Yeah you did that, we gave that to you, you did great, now here’s something more.’ It’s not that I need to tell the entire world that I got it done in time and on budget, but I want the people who matter to know that so that they give me more to do...I should clarify that. It’s not just more, it’s always having something *new* to do that is important.”

(JS) “[Success] is the freedom to do whatever you want to do...to know that you don’t have to do this thing for 15 more years is really great freedom...That you can always go do something else you feel is more important and adds value.”

(JE) “I was restless. I now have an anchor... Too many days I would ask, 'Am I going to spend 50 years getting up and doing this?' Now I'm happy to answer yes to that question...Before I felt my drive was to impact the bottom line. Now I'm impacting people's lives. It's much more fulfilling...I'm in a peaceful place. Before, my life was not peaceful.”

(MR) “I define success as having the freedom to only do the work that fuels my passion and my joy. When I do that, I can make a difference in people’s lives.”

Sample survey comments:

“Yes, I like the praise and respect garnered by having a high level leadership job, but I also like the intangibles I get from being thanked for helping others or making a difference in the life of someone else. I like the freedom and security money gives me, but that is not my primary motivator.”

(JE) “Success is when I don’t feel I have to prove myself anymore. To work for the joy of it and still do great things.”

Subtheme D. The women feel they are master Change Agents. They know what needs to change to make things better and they are the ones that can make this happen.

Sample interview responses:

(BS) “I love advocacy for a larger group. So if the larger group has an agenda, or they want to see a change, I like speaking on their behalf, or encouraging them to speak, whatever it is to get their voices heard...I am a champion for the people, as a group, more than a specific cause.”

(NM) “I like to make money so I can be comfortably self-sufficient, but my definition of success is to be of service. But in a big way, moving mountains in the company so everything is better.”

(KP) “More than anything, I want to make a difference, have an impact. And I want to be a big fish in a big pond when I do it.”

(JE) “I didn't want to rule the world. I just want to right the wrongs. It took me a while to realize I couldn't win that fight head on. So I've found a better way to help make the changes that are needed.”

(MR) “I was mortified when I was accused of being self-serving. Couldn't he see that I gave everything to the organization because I knew I was the one who could make these changes? My motive was not for my personal gain. But visibility is necessary for me to do the work I'm capable of achieving. Being the leader and making a difference is how I show my gratitude for the gifts I have been given.”

(BS) “Whenever we have something new rolling out, I'm the first to get it done... but it's about my passion. It's coming from my heart. It's not just about me.”

Survey response: When asked to identify the role that best describes their behavior at work, 85% of the women choose the word Achiever, 52% identified themselves as

Change Agents, and 40% called themselves Innovators. Less than 10% saw themselves as Activists, Revolutionaries, Rebels, Martyrs or Liberators. They don't see themselves as changing the system; they see themselves as making the system better. They like having a large sense of purpose, so they like their achievements to have a big impact.

Sample survey comments:

“I am not satisfied with what I have achieved in 20 years, which equates with what many folks dream of - live abroad, good career, many hobbies, etc. I now feel I need to have a sense of purpose for what I do for the next 20 years.”

“My husband and I are going to retire in 11 years, work together doing sales training/coaching all over the world on a contractual basis. We hope to start a foundation and share our success with worthy causes.”

“My work provides meaning and challenge every day -- my wonderful network of friends, partner, dogs and yoga ensure that I am "finding inner peace" so I can do the work I need to do.”

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors from Theme #4 The workplace is their playground:

- Desiring peace of mind and balance, but never creating the space for it.
- Having their focus on winning viewed as being competitive instead of on achieving for the good of all.
- Being seen as arrogant instead of confident, and self-serving instead of bighearted.
- Caring too much about seeing immediate and positive results.
- Able to deal with setbacks but not failures.

Theme 5. Experience is the best teacher. *Kick me down, I'll bounce back up. But that will never happen again.*

Assumption: High-achieving women today are more aware of their behaviors and the impact than ever before due to self-awareness and the personal growth activities available to them. However, they have blind spots that justify certain behaviors they believe serve them when in truth, these behaviors hurt their advancement. On the other hand, high-achieving women are reflective enough to identify lessons learned and are open to feedback to better understand the impact of their behavior so they can adjust and adapt to more quickly achieve their goals. Therefore, they will embrace this research as a much-needed tool.

Summary of data collected: Because the women enter the workplace with an air of superiority, they are often disillusioned when they are not acknowledged for their efforts and results. However, they have the strength to rise up even higher after setbacks and rarely forget a “lesson learned.”

In particular, they learned what kind of managers they liked working for. If they received little support for their progressive ideas (or their bosses took credit for their ideas or work), told to “tone down” their energy or felt held back in any way, they would either leave the company or department or create a new position for themselves.

On the other hand, a supportive, hands-off manager who gave them lots of opportunities and new projects earned their respect and loyalty. A “high-achiever friendly”

working environment is critical to keeping these women long enough to see them rise into leadership positions.

Subtheme A. Most of the women experience some disillusionment about work early in their careers. They marched in with high hopes of using their “specialness” to create great things. They are ready to do what it takes to succeed but have been held back for various reasons.

Sample interview responses:

(JE) “I don’t deserve recognition; I earn it. On the other hand, there is this ongoing sense that I am always underutilized and underappreciated.”

(AW) “I set up their operations department, I set up their compliance department, I set up their security department, I set up their records retention. I ran the branches. We did a computer conversion during my time there. It was a fun, exciting time. It was also the first experience I had with falling out of grace with the powers that be. To this very day I really don’t know what specific thing I did... I cannot for the life of me go back on my performance and see the problem other than the fact that I challenged them when they wanted to do things like bury the computer monitors under the teller’s desk because they aren’t pretty. I’d gotten raises every year, I’d gotten promotions every year, I had a staff. I believe it was a personality issue... Now I’m more careful to watch out for that.”

(AS) “I have a little bit more fear and I’m a little more serious than I used to be. I don’t know yet if that is good or bad for me.”

(BS) “The workplace didn’t always support my passion. This felt like suffocation. Then I found a job where I found my voice. Then I could breathe.”

(KP) “He was treating me and the rest of the team like children, disrespectfully micromanaging...I finally I told him that my classification was higher than his. Once he heard that, all of a sudden his mind shifts and he respects me. So this hierarchy...as if I’m a genius and brilliant all of a sudden, just because he has a

different label. It's disappointing and disgusting. I want to be recognized on my own for my contribution versus the label."

(DK) "I'm very disappointed with the corporate culture. I don't think there are good leaders. I feel that you have to be mediocre to survive. My pitfall is that I am so gung ho in the beginning, and then they sap the life out of me."

(JE) "You can give so much that it finally hurts to give because you're not getting anything back in return for your effort. You finally just unplug. Some people stay and go through the motions. I move on."

Survey response: The survey responses did not necessarily support the assumption and the results of the interviews, that the workplace provides some sad surprises and possible disillusionment. The survey question started with a statement that many women have a view of the workforce that changes once they have worked for a few years. When asked if they were surprised and possibly disillusioned by what they found, only 40% answered that this was true for them. However, 29% of the participants didn't answer this question at all. It came late in the survey and was not a multiple choice answer, so it is hard to validate the results. On the other hand, those that agreed with the statement provided some interesting insights that seem to fit the patterns of the high-achieving women identified in the other questions.

Sample survey comments:

"My mother told me it would be a dog-eat-dog world. She was right! What has been disappointing is how monotonous corporate America can be. Challenges are hard to come by and you have to fight for them even when you are the obvious choice."

"My biggest surprise has been how hard it is to work with other people to get great outcomes. The second biggest surprise is how difficult it is to get anything done - and have a sense of actual accomplishment."

“People don’t always honor good work.”

“Yes, this applied to me when I was younger. At around the age of 30, I learned that corporate environments are not supportive of one's personal goals. You need to see corporations as a ‘tool’ to get to where you want to be, independent of the artificial ‘goals & achievements’ set forth by others.”

“Many successful women, in my experience, are catty and competitive. I have worked for two women who would take credit for my ideas and work without a second thought.”

“My biggest surprise has always been how people carry biases, prejudices, and stereotypes into work or professional situations. I started a new job and was the first African American women to ever hold this position. I was responsible for the southeast area. I worked with our offices in Alabama and Mississippi for a year via email and telephone. Then I had an opportunity to travel to the offices and meet the people I had been working with. When I first arrived at the receptionist desk in Mississippi, I introduced myself to someone I talked to once or twice a week. She could not believe that I was who I told her and asked me for my business card. The entire time I was there, people stopped, stared and whispered. ‘She’s black!’ The partner that I worked with directly and I decided that I was more effective in my position via email and telephone. It took two years to convince the partners in Birmingham to even allow me to come once they heard that I was ‘black.’ They only had one person of color (non-Caucasian) in the entire office. She is the receptionist. On two of my visits, they forgot I was there and told racial jokes openly in the office. It took years for them to consider any of my recommendations. I eventually went to the managing partners in Atlanta, that knew my ability to manage and how I had saved them money. I explained the situation and asked them to put in a good word for me. They did more than that. They called and explained the advantages, bottom line benefits and instructed them to work with me. Getting their endorsement changed the focus from what I looked like to what I could do. Everyone faces obstacles in the workplace. The challenge is how well we maneuver them; eliminate them, and how resilient we are to succeed.”

Subtheme B. Even though the women like autonomy, they still want support and recognition from their managers. If a company wants to retain their high-achieving women, they need to provide them with good managers.

Sample interview response:

(JE) “I got zero visibility for my last project. I really disappeared. Nobody checked in on me. I even went to HR at one point and said, ‘...my boss has been out for 6 months and I haven’t heard a single thing from the next level up’ who happened to be the CIO who reports right into the CEO. The CIO was the champion on my charter to make sure this process happened. Yet no one was asking me anything. I didn’t want to be micromanaged but I did want to feel engaged. It’s like I was a star then I dropped out of the sky.”

(KP) “Being micromanaged infuriates me.”

(EM) “I need an environment where I can shine and be recognized.”

(MR) “My boss thought I would sit and listen to him spout off his “theories” of management, which were archaic and purely theoretical. I lost respect for him. That was deadly for our relationship. When the day came that he told me my position would never go any higher in the current company structure (meaning the Training Director could never be a Vice President, which would make me his peer), I knew what my next exciting challenge would be...walking out the door and starting my own company.”

Survey response: When asked if they had any “good bosses” in their careers, 85% said yes, while 66% of these women said their best boss was a woman. However, most of the comments reflected an inconsistency in the bosses over time, with only one person saying that the majority of bosses they have had were good ones. The aspects of good bosses were defined as reliable, honest, talked with me before acting, good listener, collaborative, cared about me as a person, gave me autonomy, acted as my mentor and coach, provided clear expectations and goals, encouraged me, trusted me, challenged me and actively engaged me in the decision-making processes.

Sample survey comments:

“To be a good manager, you need to be an open and honest communicator. Get involved with developing talent and do not shy away from dealing with people issues. Protect pride/respect others. Expect strong work ethic/integrity. Believe in humor, laughter, and fun at work. And above all, don't enjoy bureaucracy.”

“I think there needs to be better training for Bosses to be promoters of their ambitious staff (and if they think they are not capable then they need to learn how to have a direct discussion). Also, sadly, I think some women in higher levels feel threatened by high-achieving ‘underlings’!!”

“My disillusionment was working with a direct leader that did not handle confrontation or support her subordinates. She made decisions for her glory without identifying the reality of the processes or goals. Watching her self-promote while jeopardizing the success of her team, department, and people has been disappointing. She performs like many female managers in the late 70's that had to sue a company to get a leadership position. Times have changed but she has not. She does not have the vision that a successful team can best drive her own success. When she allows her "favorites" to verbally attack other leaders, she lost my respect forever.”

“All of my bosses have been women, with the majority of them being great bosses.”

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors from Theme #5 Experience is the best teacher:

- They are shocked when embroiled in office politics and then only see the negative aspects of people's behavior instead of trying to understand what drives people to act the way they do. With this viewpoint, they seldom find solutions for these interpersonal problem or ways to negotiate their relationships for better results.
- They feel immortal and have difficulty recovering from being laid off, fired, removed from a position, voted off a team, or placed in a position they don't want.

- They don't stay with a "difficult manager" long enough to see other opportunities within the company. Timing is not their forte.
- They need reflection time to best understand what is going on within an organization. Since they love to stay busy, they may not get or take the quiet time they need to thoroughly think through complex situations.
- They may not seek out help/advice or accept help/advice when offered. This could lead them to make some unnecessary mistakes. They may learn from these mistakes, but they could have learned to avoid the problems if they accepted guidance more often.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

Implications for Further Study

This small scale study was not designed to be conclusive. It was carried out in hopes that the results would encourage further and broader research. One essential next step is to study high-achieving women in specific industries to better determine the extent to which external factors interplay with their patterns of thinking and behavior. The occupational context—such as tendencies toward hierarchical structure, ratio of men to women in the workplace, traditional vs. progressive problem solving, and working procedures and economic stability—could either conflict or support the work preferences of high-achieving women, affecting their career options and choices.

Another refinement of this study would be to break out the women into age groups. Some of the themes described in this study might relate to patterns women typically demonstrate as they experience maturational development. (Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Brizendine, 2006) Although these patterns might manifest differently from women who entered the workforce thirty years ago, they still might represent the specific stages women move through as they approach their 30th, 40th and 50th birthdays. For example, the women in their late twenties seemed less concerned about financial stability than having fun on the job, whereas the women in their late forties and early fifties rarely mentioned the word fun. The older women talked more about how a strong financial foundation gave them the freedom to make career choices that honored their strengths and values. This difference could relate more to their age or to their generation than to their defined personality style.

In fact, the themes found in this study could be representative of “Gen X and Y” employees. Further research can be conducted testing the themes found in this study with all women of age groups defined by each decade to determine specific generational factors. Is there a difference between high-achieving women from Generation X and Y? Are the patterns that emerged in women twenty years ago—such as those reflecting extreme self-confidence, an insatiable drive for new experiences, and satisfaction from work on an equal level or above the joy of raising a family—growing in intensity with each decade? These studies will further help the women understand themselves and their goals while they seek fulfillment from their careers.

In addition, studies that include high-achieving men could provide more clarity on the societal impact creating the challenges these women face. Certainly, young men’s lives and career choices differ from their senior’s as a result of the changing career and family contexts they are living in. These changes may also vary by industry since some industries, such as computers and biotechnology, have more progressive leaders and cultures than others. Assumptions about how to develop female executive talent must be informed by research that includes the behaviors and preferences of their male colleagues.

Finally, it is the hope of the researcher that individual companies will use this research to create their own assessments to see how it correlates with the needs, desires and beliefs of their female high-achieving employees. Then working together, they can create or enhance programs, procedures and relationships that encourage the women to stay and grow with the company. Further ideas on how companies can use the research results are included in the Recommendations section of this chapter.

Confounding Variables

The small size of the sample and the limited means of selection make the findings highly tentative if trying to create inclusive, factual statements about high-achieving women in the workplace. The study should be regarded as a means to create awareness of the emerging profile of high-achieving women—a portrait that is only starting to be discussed in the literature.

These women probably are bent toward self-disclosure, discovery and personal growth since they came to the study mostly through coaches they work with professionally now or in the past. If this study was done as a random sampling of an entire population of high-achieving women (either by industry or geographically), the results might have been different. In general, people who are not interested in self-exploration define their challenges in a different light than those who are committed to learning and growing.

Also, there is no specific criteria that definitely defines “high-achieving woman” so the selection was somewhat biased based on the researcher’s perspective even though it was designed based on factors taken from her review of the literature. Even if the DISC assessment provides a reliable definition of “high-achieving”, the assessment is a self-report based on self-perception. The selection process could have been better validated, both individually and across the population, by using an instrument that also measured the perceptions of the people the participants work with, including those above and below them in the organization, to determine any gaps between self-perception and the perception of other people.

Nothing was done to ensure that all demographical groups were included. Although the interviewees were randomly selected and there was a mix of women both married and single and with and without children, there was no accounting for race, religion, sexual preference, country of birth, family economic status, and other factors that could play into their behavioral patterns and career choices. It will be easy for particular demographic groups to discount the findings as non-inclusive. Hopefully, they will instead use the findings as a launch for further discussions.

Finally, the interviews were completed by one person which could have introduced a tendency to “lead the witness” in the process. The interviewer used the same set of questions each time and the interviews were transcribed to decrease subjective interpretation. However, the interviewer was not trained to keep all of her own reactive responses out of her speech so her technique could have influenced some of the answers. However, the results of the online survey suggest that the interviews were representative of the population, demonstrating a degree of reliability and validity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When describing the results of my research to a colleague of mine, she asked, “I wonder why girls today are more invested in proving they are not their mothers than they are in trying to please their fathers?” Although I couldn’t answer her question, I recognized that although my career choices included both pleasing my father and resisting being my mother, the latter had a stronger influence on my choices. My mother was always angry and resentful that she did not have a life of her own. She daily demanded recognition from her children and

her husband for her cooking skills and worked hard to achieve public recognition for her volunteer jobs. Yet it wasn't enough for her. Her mother wouldn't allow her to finish college, giving the money to her brother, and she felt as if she had to get married to survive. I don't know when I vowed to not live her life, but my obsession with being independent, recognition for my "real-world" achievements, and focus on self-gratification came early in life. I am not narcissistic, but I am a fully-functional, prolific and successful woman in every way my mother was not.

My mother grew up in a generation where doors were just opening for women to work their way into respected positions in corporations. Some of them blew these doors open. Others were just able to peek through the doors and see the sunshine on the other side. Yet if they tried to step through, someone reminded them that the world beyond was not a "woman's world." As a result, some women remained in their place, as my mother did, bitter about not being able to blossom and share their potential with the world. Others blazed trails on their own proving what a woman could do, but because they had little emotional support and mentoring, they secretly worried that they would not be able to live up to expectations.

Therefore, in the 1980s and 90s the research by Clance and Imes (1978) that identified the Imposter Phenomenon inspired many research studies, academic articles and popular books. As described in the literature review, Clance and Imes found that despite their accomplishments, successful women persisted in believing that they were really not bright and capable enough to carry out the responsibilities of upper management and feared that they would be exposed and labeled as "imposters" if anyone found out. They attributed their

career climbs, which was often climbing out of dead-end rote jobs to overburdened middle-management positions, to luck, timing, overestimation of abilities and faulty judgment by decision makers. (p. 241)

As a result, they became timid in an effort to stay out of the limelight or abrasive in an effort to protect their position. (Adler, 1978) Generally, self-reports indicated a lack of self-confidence and an over-emphasis on a level of perfection they could not meet or sustain. Assessments by co-workers found many women leaders to be passive-aggressive, too bossy and self-righteous. (Marcia, 1980; Danielson, 2007).

The themes that showed up in the books and training programs for these women focused on helping them “find their voice” so they could speak with conviction and power or on teaching them how to not be a “bitchy boss.” These programs were designed to meet the needs of the first generation of women who blew through the boardroom doors and found themselves in a hostile, strange and uncomfortable world.

At the same time, the lure back to the world of motherhood was strong. If they had children, they were still the primary caretakers and were expected to remain involved with school functions and possibly community and religious activities. (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002) Even today, many corporations that tout their support for women point to their programs that provide day care for their children, flexible scheduling and maternity benefits.

Although there is still discrimination in the workplace that tries to dampen the voice of women and there are still trade-offs that women must make between their careers and family, there has been a drastic shift in society’s norms around women’s roles both at home and at

work and in the self-concept of the women themselves. In particular, the overall sense of confidence, pride in their work and passion for life that today's high-achieving women possess make them distinct from their predecessors. They are no longer imposters and have found creative ways to invest in both career and family. Therefore, the research, articles and books that focus on assertiveness skills and life balance have little appeal to the current generation of high-achieving women. They need a new set of recommendations and guidelines based on the new themes that are emerging.

Therefore, I will make recommendations based on the five themes, subthemes and possible negative internal factors and behaviors identified in this study. The themes include:

Theme 1. Extreme confidence

Theme 2. Zig-zagging career path

Theme 3. Driven by a need for recognition based on performance

Theme 4. The workplace is their playground

Theme 5. Experience is their best teacher

Theme 1. Extreme confidence .

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors:

- Burn-out from taking on too much;
- Failure from taking on projects beyond their expertise with no available guidance;
- Taking on too many projects at once, creating stress and errors;
- Not seeing other possibilities while busy persisting down one path;

- Steamrolling a project without broadly looking at the total impact.
- Risking an addiction to work; always making work the priority over family, friends and health.

As mentioned in the literature review, Wagner and Wodak (2006) found that how women behave at work relates to how they define their identity overall. The most revealing result of their study is the extreme shift in self-perception in the women of the last generation to the current one in the measurement of efficacy—the belief in one’s ability to perform. This strengthening of the self leads to a natural resiliency, strong performance under pressure, and resistance to unsolicited negative valuations. (Hoyt, 2005)

The women in this study were given a different message about what they could accomplish at work. As children of the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s, they were raised on the budding self-help movement based on an assumption articulated by psychologist Alfred Adler (1956), that humans are “whole and resourceful beings” that do not need to be fixed. They grew up in a time where talking about “me” was more than tolerated, it was expected. (Twenge, 2006) Someone, a family member, sports coach or teacher, taught them that they were truly the masters of their destiny and they have the power to create whatever they desire. Not only could they rise above the dependence of their mothers, they could make more money their fathers. The aspiration of financial independence—fueled by a sense of the power and the freedom they would gain—was solidified from childhood.

“I Believe I Can Fly” Phenomenon

Therefore, these women belong to a generation brought up to believe they could do anything they put their minds to. This generation also experienced the proliferation of competitive sports for women. Many of them had their self-confidence enhanced by successfully competing in sports in and outside of school. They learned they were powerful not just mentally, but physically as well. As young women, they were learning to appreciate self-sufficiency.

Armed with a sturdy self-esteem, confidence in their ability to succeed, and a belief that they could contribute to any organization they chose to work for, these women found career success early, often from the start. Many of them moved into management positions within the first two years of working. As they moved up, many had more support at home than previous generations. Although a number of the women interviewed said they loved their single lifestyle, those who were married described their husbands as actively supportive of their careers, not merely tolerant of them. Out of the total population of the study, 95% of the women married or living with someone made more or the same amount of money as their partners. Although this could also mean that some may be carrying the financial lode, this often affords them outside help with the household and often they share the responsibilities of both motherhood and maintaining the household with their mates.

As a result, many of the internal conflicts and external pressures that women of the previous generation faced are receding. Now the women seem to face more career-oriented dilemmas such as how long should they stay with one company or what do they need to start a business of their own. Even more profound, once the women get a realistic sense of what

they are capable of accomplishing, they begin to question what they really want out of life and what truly makes them happy. This process is a dynamic journey of continuous learning and self-development, and yields a constant reinvention of their working identities.

Therefore, the results of this study suggest that high-achieving women would benefit from a different type of guidance than they have been offered in the past. For one, the women could use career planning focused on helping them develop a strategic perspective for their advancement to eliminate impulsive decision-making when choosing to accept or leave a job. Yet most importantly, as they learn how to articulate a purpose they can align their energies to, they would benefit from sorting out “who” they are as they make important personal transitions.

The challenge will be to help these women see that planning doesn’t mean restricting their options. It will not “cut their wings” but help them to fly on a more direct and fulfilling course. If they were to apply their skills and confidence to a career plan—even a vague one based on a purpose instead of a goal—they would actually realize more freedom and options over time. A strategic plan for these women would not focus on one identity. It would be designed to better utilize their strengths in a way that would allow them to evolve and transform their identities over time. For example, their plan might be to become a leader in a specific industry. Yet their concept and vision of leadership would probably change over time. Therefore, as they learn and grow, so does their working identity.

Organizations might benefit from providing their high-achievers with an external coach who is trained to help their clients expand their self-awareness. When employees work with their managers, mentors and internal coaches, the focus is often on organizational goal

achievement. Although these women welcome relevant and practical on-the-job feedback and encouragement, the greater difficulty these women have is about figuring out “who” they are and what is their role in the organization.

In particular, if companies want to ensure these women stay and rise into leadership positions, they need to have people trained to help the women explore how they see themselves as leaders and what they need to commit to if they are to become a leader. Whether coaches are internal to the company or contracted from the outside, they need to have specific coach training relating to identity formation and the process of making personal transitions. (Bridges, 2004) Additionally, external coaches are generally committed more to the person’s success than the success of the team or organization, making them more apt to recognize when their clients are heading toward burn-out or even worse, when they are at risk for becoming addicted to work, always making work the priority over family, friends and health.

Another important avenue for the women to gain insight and be more deliberate about their choices is to involve them in dialogue with each other. Since these are women who prefer action over reflection, giving them an opportunity to dialogue with their peers with similar dilemmas can provide the vehicle for active reflection, learning, and mutual problem solving (Gersick & Kram, 2002). Not only do these activities decrease a feeling of isolation, they can help the women find creative options to their shared problems such as their difficulty with saying no to new projects which leads to stress and possibly burnout. They can also use these meetings as Master Mind groups to explore how they are handling current

projects which could help steer them away from their tendencies toward myopic decision-making and less than effective actions in the boardroom. (Reardon, 2001)

Theme 2. Zig-zagging career path.

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors:

- Not having a career plan until much later in career;
- Making impulsive job choices, so some are good and some are horrible;
- Not stopping long enough to enjoy the fruits of their successes.
- Developing resentments with jobs or managers that started out well but failed to fulfill their needs over time.
- Not staying long enough in a company to earn the credibility and recognition needed to earn an executive position.

One of the main problems of having a “zig-zagging” career path is that these high performers do not stay within one organization or division long enough to gain the perspective necessary to understand their roles as leaders. So even if they are hired at a senior level or promoted quickly, they are always playing “catch up” when building relationships and learning the ins and outs of their organizations. Part of this problem is due to their emotional decisions-making when it comes to taking jobs and lack of career planning, which was mentioned in the previous section. However, organizations must also take responsibility for not taking into consideration the values and desires of the women. Little is done both to

ensure retention of the women and to ease their transition into and across the company when they accept new positions.

None of the women in this study said they aspired to be CEO of a company. Their motivation was not external, based on titles and power. Instead, they are internally motivated. They need to feel autonomy in their work assignments, be given new and greater challenges to conquer, be recognized for the impact their results make on the company and be encouraged to try new methods and takes risks to achieve amazing results. These women shouldn't be held back or "reigned in." Instead, they should be given mentors who engage them in regular dialogues that help them gain the perspective they need to make good decisions. They need to be given a platform for their ideas; their voices need to be heard no matter where they are and what titles they hold.

One of the women who actually relished the possibility of rising to an executive position in her organization said,

"...there's so many places [within the corporation] that I could go to when it's time to move on. I could go to a bigger hospital or to a service line. There are a lot of opportunities. This is the kind of company that if you could make a case for why you needed to create a position for something, I don't see why they wouldn't try to make it happen."

Then with each move she makes, she should be given a mentor to orient her and help her integrate smoothly with the new team.

Satisfaction for these women requires an active pursuit. It is the emotional reward they get after solving a novel problem or adapting to a new situation. Corporations experience new problems and changing circumstances all the time; it would behoove them to have a "corps of high achievers" available to take on these challenges. Over time, this group could

help to shift the mindset of the organization making it more quick-acting and eager to embrace change. This might be the model needed for the future leaders of US corporations.

Therefore, women who are planning career directions based on their strengths and desires need to be given the distinction between “having drive” and “being driven.” Right now, the women have an intrinsic drive for new and value-added achievements. However, if they were helped to find a purpose for their drive, they might be driven in a particular direction. Their careers may still zig zag within a corporation or industry, but the movement may be made with a specific target in mind. Many of them said they would welcome having this type of focused intention for their lives.

In addition, if the women are driven toward a particular purpose or accomplishment, they might value staying with a corporation over time. This might circumvent their tendencies to zig zag off the corporate track and into their own businesses. As identified in the literature review, more women than men are starting businesses in the U.S., with the fastest growing sectors in traditionally male-dominated industries such as construction and transportation. Other surveys have also found that young businesswomen today describe corporations as places to hone skills, but not to establish long term careers. (Delaney, 2003)

With over 80% of the women in this study dreaming of owning their own businesses at some point in their lives, corporations might influence them to do this later than sooner if they support, encourage and give outlets for this entrepreneurial spirit.

Theme #3: Driven by a need for recognition based on performance.

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors:

- May overlook and even allow discrimination to continue
- Appearing insensitive to other people's needs, desires and solutions
- Reacting harshly to criticism
- Mistaking their intimidating behaviors for persuasiveness
- Holding people to a standard they create without tolerance for differences
- Being susceptible to impulsive decision-making and burnout
- When disagreeing with others, they come across as argumentative, obstinate and blunt and then amply justify their behavior
- Not really listening

These women have internalized the message, "I'm valued for what I do rather than who I am." They have decided to prove to the world how amazing they are; they are worthy because of the extraordinarily impressive things they can accomplish.

While on this whirlwind of achievement, taking charge, producing results and creating value, they may intimidate or alienate others, miss options or overlook errors, and drive themselves and their families into the ground. Yet, since the confident, high-achieving woman is a new anomaly in corporate America, few managers know how to consistently channel their energies toward cooperative results. However, the kind of dialogue necessary for the women to stop and critically look at their behaviors is sensitive and requires strong interpersonal skills. If done well, the women will welcome the opportunity to explore the

dynamics of their relationships and develop the emotional competencies needed to succeed in the senior ranks.

Coaches and mentors can help the women gain insight into the impact of their behaviors. However, this type of guidance would be most useful if provided by their direct managers since the results of their behaviors are specific to projects and relationships. In the past decade, articles and training programs have been created for managers to learn how to mentor alpha males. It is time that programs are provided for managers to learn how to best develop high-achieving women. Silence on these matters perpetuates the disproportionately high leave-taking among these women. On the other hand, organizations that demonstrate their respect and concern for these women by honoring their values and making sure that their managers spend time on developing them are likely to succeed in retaining this talent for the long-run.

It is time that leaders in our organizations recognize that there is a new role pattern emerging that defined the high-achieving woman. They exhibit strong behaviors when carving out their own spaces, they seek recognition for their good work and actively campaign for and work with their teams to achieve success. This generation of high-achieving women are confident in their abilities, can stand up for themselves when demands are unreasonable and can say no to standards and practices that do not serve their “honorable goals” or the needs of their teams.

Yet, although they may be less aggressive than their angry predecessors, they may still be unaware of the impact of their powerful behavior on others, they may be prone to sacrifice their time and health “for the cause” and they may not have enough “insider information” to

know how to maneuver within the inner circle of leaders in their organizations. Although they require frequent new challenges to stay energized and engaged, they don't always know how to ask for what they need.

In short, as the workplace evolves, high-achieving women are evolving as well. Yet management and organizational structures are not evolving fast enough to keep up. As a result, these women who add great value to our companies are leaving in droves. As the baby boomers retire, U.S. corporations cannot afford the bloodletting of their best professional women. It is time they heed their needs and provide them with good mentors and coaches who know how to help them focus and get what they need to feel fulfilled.

Theme 4. The workplace is their playground .

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors:

- Desiring peace of mind and balance but never creating the space for it.
- Having their focus on winning viewed as being competitive instead of on achieving for the good of all.
- Being seen as arrogant instead of confident, and self-serving instead of bighearted.
- Caring too much about seeing immediate and positive results.
- Able to deal with setbacks but not failures.

Up to this point, the focus has been on providing the support and guidance to direct and utilize the practically limitless energy of the high-achieving women in the workplace.

However, it is also important for these women to recognize what “playgrounds” serve their needs and values so they can feel excited and valuable.

In recent years, there has been a trend toward encouraging people to simplify their lives and focus on what is important. However, books and articles written on this topic tend to focus on family values and private hobbies as the “true” sources of enjoyment. This discounts the person whose “true” source of enjoyment is the results and recognition of work. There may be a fine line between a workaholic and someone who treasures her work, but no one should be demeaned for how they experience passion.

These women truly love their work and need to have a place to “play all out” in order to be happy. In the best of cases, they will be able to align their personal values with the corporate values. If so, they will be valuable, and satisfied, assets.

Therefore, the women need to be able to assess what organizational cultures will fit their temperament so they can make concrete and facilitative career choices. Some of the clues they need to look for when determining if a company’s culture will feed their needs include:

- ✓ Risk-inclined (as opposed to risk averse)
- ✓ Open and honest discussions about projects (as opposed to competitive and passive aggressive)
- ✓ Freedom and control over their work
- ✓ Recognition and reward programs based on performance
- ✓ Access to higher-level leaders to discuss ideas

- ✓ Tolerance for mistakes as a means to learn and excel
- ✓ Frequent opportunities to work on and lead highly visible and important corporate projects

A bonus would be on-site work-out facilities and cafeterias stocked with healthy food. Although these women do not like to stop and smell the roses, they will take care of themselves if it is convenient. In fact, many of the women remain active in sports and physical conditioning throughout their lives. If corporations are looking to do what they can to retain these women, they should help them fuel their energy in healthy ways. Erma Bombeck simply and powerfully described the essence of the high-achieving woman when she said, “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left and could say, I used everything you gave me.”

On a recent business trip, I read an article in the Smart Business section of the US Airways in-flight magazine. (Prince, 2007) The writer described how Lancet Software, a successful start-up, lost its biggest customer in 1998, which had been delivering 90% of its revenue. Suddenly, there was only enough cash for one payday. Instead of hiding the news from their employees, the president and his three co-founders told the employees and asked for their help. In the end, everyone stayed on. They found another large customer that got the company through the crisis, and then immediately began to diversify the customer base.

The way the founders, or “flounders” as they call themselves, treated their employees is exactly how today’s generation of high-achieving women need to be treated. They need to be involved and given impossible problems to solve. They need to do this with trust and

autonomy. Put them on a team with other confident high-achieving men and women and you might find a gold medal Dream Team that will find the way to take the organization to the top.

Theme 5: Experience is the best teacher.

Possible negative internal factors and behaviors:

- They are shocked when embroiled in office politics and then only see the negative aspects of people's behavior instead of trying to understand what drives people to act the way they do. With this viewpoint, they seldom find solutions for their interpersonal problem or ways to negotiate their relationships for better results.
- They feel immortal and have difficulty recovering from being laid off, fired, removed from a position, voted off a team or placed in a position they don't want.
- They don't stay with a "difficult manager" long enough to see other opportunities within the company. Timing is not their forte.
- They need reflection time to best understand what is going on within an organization. Since they love to stay busy, they may not get the quiet time they need to think things through.
- They may not seek out help/advice or accept help/advice when offered. This could lead them to make some unnecessary mistakes. They may learn from these mistakes, but they could have learned to avoid the problems if they accepted guidance more often.

Companies interested in retaining high-achieving women and moving them into executive positions should not approach solutions as “fixing the women.” As mentioned in the last section, there are cultural and procedural shifts that can be made within a company to better accommodate the needs and values of these women. In addition, the possible problems listed above are mostly a matter of perspective and not a lack of competence. If left alone, the women may gain wisdom over time and learn how to adapt their behaviors to achieve greater success. Yet sometimes they only look back on their careers and wish they had done things differently. Therefore, if they are willing, working with a coach or mentor to expand or even change their perspective can enhance the process of learning and growing through experience.

Clearly, being a leader means more than inspiring others to perform. Going from being an outstanding individual performer to being a successful leader of others requires a new self-definition. Management training and leadership books may describe what types of behaviors work best, but the women will not take on these behaviors until they identify if they want to be a leader and who they must become to fulfill this role successfully.

The High-Achieving Leader

I was coaching a high-achiever who had been promoted to district sales manager of a large pharmaceutical company. She was struggling with getting her team to complete their administrative tasks. She said she felt like the police having to remind them to obey the rules. She asked me what she could do differently to make them comply.

Instead of brainstorming approaches, I asked her to define herself as a leader. Her answer focused on carrying out the responsibilities of the company: 1) for seeing that her district met their sales goals and 2) that her team member's names never showed up on any lists for not completing company directives.

Her definition focused solely on task. She failed to include the human element. Although she was adept at communicating expectations and quick to find resources if an employee asked for help, she omitted the responsibility of setting and maintaining an emotional tone that encouraged risk-taking and innovation (ironically, this is what she, as a high-achieving woman, expected from her manager). There was a glaring lack of words such as respect, encouragement, safety and trust. She clearly felt that her position put her above her team, not as a primary member. This made it difficult for her to accept the situation as a learning and growing experience for herself as well as her employees.

Yet when she talked about members of her sales team as individuals, it was obvious how deeply she cared about them and their success, demonstrating that she wasn't solely driven by her own desire for recognition. She wanted to help them enjoy their jobs and be proud of their individual wins as much as she wanted them to make a visible difference within the company. Yet few people saw how deeply she cared about her team. They only saw her as caring too much about getting recognition for exceeding the sales expectations.

She came to our coaching relationship committed to changing her style. She was at a loss for what to do other than delivering threats and rewards and providing quick follow-up to her employees when they made requests. Additionally, she felt constant pressure from her

boss and division management to perform which was typical of the culture of the organization.

I interviewed her direct reports. It was no surprise that they described her as overwhelming, patronizing and too intense. They felt she spent far too much time demonstrating her own expertise than in trusting and developing them. She never spent time just talking with them; she didn't get to know who they were and what they needed. If they came to her with a concern, she was quick to jump in with solutions instead of coaching them to find their own. They were afraid to give her feedback because she might retaliate. They didn't think she was a bad person. But since she obviously didn't trust them, they couldn't trust her.

I could have told her to back off and quit micromanaging. I could have taught her coaching skills. I could have worked with her on specific scenarios and helped her find new solutions. Yet I didn't want to waste our time.

Before she could behave differently, she had to see her role and herself in a new light. This was not an easy process. Although the organization professed to honor human values, these came second to increasing the bottom line. Therefore, she received little support from own manager when trying to solve her problems other than looking at how each person was meeting or exceeding projections.

Yet my client's incentive was more personal than professional; she might have remained on a decent career path in spite of her team's discontent since their sales numbers were good. Yet because she cared, she chose to brave the journey of personal transformation. What follows are discussions and exercises I used to help her reflect on and shift her self-concept

and to set up “communities of practice” to support her as she tested out and integrated new ways of being a leader.

A. Reflective Practice

People do not “change” their self-concept like they would a piece of clothing. The process is one of unfolding into a new sense of being. It is dynamic and non-linear. It takes place by reflecting in real-time on events that are happening or recently completed. This reflection can be done by writing or in dialogue.

As her coach, I set the context for my client to talk about how she saw herself and then to explore how this character she was playing influenced what was happening in her interactions with her employees. This led her to try out new ways of thinking and acting when in communicating with her team. As a result, she daily tested out new thought patterns and behaviors and let go of old ones. Over time, she could see herself changing—thought by thought and action by action. This is the process of renewal.

Joseph LeDoux wrote in his book, *The Synaptic Self* (2002), that the notion of self is defined in the patterns of interconnectivity between neurons in the brain. We are what we feel and what we think. Yet, the neural patterns in our brain are not static; our sense of self is not a solid concept. These patterns are shifting all the time. We are always in a process of becoming as we move through life. Therefore, we can actively assist in the process of shifting our self-concept. A new self is realized when calling upon the information encoded in the past (self-awareness) and modified by choosing to think differently about present experiences.

The key to this shift is choosing to learn. Our genes bias the way we react to situations, as evidenced in the consistent temperament and tendencies reported by the high-achieving women in this study. However, new connections can be made, which shifts our self-concept and ultimately, our ways of thinking and behaving, by trying out new behaviors and then thinking about what happened. (LeDoux, p. 2-9). Again, this process can be done alone but is greatly enhanced when the high-achieving woman is working with a coach trained to ask questions that facilitate the reflection process.

Therefore, high-achieving women can expand their self-concept by trying out new ways of interacting with people and then discussing and thinking about their performance to create and maintain new synaptic connections.

In addition to active reflection, the women can work on creating a vision of “who” they want to be as a leader. These women tend to focus on actions and results. Engaging them in a conversation about who they are as a person driven by pride, hope, appreciation, a sense of purpose, mastery, passion and compassion promotes the development and unification of the self. They may not change their core values, but the expression of these values will shift as they redefine who they are in different situations. For example, what they most enjoyed about being an individual performer may get in the way of them being an effective leader. They may need to temper their passion as they listen more with compassion and shift the source of their pride from their own achievement to how they get work done through others.

A good place for a high-achieving woman to start the process is to work with distinctions. Instead of trying to define an abstract concept, exploring how the concept relates

to a possibly more desirable concept can be more revealing. For example, some distinctions that I discussed with my client were:

- Exploring versus Reacting. When someone says or does something you do not approve of or agree with, what would exploring with them look like instead of reacting? What does exploring feel like? Is there a difference between probing and exploring? How can you make exploring a natural and comfortable process for yourself and your direct reports?
- Power versus Force. How does a leader use force to get things done? How would a leader use their personal power instead? If someone powerfully gets things done, how does this differ from forcefully getting things done? Is the payoff for using force ever justifiable? What would it take for you to be seen as powerful instead of forceful? If you view power as negative, how can you shift your view of power to be positive?
- Influence versus Strength. How do you utilize your strength at work? How do you use influence? Are there times when your strength serves you? Are there times when your strength has caused problems? What would you do if you were considered a “woman of influence?”

The conversations I had with my client around these distinctions were rich. They bent the frames that contained how she saw herself in relation to her work and her role as a leader. The integration worked well because she was able to try out new behaviors immediately after our mental explorations. Once she had an insight, she acted on the reflection, helping to

ensure that new connections were wired into her brain. According to LeDoux, this is the learning process. Insight must be paired with action to get transformation.

B. Real-time practice

In addition to coaches, it is good practice for the women to find a community of peers going through a similar growth process. Empathetic, encouraging friends committed to growth can help each other stay on course even when layoffs loom, employees whine, the kids at home scream, health issues nag and projects are cancelled. The women should find other women committed to becoming great leaders in their own or other non-competing companies to create a safe “community of practice” where they come together regularly to help each other learn and grow. High-achieving women face a unique challenge in attempting to master the role of leader; coming together with like minds will keep them from feeling isolated as they navigate this journey.

My client had peers she could call on for this support. I also suggested she look to expand her community with women from her professional associations in case there would be times she didn’t feel safe talking about issues with her in-house peers.

Most importantly, high-achieving women should not follow their tendencies to always tough things out on their own. They need their coaches, mentors and communities of practice to provide sounding boards and critical eyes to help them be successful leaders. The time spent with these people is as important as the time they spend on their work. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. If they are truly committed to creating the amazing results

that impact the workplace and beyond, then they need to know how to access and use the wisdom of others.

In his book, *Managing People is Like Herding Cats*, Warren Bennis (1997) said,

“We all face the great challenge to discover our native abilities and to invent and reinvent ourselves throughout life. To be authentic is literally to be your own author, to discover your native energies and desires, and then to find your own way of acting on them. When you’ve done that, you do not exist simply to live to an image posited by the culture, family tradition, or some other authority. When you write your own life, you play the game that is natural for you to play. You keep covenant with your own promise.”

And as JE said in her interview,

“I know now what drives me is leading the life that I know I’m meant to lead, which includes my spirituality, how I am as a wife, how I am as a mother and how I am as a leader. I want to stand true and know that I’m good enough, and that I provide value whether or not somebody sees it. Success for me is not having to prove myself anymore.”

The intention of this study has been to stimulate dialogue among high-achieving women, the executives they work for and the coaches and mentors that support them. The overall goal has been to promote awareness of this newly defined business challenge. I have found that the themes and patterns articulated in this paper are of great interest to the current generation of high-achieving women in the workplace for two reasons. First, they give voice to dilemmas these women face in the workplace, predicaments that they have had trouble articulating themselves. Women who gather to discuss these findings may feel more empowered to invent alternate strategies for their careers and their lives. Second, they bring forward important emotional needs that have been ignored but should be attended to by the organizations they work for, their managers, and their coaches in order for these women to

successfully move into executive positions. It is my hope that this study generates new ways to develop and support high-achieving women in the workplace and inspires specific practices to stimulate their desire to aspire to executive positions.

In conclusion, this study should promote awareness of how today's generation of high-achieving women in the workforce define career success. These self-reliant, highly confident women seek jobs that give them frequent and novel challenges to work on, that allow them to think creatively and permit them to test out innovative approaches to problems. They want recognition for the work when it is successfully completed and useful feedback when improvement is needed. Doesn't this sound like the model employee?

The results of this study should serve as a guide for the women and the mentors, managers and coaches who act as their partners as they navigate the labyrinth of corporate America. Hopefully, it will also give clarity and direction to the organizations desiring to retain and promote these women to executive levels.

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APPENDICE A

Call for Participants

Dear Colleagues,

I am doing my doctoral dissertation on the internal factors of high-achieving women age 28-52 that inhibit their career growth and contribute to the low number of leaders in US corporations.

Do you have clients or colleagues that fit the following criteria and may want to participate in this study? If so, the need to be:

- Working in a corporation with over 50 people, or have worked in one within the last 10 years
- Between the ages of 28 and 52
- Live and work in the United States
- Aspire to achieve more for herself and her career now and in the future

If you know someone that fits these criteria, could you please give them the attached Invitation to Participate? I will give each woman who qualifies a **free DISC Style Analysis Survey** to determine that they have a high need for achievement. For participating, they will receive a computerized report describing their dominant communication style and implications for development.

If all qualifications are met including the DISC analysis, each woman will be asked to 1) fill-out a questionnaire and give additional comments, which will take up to an hour, or 2) participate in an interview where she will discuss her work and career experiences. This second option will take two to three hours, with an hour follow-up session. She can refuse to go to the second level if she wants, and back out at any time. All answers and contact information will be kept confidential.

At whatever level she participates, she will also receive a summary of the interviews, plus a chance to give her feedback after reading what the other women have to say.

Finally, all participants will receive a copy of the dissertation and if published in a book, they will receive a copy of the book as well.

I appreciate your help with finding participants for my research. Your assistance will make a difference in identifying the support high achieving women need in today's workplace.

If your client or colleague is interested in participating, please have them email me at Marcia@Covisioning.com.

Thank you so much for your help,



Marcia Reynolds
602-954-9030
Marcia@covisioning.com

APPENDICE B

Participant's Consent Form

Participant's Name _____

1. I hereby authorize Marcia Reynolds, of the Professional School of Psychology, to gather and organize information from me on the topic of high-achieving women in the workplace and in particular, what drives my own behavior at work.

I have freely and voluntarily consented to participate in this study, with no coercion, psychological or otherwise, used to elicit my cooperation.

I understand that my participation will involve taking a communication style assessment and then participating in an interview which will include biographical information, which will take approximately 2 hours plus an hour of follow-up time. If I participate in the interview, I understand that I can request to use a pseudonym so that my real name will not appear in any documentation, ever.

2. I understand that any conversations I have with Marcia Reynolds will be done by phone unless face-to-face is geographically convenient. All interviews and follow-up sessions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The audio tapes, notes, transcripts, surveys and assessments will be kept in a locked cabinet. The audio tapes and any notes that could link me to specific data will be destroyed upon completion of the final document or within a year after the study has been completed, whichever comes first.
2. I understand that there is minimal psychological risk involved in this participation. I am aware that I might be uncomfortable with answering some of the questions that will be asked, and I am aware that I can refuse to answer any question or to discuss any matters that cause me discomfort.
3. I understand that I may end my participation in this study at any time.
4. I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue distress due to my participation, consultation is available to me by calling Marcia Reynolds at 602-954-9030 or emailing Dr. William Bergquist at Whbergquist@aol.com for immediate attention and possible referral to a counselor for a session paid for by the researcher.
5. These procedures have been explained to me by Marcia Reynolds.

Participants signature

APPENDICE C

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself—your background, your family, your career path. (this takes about an 45 minutes)
2. How do you define success? Can you tell me about a specific success in your own life that exemplifies this definition? Has this definition changed with experience? What characteristics do you attribute to success in general and to your own success?
3. What success factors would you attribute to your upbringing? Can you recall any particular moments that made a difference to your life and career choices?
4. How do you label yourself? Do you use any metaphors to describe your life?
5. What do you hope your career looks like in the future? Why are you choosing this path? Can you foresee any roadblocks? What do you need to help you move forward?
6. Are you aware of any of your own behaviors that get in the way of achieving your goals? Can you share a couple of instances with me?
7. What are your views about how women are treated in today's workplace? How does this affect your choices and decisions?
8. What are the lessons you have learned about succeeding in the workplace that have helped you to be whom you are today? What would you share with young women just starting their careers today?
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about yourself that this interview has elicited or that you think I should know to get a fuller and more accurate picture of you and your unique perspectives on life and career?

APPENDICE D

Survey Questions

High Achieving Women Survey Questions

In June, you completed a behavioral style profile that indicated you were a match for my dissertation research on high achieving women in the workplace. Since then, I used random selection to choose 10 women to interview about their thoughts on their careers and professional development. Several themes arose from these interviews. My next step is to validate what I found with you and the rest of the 65 women who matched.

Below are 30 questions on your personal life circumstances, your career history, how you see yourself at work, and your career/life direction. This could take from fifteen to forty-five minutes of your time, depending on how much you would be willing to share and how much time you can spare. At minimum, please answer the multiple choice questions. If you have the time, please **provide additional insights related to the questions where asked.**

Required Consent to Complete Survey -

1. I have freely and voluntarily consented to participate in this study, with no coercion, psychological or otherwise, used to elicit my cooperation.
2. I understand that my real name will not appear in any documentation, ever. The survey results that could link me to specific data will be destroyed upon completion of the final document or within a year after the study has been completed, whichever comes first.
3. I understand that there is minimal psychological risk involved in this participation because I will be answering personal questions. I am aware that I can refuse to answer any question and I may end this survey and/or my participation in this study at any time.
4. I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue distress due to my participation, consultation is available to me by calling Marcia Reynolds at 602-954-9030 or emailing Dr. William Bergquist at Whbergquist@aol.com for immediate attention.
5. I understand and accept these procedures. If I have questions, I can contact Marcia Reynolds at Marcia@Outsmartyourbrain.com or 602-954-9030.

I. Personal Information

1. What is your age?
2. Are you:
 - a. Currently married?
 - b. Currently divorced, separated or widowed?
 - c. Living with your partner?
 - d. Single, never married?
3. How many children do you have, if any?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1, or pregnant with or in the process of adopting my first
 - c. 2
 - d. 3+
4. Do you feel that being involved with sports had a significant impact on your life?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Additional comments:
5. How old were you when you left home?
 - a. 17
 - b. 18
 - c. 19-23
 - d. over 24

Additional comments:
6. Did you go to college?
 - a. Yes, undergrad only
 - b. Yes, including advanced coursework/degrees
 - c. Yes, but have not completed a degree
 - d. No

7. If you went to college, did you pay for it yourself
- a. Yes
 - b. No, my family paid for me to go to college
 - c. It was a combination of my contribution and help from my family
 - d. I had financial assistance from other than my family

Additional comments:

8. If you are married or you are living with a partner, how do you compare on take-home salary?
- a. I am the breadwinner
 - b. We make about the same
 - c. I make less than my partner

Additional comments:

9. Did you have a major cheerleader in your life that helped you to feel special and strong?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, this person was:

- a. My mother
- b. My father
- c. My grandmother
- d. My stepmother
- e. My stepfather
- f. A sports coach
- g. A teacher
- h. Other:

Additional comments:

II. Career Information

10. How many companies have you worked for since you were 17?
- a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5+

Additional comments:

11. Did you move up the ladder quickly early in your career?
- a. Yes, and it was good for my career
 - b. Yes, and it was too fast with failures as a result
 - c. No, it has been too slow
 - d. No, the pace is about right

Additional comments:

12. When you started your career, did you think were entitled to:
- a. A fast career climb
 - b. Direct help with learning and development
 - c. Recognition for your work
 - d. Frequent new challenges and opportunities

Additional comments:

13. What is the longest period of time you worked for one specific company?
- a. 2 years or less
 - b. 3 years
 - c. 4 years
 - d. 5+ years

Additional comments:

14. If you have changed jobs at least once, what seems to be the main reason you move on?
- a. New opportunity showed up
 - b. Job I left behind wasn't fulfilling
 - c. Circumstances I left behind changed and were no longer tolerable
 - d. I was fired
 - e. Family decision (i.e. husband relocated, wanted to be with children, take care of a parent)
 - f. Wanted to start my own business
 - g. Personal reasons that had nothing to do with the job

Additional comments:

15. Do you now or do you want to own your own business in the future?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Additional comments:

16. Have you had any good mentors at work?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Additional comments:

17. Have you had any champions at work that helped you get promoted and/or gain visibility for you and your work/ideas?
- a. No
 - b. Yes, and it was my boss
 - c. Yes, but it was not my boss

Please identify the position of the person who was your champion if it was not your boss.

Additional comments:

18. Do you feel you have had good boss(es) in your career?
 - a. Yes, but none have been women
 - b. Yes, and at least one was a woman
 - c. No, I have not had anyone I would consider a good boss
 - d. Other (please specify)

19. Please list up to five things a person would need to do to be considered a good manager for you.

20. Describe your management style (who you are and how you behave when you act in the role of people or project manager). Include behaviors that you think have worked for you and those that have made it difficult for you to manage others.

21. Do you think there is discrimination against women in the workplace?
 - a. Yes, but it hasn't really affected me
 - b. Yes, and I have experienced it directly
 - c. Maybe, but I haven't noticed it in my experiences
 - d. No, it is mostly a thing of the past

Additional comments:

III. Working Identity

22. When it comes to making career/job decisions, would you say you were PRIMARILY internally or externally driven?
- a. External--I am primarily focused on financial security or gain.
 - b. External--I am primarily focused on achieving a higher level of leadership, including a specific title or position.
 - c. Internal--I make my career choices based on how challenging and interesting the job is, and how much impact and freedom I have.
 - d. Internal--I have primarily made choices based on leaving past jobs that I either outgrew or weren't right for me.

Additional comments:

23. Do you think you have ever had something to prove at work?
- a. No
 - b. Yes, and it had to do with proving what a woman could do
 - c. Yes, and it had to do with what I could do that someone said I couldn't

Additional comments:

24. Choose up to 10 of these words that best describe yourself:
- a. Restless
 - b. Perfectionist
 - c. Bold
 - d. Bored easily
 - e. Direct
 - f. Assertive
 - g. Pushy
 - h. Compassionate
 - i. Fearless
 - j. Impatient
 - k. Persistent
 - l. Rebellious
 - m. Confident
 - n. High Energy
 - o. Antsy
 - p. Passionate
 - q. Impulsive
 - r. Steamroller
 - s. Never satisfied
 - t. Gives too much
 - u. Self-saboteur
 - v. Competitive with everyone
 - w. Competitive mostly with other women
 - x. Competitive mostly with men
 - y. Competitive mostly with myself
 - z. Honest to a fault
 - aa. Other (please specify)

25. Think about your last five years at work. Do you think you experience self-doubt at work?
- e. Never
 - f. Often
 - g. Sometimes, when faced with accepting a new challenge
 - h. Sometimes, after accepting a new challenge

Additional comments:

26. Choose three roles that would best describe you in the workplace during most of your years at work:
- a. Martyr
 - b. Revolutionary
 - c. Change Agent
 - d. Pioneer
 - e. Rebel
 - f. Bouncing Ball
 - g. Queen
 - h. Achiever
 - i. Activist
 - j. Liberator
 - k. Innovator
 - l. Builder
 - m. Seeker
 - n. Tumbleweed
 - o. Warrior
 - p. Visionary
 - q. Other (please specify)

27. Identify the top five needs that best describe what you feel necessary for you to feel good about your job:
- a. Autonomy
 - b. Financial Security
 - c. Excitement
 - d. Freedom
 - e. Recognition
 - f. Feeling Valuable
 - g. Opportunities to learn new things
 - h. Support for personal as well as job development
 - i. Self-sufficiency
 - j. Fun
 - k. Appreciated
 - l. People to dialogue with
 - m. New challenges
 - n. Attention (stand out in the crowd)
 - o. Control over my work
 - p. Other (please specify)

IV. Career/Life Direction

28. Do you feel that you started your career with a plan for your future?
- a. Yes, and I have stuck to that plan
 - b. Yes, but the plan has changed as new opportunities came up
 - c. No, I got a job and bounced around until I found what I liked
 - d. No, my choices have always felt impulsive or based on circumstances out of my control and I do not know where I will be in five years

Additional comments:

29. Do you feel you have a plan for your future career?
- a. Yes
 - b. No, but I wish I did
 - c. No, it's not necessary as long as I'm doing good work
 - d. Sort of, but it isn't clear
 - e. I did, but everything has changed

Additional comments:

30. Do you feel you have a sense of purpose for your life/career?
- a. No, and it's not necessary as long as I'm doing good work
 - b. No, but I would like to know this
 - c. Yes, but it is not a part of my work right now (excluding volunteer work)
 - d. Yes, and it is a part of my work right now

Additional comments:

31. If you could learn one thing to help you with your future, it would be how to:
- Define my life purpose/meaning
 - Lay out a solid direction for my future
 - Find inner peace
 - Other (please specify)
32. Job satisfaction is a foreign and fleeting word. There seems to be an internal flame that needs constant stoking. I am rarely satisfied for long. And often, when I am done with a project I am on to the next thing with little thought about the last thing I did. Is this true for you? If yes, please comment below.
33. Many women enter the workplace with an idealistic view of what they will be able to achieve. Then they learn that the world of work is different from what they had envisioned. Does this apply to you? If yes, explain what was your biggest surprise or disillusionment. It would help if you could provide a story or example.
34. A career path isn't about climbing up a ladder; it's about successive accomplishments that are enjoyable to work on. If I ever feel that I am getting less out of a job than I put in to it, I start considering for my next career move. Because of this, I generally will not "serve time" in company. If work doesn't remain fun, exciting, and mentally stimulating, then I need to move on.

Please comment on this statement.