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## A paradox of diversity: Billions invested, but women still leave

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A Paradox of Diversity: Billions Invested, But Women Still Leave

by

Rebekah S. Heppner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, both of whom I lost during my time as a graduate student. They never quite understood me, but supported me just the same.

To my mother, Juanita Broadhead Heppner, 1924-2005, who I got to know better through my research on the women of her era and who I now understand had very limited options for her own life plans.

To my father, William Joseph Heppner, 1919-2002, who taught through example that no one should be judged by the color of their skin and who raised a daughter to believe that she could be anything she wanted to be.

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I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the former executives who shared their stories with me so willingly. Their enthusiasm for this project gives me hope for the future of women, both in the workplace and in society, as they have remained hopeful and optimistic despite the obstacles they encountered in their careers.

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## A Paradox of Diversity: Billions Invested, But Women Still Leave

Rebekah Heppner

### ABSTRACT

In 2005, women made up 46.4 percent of the United States labor force but only 1.6 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs (Catalyst 2006). Although gains have been made since the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, there is clearly something stopping women from equal representation at the top. Since the late 1980s, businesses have spent billions of dollars on initiatives designed to assist them in dealing with the anticipated increase in the “diversity” of their workplaces (Lubove 1997; Stodghill II 1996; Johnston and Packer 1987). Is there potential for diversity initiatives to help women conquer the “glass ceiling?”

Presented here are the stories of ten women executives who entered the workplace in the 1980s, a time of great economic prosperity; opportunities appeared unlimited, yet these women have “opted out.” Socialist feminist theory addresses this issue and provided the framework for analyzing the women’s stories. As the stories unfold, a system marked by “hegemonic masculinity” (Acker 1990) becomes clear. This system of power and privilege that perpetuates the glass ceiling is invisible to the men who reproduce it and to a great extent, to the women whose careers are truncated by it, making it extremely difficult to change.



As a pragmatic feminist and applied anthropologist, I have attempted to find opportunities to improve upon this situation, recognizing they are less than ideal. Diversity initiatives have the potential to disrupt stereotypes. Policies that undermine the corporations' right to the "ideal worker" can address sex discrimination. Feminists outside of corporations must also continue the fight. They can view the workplace objectively and raise issues that the women inside cannot. The women inside of organizations are making a difference just by their presence, by demonstrating their competence. But as long as the price for success includes assimilating to the "ideal worker," they will be making a sacrifice that the women in this study did not wish to make. And no one should have to, male or female. In the battle over who gets to "have it all," it is clear that the corporations are the only ones who are winning.

## Introduction

Subtle discrimination against women . . . is still an unwritten law today, and its effects are almost as devastating and as hard to fight as the flagrant opposition faced by the feminists. . . . It took, and still takes, extraordinary strength of purpose for women to pursue their own life plans when society does not expect it of them.

This quotation would have been an apt conclusion to this dissertation had it not been written over forty years ago (Friedan 1963:185,386). The intervening years have been ones of tremendous progress for women, but discrimination in the workplace is still a painful reality. In 2005, women made up 46.4 percent of the United States labor force and 50.6 percent of management and professional positions, but only 16.4 percent of the corporate officers of the *Fortune* 500, and only 1.6 percent of *Fortune* 500 CEOs (Catalyst 2006). Although women have made many gains since the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, there is clearly something stopping them from equal representation at the top of America's corporations.

This dissertation presents the stories of women who entered the workplace in the 1980s, a time of great economic prosperity; opportunities appeared unlimited. There is the first generation in which large numbers of women graduated from universities and had early career successes on par with their male coworkers. All indications were that they were headed for the top. Yet the ten women who share their stories here have "opted out." Recounted herein, in her own words, are each woman's experiences as she climbed

her own career ladder as well as the reasons that she ended her pursuit for success within the corporate environment.

The “glass ceiling” was first identified in the 1980s and this phenomenon has received attention from researchers, the popular press and government agencies. Yet there is rhetoric in our society today that says women no longer face discrimination; that they are able to achieve whatever they have the desire, education and aptitude to achieve. If qualified women do not succeed, it must be because they have made a personal choice to dedicate their lives to other purposes, usually raising children. But are they “opting out” by choice, or being forced out by the structures and attitudes they have tired of struggling against? Role stereotypes are a strong cultural factor influencing such life “choices.” Women who have attempted to “have it all,” both career and children, have been criticized as selfish because they are not living up to their roles as mothers, while fathers who pursue career success are considered to be unselfishly giving up their personal and family time to properly fulfill their role as providers (Williams 2000:182).

A consulting industry has developed out of a perceived need to address the changing demographics of the workplace. This “diversity” movement was originally an extension of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs and targeted the “diversity” represented by race and sex. Anyone other than a white male was seen as unusual, especially in a management position. How effective has the diversity movement been in changing corporate culture to be more accepting of difference? Is there potential for diversity initiatives to help women conquer the glass ceiling? These are the questions that I have addressed with this research.

Ellis & Sonnenfeld (1994) have concluded that diversity initiatives “signify an important shift in corporate philosophy, which is both symbolic and substantive,” but they also cautioned that programs should be oriented towards “fostering respect for employees as individual actors, rather than toward treatment of employees as members of groups with easily categorized differences” (Ellis and Sonnenfeld 1994:101).

Unfortunately, many of the programs undertaken have not followed this advice and have increased stereotyping and added to friction in the workplace, undermining the potential of diversity work to change corporate culture. In response to criticism of early diversity training, the definition used by businesses for “diverse” has expanded from race and sex to include less controversial things, such as education level and personality style. This broadening has further reduced the effectiveness of diversity programs in addressing actual prejudice and discrimination against women and minorities.

Gender is particularly difficult to address in the workplace because gender roles transcend the business world and are deeply ingrained in our culture. The assigned role of women as nurturing caretakers follows them into the corporate boardroom and conflicts with the expectations for leaders that are found there. Men, on the other hand, can maintain their “heroic provider” roles both in their husband and fatherhood responsibilities and their work as leaders of corporations (Williams 2000; Olsson 2000). Feminist researchers have investigated the construction of gender both in society and in organizations and revealed that workplaces are defined by masculine norms. This must be addressed before “equal” treatment of women and men will achieve equal results (Williams 2000).

As the life stories of the careers of these ten women unfold below, the invisibility of this “hegemonic masculinity” becomes clearer (Acker 1990). They tell us in their own words how gender is operationalized as sex discrimination. I have analyzed their stories with a socialist feminist theoretical viewpoint and revealed how gender roles are created and reproduced at the highest levels in American corporations. As a pragmatic feminist, and an applied anthropologist, I have endeavored to find places of intervention in this difficult struggle, while accepting the realities of the advanced capitalist system in which it is fought (Levit and Verchick 2006). In this, my own experience as a female executive becomes useful, especially in my understanding of the difficulty of using social justice as a reason to expect changes within the competitive business climate. However, a movement within the business world towards “corporate social responsibility” provides hope that some cultural change can be sought without having to justify it by its profit potential.

The struggle is now being fought on multiple fronts. Although the women here have left the workplace, there are many who have stayed. Some will be able to make changes to the workplace, and their continued presence chips away at individual biases regarding female competency. Feminist researchers continue to expose the impact of power differentials and some have taken their theories into the workplace in an attempt to disrupt inequities “on the ground.” I believe that theory and practice can work together to find solutions to important social issues. Diversity initiatives are one intervention where this can occur. Policies and the legal system that implements and enforces them are another.

The demographics of the workplace are continually changing and each generation brings new ideas and viewpoints. The women in this study express hope that the future will be different. I am hopeful also, but I don't believe we can just wait for the world to change. There is much work to be done to meet this goal of socialist feminism: a society in which "all systems of private/public oppression based on sex, gender, race, class, etc.," are eliminated and social relations are transformed (Calas and Smircich 1996:221).

## **Literature Review**

### **Diversity Initiatives**

In 1987 the U.S. Department of Labor issued the “Workforce 2000” report, which predicted that, by the year 2000, only 15 percent of net additions to the labor force would be white males. Since then, businesses have spent billions of dollars on initiatives designed to assist them in dealing with this anticipated increase in the “diversity” of their workplaces (Lubove 1997; Stodghill II 1996; Johnston and Packer 1987). Some researchers believe that the diversity “movement” was created by consultants, using this statistic to continue their work towards an inclusive workplace, after suffering from backlash to their affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs (Litvin 2006; Jones and Stablein 2006). Although often confused with those programs, “diversity,” as it is being used here, refers to voluntary initiatives undertaken by corporations “directed at the systematic recruitment and retainment of employees belonging to diverse social identity groups” (Prasad, Pringle, and Konrad 2006).

The “identity groups” included in early diversity programs were limited to race and gender, but this definition has broadened, first to include other “protected” classes such as age, religion and physical ability, and later to add such factors as differing educational backgrounds, personality types and family situations. Unlike affirmative action programs, diversity programs recognize that merely hiring a diverse workforce is

not sufficient, something more is needed to ensure that those workers will stay and succeed.

Not surprisingly, diversity initiatives are more likely to be found in large corporations and businesses with international operations (Bendick 1998). Surveys limited to *only* large employers have shown the prevalence of diversity programs in those firms in the range of 60-70 percent. Firms with more than 5,000 employees, in fact, represent 60 percent of all the diversity activity, though they do not employ 60 percent of American workers. The cost and time commitment for any type of leadership development program makes it unlikely that there will be much participation by very small businesses. However, surveys done in the mid-1990s of employers of *all* sizes showed that 30 to 50 percent of them had formal programs for managing diversity in place (Bendick 1998:16).

Early forms of diversity training emerged from the “encounter group” model of the 1960s, but have continually evolved. Sometimes called sensitivity training, this type of program is still being done. Because the civil rights movement occurred at the same time that pop psychology came into vogue, Lasch-Quinn (2001) concluded that there was “a fateful coinciding of events.” Others have described this approach as “overzealous diversity bureaucrats exercis[ing] their inclination towards social engineering via 1960s style group therapy” (Bernstein 1994:87). The “plural” organization (Cox Jr. 1991) was typical of this early period; companies were starting to accept integration but expected conformity and assimilation to the white male workplace. Organizations were trying to adopt the ideology of affirmative action in hiring, but were not successful in retaining and promoting women or minorities to any great extent (Cox Jr. 1991).



In 1991, diversity scholar Taylor Cox called for companies to move away from the “plural” organization toward a “multicultural” one in which individuals would not be required to assimilate into the dominant culture, but allowed to contribute “to their maximum potential,” by bringing their “unique” views and experiences to the workplace (Cox Jr. 1991:12). This approach arose during the competitive environment of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when consultants told companies that they could increase profits by matching the demographics of their workforce with those of their customers (Thomas 1990). This approach also still exists, but has been criticized by social scientists because it often relied on “trait lists.” Konrad (2003) has expressed concern that this increases stereotyping, by essentializing employees to a group identity. The identity is now seen as a positive since it is believed to be of use to the company. Research has shown that, where this approach is taken, minority workers are clustered in parts of the business where they are matched to customer demographics, where their “unique” qualities can be used “fully” to increase sales. They are not given any real power within the organization and are not likely to be promoted out of the “margins” (Ely and Thomas 2001:26).

Roosevelt Thomas was first to call for the expansion of the definition of diversity to include age, background, education, job function and personality differences (Thomas 1990). This has been seen by many as an attempt to diffuse the tensions that surrounded programs focused on race and gender, and to counter the “white male backlash” they had engendered (Mirchandani and Butler 2006). Defining diversity broadly versus narrowly is still discussed. Some believe the definition used should be situational, defined based on the goals of each organization and the issues it needs to address (Roberson 2003). Critics have said that defining diversity broadly allows companies to ignore the impact of

prejudice, and reduces the chances that diversity programs will improve conditions for women and minorities (Konrad 2003). Since this approach to diversity tends to place equal value on each element of diversity, power differences are ignored and “historical asymmetric positions of power and privilege continue to be enshrined” (Konrad 2006). Harrison and Sin (2006) reviewed research designed to measure the effectiveness of diversity initiatives and concluded that this broadening of the definition of diversity, and the resulting difficulty in combining the various dimensions into a useful index, has made it difficult to move this area of research forward. Hearn and Collinson feel that discussing gender is avoided by focusing instead on diversity “which can mean everything, anything or nothing ” (Hearn and Collinson 2006:313).

More recent programs have kept some of the elements of the multiculturalism paradigm, but have developed a more extensive “business case for diversity,” which holds that there is economic value in diversity through increased creativity and diverse viewpoints in decision-making. The components of the business case for diversity were detailed in a 1997 article in the *Academy of Management Executive*. Cost savings from reduced absenteeism and turnover, as well as reduced discrimination complaints were included as benefits to businesses that undertake diversity initiatives. In addition, it detailed these ways that diversity can lead to business growth:

- understanding diverse markets,
- increasing creativity and innovation,
- producing higher quality problem solving,
- enhancing leadership effectiveness, and
- building effective global relationships [Robinson and Dechant 1997].

A “compelling business reason” was needed in order to sell the programs to American corporations (Thomas Jr. 1999). To quote one business leader, “Moralistic

statements, and race and gender militancy, would not sell diversity management to CEOs . . . [it] must be sold as business, not social work” (Ivancevich and Gilbert 2000:3).

The management literature includes studies of the business case which attempt to prove that diverse work groups are more creative and therefore more effective (Swann Jr. et al. 2004). The results of this research have been mixed (Kochan et al. 2003). Richard (2000) attempted to test the business case by proving that profitability increased with increases in workforce diversity. He concluded that there was a positive impact on profit when the firm is in a growth mode, but a negative impact when downsizing. He believes this is due to the need to focus on cost control while downsizing, and the fact that increased diversity “creates additional costs stemming from increased coordination and control” (Richard 2000:167). This seems to refute the “cost savings” portion of the business case. Richard also admits that higher profits in the growing companies may have *led to* higher diversity, rather than diversity contributing to profit. He feels that he has compensated for this by using more than one measure of profitability, but this complicates his argument and his work demonstrates how difficult it is to evaluate diversity programs, in general, and the business case in particular.

Dwyer et al. (2003) also attempted to use statistical analysis to test the effect of diversity in management on “performance” of an organization, as represented by profitability measures. They concluded that diversity is a benefit when a company is growth oriented, but that it needs a supportive culture. Introducing diversity in a competitive culture will reduce profitability.

Recently, researchers in both business and social science are questioning the focus on economic value in the business case argument. It requires that we accept the premise

that the sole, or at least primary, purpose of business is to make money. Therefore, the only reason that a business would spend money on a diversity initiative would be a belief that it would return more in profits than it would cost to implement. This focus has become a part of the diversity discourse and has been accepted by most practitioners as a given (Litvin 2006). The idea that there is such a financial benefit has not been proven by scholarly research and the underlying philosophy that employees will change their behavior because they believe it will increase their employer's profitability has been neither tested nor proven (Litvin 2006).

Today's management researchers are working in the areas of social responsibility and sustainability, which indicates a shift away from the reification of the profit motive (Kossek, Lobel, and Brown 2006). Even some business leaders have begun to talk about loftier goals for business, as can be seen in the blog of John Mackey, founder of Whole Foods, which he titles: "Profit Is The Means, Not End." Mackey contends that some businesses (Whole Foods, for example) exist to fulfill a core mission other than profit, and that profit is just the mechanism that allows them to do so (Mackey 2005).

One professor of management has suggested: "making space for a better case" for workplace diversity, one in which an alternative discourse is formed that begins with the premise that businesses exist to allow individuals and societies to pursue and achieve their own goals (Litvin 2006). She cites a 2003 study of visionary business leaders in which many espoused goals beyond profit, like Mackey, as the basis for her belief that this "better case" can be presented at this time.

The most well known component of a diversity initiative is training, but most initiatives are more comprehensive and include such things as compensation systems that

reward diversity efforts, diversifying the company's suppliers, and "multicultural" advertising (Frankel 2004). Other tactics include diversity councils and mission statements, as well as support groups, known as networking or affinity groups, for minority and women employees and mentoring programs (Ellis and Sonnenfeld 1994). Most researchers agree that training alone cannot be effective and its impact is dependent on this more holistic approach and on the "corporate culture" or atmosphere in which it takes place (Brown 2004; Wentling and Palma-Rivas 1997b, 1997c).

Training methods vary among companies and consultants, but fall into essentially two categories, awareness and skill building (Roberson 2003; Wentling and Palma-Rivas 1997:27; Cox Jr. 1991). Awareness programs include educational seminars on topics including the business case for diversity, the laws regarding employment discrimination, and specifics of the company's anti-discrimination policies (Bendick 2001). They may also include discussion of the history and impact of discrimination (Bendick 1998). Unfortunately, they have often included the confrontational "sensitivity training" approaches that have created much of the controversy over diversity training (Roberson 2003).

Skill building involves more experiential learning, utilizing case studies and role-playing to allow participants to practice applying their new skills to potential issues in the workplace. It may also cover communication and conflict management involving diverse groups and individuals (Roberson 2003). Surveys have shown that behavior change is the goal of diversity programs, which should lead to greater use of skill building programs, but most training is still focused on awareness (Rynes and Rosen 1994). Trainers either feel that behavior change will result automatically from awareness or are just unsure of

how to provide pragmatic, skill-based training (Bendick 2001). Researchers emphasize that behavior change will *not* occur automatically from awareness and education. Without skill building employees will “be at a loss as to what to do with their new understanding” (Wentling and Palma-Rivas 1997:28).

The employee groups most commonly trained are first-line supervisors and middle managers. Some companies have attempted to train all employee groups, but the training provided to non-managerial personnel is often extremely limited. The participation of senior executives in training is evidence of their commitment to diversity programs, but is often done separately from the rest of the employees, to “sell” the concept to top management before adopting a company-wide program. Although involvement by senior management is often cited as key to success of the program (Kossek, Lobel, and Brown 2006), rarely do the top executives receive training designed to change their own attitudes and behaviors.

An issue that surfaces continually in the literature is the lack of evaluation of diversity training. Researchers who have attempted it have found both resistance from the corporate management and lack of data for quantitative evaluation (Chrobot-Mason, Konrad, and Linnehan 2006). A recent article by business researchers confirmed that there is still: “very little research analyzing the differential effectiveness of various training designs” (Kossek, Lobel, and Brown 2006:63). Other researchers have said that this lack of evaluation is due to the businesses’ reluctance to address the need for “a radical upending of basic assumptions, patterns, and structures” (Comer and Soliman 1996).

David Thomas of the Harvard Business School provided a description, based on his research, of the culture of organizations in which a diversity initiative can be successful. It must not be bureaucratic, needs to stimulate the personal growth of employees and encourage openness, and employees must feel valued. The primary requirement, though, is that the management must believe that they benefit from diversity (Thomas 1991). Thomas was part of The Diversity Research Network which included researchers from six universities who studied four companies over the course of several years (Kochan et al. 2003). The Network's research goal was to address the "mismatch between research results and diversity rhetoric," since there has been little empirical research to support the business case for diversity and because "the research literature paints a more complex picture of the consequences of diversity than does the popular rhetoric" (Kochan et al. 2003:5).

This prestigious group of researchers encountered several obstacles. First, companies did not wish to participate. Twenty *Fortune* 500 companies were approached but only four accepted. Three factors contributed to the corporate reluctance to participate – a fear of legal exposure, a reluctance to "raise the question" of the effectiveness of their programs and a "lack of analytical tradition" among corporate diversity professionals (Bean 2004:39). The companies that accepted have a "long history of success in achieving a diverse workforce and a commitment to leveraging diversity to enhance organizational performance" (Kochan et al. 2003:8). There is clearly bias introduced by limiting research to companies that are willing to participate, and who most likely expect positive results.

The researchers found that “not only had none of the organizations . . . ever conducted a systematic examination of the effects of their diversity efforts on bottom-line performance measures, very few were interested in doing so” (Kochan et al. 2003:8). Because data were not available, they were unable to do the same research at each company, limiting the comparability of their results. They found little direct positive results, “at least not consistently or under all conditions,” and some direct negative results of diversity among employees, although these were mitigated by the diversity initiatives.

These results led the researchers to conclude that “context is crucial in determining the nature of diversity’s impact on performance” (Kochan et al. 2003:17). For example, highly competitive teams tended to show negative impacts of diversity. They also found that, when “organizations foster an environment that promotes learning from diversity,” racial diversity can enhance performance. The authors concluded that, since they found no direct effects of diversity, their results are evidence that diversity initiatives have eliminated the *negative* impacts that were documented in the early literature. This seems to be quite a stretch and it undermines the “value in diversity” presumption of the business case. Among their recommendations, the researchers included modifying the business case because it was too simplistic and looking beyond the business case because diversity is both a “labor market imperative and a societal expectation and value” (Kochan et al. 2003). This is additional evidence that the profit maximizing business case needs to be abandoned.

Although the results of this research were disappointing, it demonstrates the complexity of this type of research and of the issue of diversity itself. Overall, the researchers felt that their work “clearly documents the importance and value of firm-



wide, diversity sensitive managerial strategies, human resource policies and organizations cultures” (Kochan et al. 2003:16). It is difficult to see how they reached such a conclusion and, unfortunately, the conservatively written abstract, which stated that: “Few positive or negative direct effects of diversity on performance were observed,” led the press to publicize this study as proof that there is no benefit to diversity (Armour 2003). Workforce.com, for example, ran a story with the headline: “Diversity’s Business Case Doesn’t Add Up” (Hansen 2003). The lead researcher responded to this with: “I think people are looking for easy answers or very good sound bites. When you say, ‘Diversity doesn’t necessarily produce positive results’ [reporters] can see the controversy in that and build on that” (Bean 2004:39).

Researchers from Europe, New Zealand and Australia, are beginning to address workplace diversity in their home countries, using the concepts that originated in the U.S. (Konrad 2006). This increases the need for research in this area as its impact becomes global. Although much of their research has been critical, leaders such as A. Prasad have stated specifically that their critique is not meant to eliminate diversity initiatives from the workplace, but only to “alert management scholars and practitioners to the existence of multiple layers of complexity in which such programs are usually embedded, and to offer some ideas that might be useful in future discussions concerned with designing more effective diversity programs” (Prasad 2006).

A. Prasad (2006) expressed concern that diversity initiatives, if not properly designed, might perpetuate stereotypes that have their roots in colonialism. He is concerned with the issue of “soft power,” which he defines as “the symbolic power that flows from relatively taken-for-granted and largely unquestioned understanding of what

constitutes legitimate, appropriate or allowable behavior for different sets of people in specific cultural contexts.” Prasad cautions that relying on the goodwill of those in power to give it up in the interest of creating a more inclusive workforce is naïve, and that it may be more useful to view “the terrain of workplace diversity as a discursive site of *resistance* . . . “ (Prasad 2006:139).

Sinclair (2006) feels that the diversity movement in Australia, where the most significant concern is discrimination against women, began “because it feels unsafe or impossible to explicitly target gender issues” (Sinclair 2006:517), and that diversity initiatives label the “other” as a problem to be managed instead. She calls for a “critical diversity management practice” which rejects the business case because values and beliefs are not changed by economic arguments. Sinclair specifically addresses senior women, like those in my study, and says that they “know that accurately labeling their exclusion will be career suicide, so most do not, but leave quietly to ‘pursue other interests’” (Sinclair 2006:522). In her “critical diversity management practice,” professionals will use theory and social science to reveal structural and systemic barriers at work and will not let the results of their work be kept “confidential,” and thereby ignored. She recommends that professionals work one-on-one with top leaders to help them reframe the “problem” that they feel they need to address. “Critical theory prompts us to ask . . . whether our work illuminates and changes oppression or simply gives management new tools and additional legitimacy to intensify control of people’s lives” (Sinclair 2006:527).

Hearn and Collinson (2006) have written about diversity among men and masculinities, pointing out that effeminate and homosexual men are marginalized also.

They use the term “hegemonic masculinity” for organizations such as those in my study. “Women and gay men serve as the differentiated others, against which heterosexual men construct, project, differentiate and display gendered identity” (Hearn and Collinson 2006:304). Hearn and Collinson point out that only a certain masculinity, “the white, middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied masculinity, dominates other men, such as working class and gay men” (as well as women), but this masculinity “predominate[s], at least ideologically, in powerful organizations and managerial positions” (Hearn and Collinson 2006:305). Mainstream, and even some of the more critical, management theories have ignored the fact that men have held most management jobs. Although they do not call for the end of diversity work, Hearn and Collinson feel that we should not allow it to take the focus away from “the structured, asymmetrical relations of power between men and women” (Hearn and Collinson 2006:314).

Other researchers have also been cautious about both the study and practice of diversity initiatives. Anthropologist Peter Wood of Boston University has been a sharp critic of the concept of “diversity” as it being used in business (Wood 2003). When the Supreme Court issued its opinion in the University of Michigan law school admissions case in 2003, he wrote that it allowed higher education to “reify the folk categories of racial and ethnic division in the U.S.” (Wood 2003). He has also said that anthropology, through the American Anthropological Association’s participation in an amicus brief in that case, now “stand[s] as a profession officially in favor of classifying people by race,” in direct conflict with anthropology’s “basic insight” regarding the arbitrariness and social construction of such classifications.

In a less caustic, but similarly critical viewpoint, Terrence Turner of the University of Chicago takes on “multiculturalism,” which he feels “risks reifying cultures as separate entities” and “fetishiz[ing] them in ways that put them beyond the reach of critical analysis- and thus anthropology” (Turner 1993). Turner, however, feels that anthropologists *should* involve themselves with multiculturalism, and that we have made a mistake by ignoring this movement. The meaning of culture is being changed by the multiculturalists, and anthropologists cannot afford to be left out of this “historic transformation” (Turner 1993:424).

Avery Gordon has stated that, although diversity management purports to reject assimilation, in fact, it actually *requires* assimilation, if only to the belief in meritocracy “where the criterion for merit is winning in global competition . . .” (Gordon 1995:18). Gordon’s argument is simply that diversity management is a tool used to maintain the capitalist system. Gordon, a sociologist, recommends that cultural studies move quickly to regain control of the concept of culture and emphasize the link between it and “the power relations that corporate culture would like to transcend” (Gordon 1995:23).

Other critics, such as Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn believes that American racial attitudes have “undergone a genuine sea change,” and, therefore, we no longer need diversity programs (Lasch-Quinn 2001). Richard Bernstein has stated that minorities should be willing to assimilate because the “diverse” European immigrants did so, and that the diversity movement threatens the democratic system, which is the “greatest engine of genuine diversity” (Bernstein 1994).

Anthropologists can use their involvement in this area to correct some of the misconceptions used by these critics of diversity programs, as well as those of anti-

affirmative action forces. Ann Jordan describes the way that a secondary “corporate” culture is learned and suggests that this learning process is something that anthropologists should study. Diversity programs become a part of this process, which involves “verbal asides of employees, the stories, ceremonies, myths and especially the shared behavior patterns of employees” (Jordan 2003:45). Utilizing a holistic and historical perspective of employment discrimination can also assist in dispelling the “level playing field” defense.

### **Public Policy**

The term “affirmative action” made its first appearance in an Executive Order issued by President Kennedy in 1961. This order created the precursor organization to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and recommended some “relatively weak forms of affirmative action” like training programs for contractors on federally funded projects (Americans United for Affirmative Action 1999). President Johnson continued Kennedy’s work in this area and the Civil Rights Act that was passed in 1964 was even stronger than what Kennedy had proposed (Wakefield and Uggem 2004). Title VII of this Act prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin by both public and private employers.

Although it was primarily designed to prohibit discrimination against blacks, sex was added to the Act late in its drafting (Wakefield and Uggem 2004). An opponent of civil rights for blacks, who actually supported women’s rights, added the word “sex” in hope that it would help defeat the legislation (Evans 2000). When it passed, women finally had the constitutional right that protects them from discrimination in employment.

The EEOC, however, was not quick to enforce it, continuing, for example, its approval of the use of “help wanted female” classified ads (Evans 2000).

The first director of the EEOC has been quoted as saying that the sex provision of the Act was “a fluke . . . conceived out of wedlock” (Levit and Verchick 2006:59). The New York Times dubbed Title VII the “bunny law,” referring to the dilemma of whether a man could sue the Playboy Club if he were not hired to be a bunny (Evans 2000). The country, however, showed its support of the Act in the 1964 elections, re-electing all of its supporters, and voting out half of those who opposed it (Cokorinos 2003).

The EEOC was initially given very little power. It could receive, investigate, and process complaints, but could not initiate them and could not prosecute them through the criminal justice system (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). The authors of the Civil Rights Act were careful not to mandate any sort of preferential treatment, instead focusing on eliminating barriers (e.g. Jim Crow laws). It was the explicit disavowing of quotas and the absence of enforcement power for the EEOC that ended a 534-hour Senate filibuster against the Act, making its passage possible. The opposition to quotas and enforcement, however, was almost entirely from southern segregationists (Lemann 1997; Cokorinos 2003).

The Johnson administration was in favor of a much stronger policy, and it came eventually in the form of Executive Order 11246 which created affirmative action as we know it today. Issued in 1965, this order required government contractors to submit plans that “analyzed the demographics of their existing work force and indicated proactive measures the employer would take to move toward greater equality” (Americans United for Affirmative Action 1999). The order also established the

Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to enforce its requirements. Order 11246 was expanded in 1968 to include women (Cokorinos 2003).

In 1971, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a report critical of the nation's progress. This led to the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, which gave the EEOC the power to initiate complaints and to sue employers directly (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). It also extended the EEOC's jurisdiction to include groups other than racial minorities (Wakefield and Uggen 2004). Systemic discrimination, cases in which individual victims are difficult to identify, was now covered by Title VII (Nalbadian 1989). In his 1973 opinion in *Frontiero v. Richardson*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brennan stated that "our Nation has had a long and unfortunate history of sex discrimination . . . rationalized by an attitude of 'romantic paternalism' which, in practical effect, put women, not on a pedestal, but in a cage" (Levit and Verchick 2006:9).

The EEOC brought suit against AT&T in the 1970s, a time when that company employed a predominantly female workforce as telephone operators, but only 1 percent of its managers were women. The company included in its reply the fact that it did not exist to provide employment to "all comers, regardless of ability." They eventually settled the case for \$70 million. *Fortune* magazine has pointed out that two of the eight women running *Fortune* 500 companies in 2005, including Carly Fiorina at Hewlett-Packard, were "products of the enlightened post-lawsuit AT&T" (Morris 2005). In a notable quote from the late seventies, then Congresswoman Bella Abzug said: "We don't

want so much to see a female Einstein become an assistant professor. We want a woman schlemiel to get as quickly promoted as a male schlemiel” (Williams 2000:245).

In the 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan made affirmative action a key issue, “a message that reverberated with a large number of increasingly insecure middle class white voters during a period of great overall change in the employment sector” (Americans United for Affirmative Action 1999). The Reagan-Bush years changed the public discourse through the contention that earlier anti-discrimination policy was a threat to American democracy because it replaced merit with preferences. Their administrations espoused the belief that most forms of discrimination had already been eliminated (Wakefield and Uggen 2004).

In the 1986 case *EEOC v. Sears Roebuck Co*, the EEOC was able to establish that Sears had a pattern of discriminating in favor of men for high-paying commission sales positions, while women were concentrated in lower-paid jobs. Sears presented a defense based on surveys of applicants that showed women “lacked interest in the commission sales positions because they were competitive, high pressure, and had irregular hours” (Levit and Verchick 2006:65). A federal court of appeals upheld this defense, known as the “choice” strategy and it is still in use, despite the fact that “recent survey data indicates women consistently have aspirations to work in traditionally male jobs” (Levit and Verchick 2006:73). It is difficult to overcome “deep-seated cultural beliefs that males and females are inherently suited for fundamentally different kinds of work” (Levit and Verchick 2006:77).

Feminist Catharine MacKinnon’s 1979 book about sexual harassment is credited for that behavior being added to the definition of sex discrimination used by the EEOC



(MacKinnon 1979). This was affirmed in 1986 by the Supreme Court in *Meritor Bank v. Vinson* and extended by the Court in 1998 when it detailed situations in which “employers would be vicariously liable for harassment by supervisors” (Levit and Verchick 2006:67).

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, an extension of Title VII that requires employers to treat pregnancy like any other disability, was challenged in a 1987 Supreme Court case, *California Federal Savings & Loan v. Guerra*. The employer was providing maternity leave but not paternity leave, which was challenged as unfair. The Court ruled this separate treatment was justified, although many women’s groups opposed it as unequal treatment (Levit and Verchick 2006).

An important case for women executives was decided in 1989. The prestigious CPA firm Price Waterhouse denied partnership to Ann Hopkins, despite her successful record of performance. The Supreme Court for the first time considered sex stereotyping to be a form of discrimination under Title VII. Hopkins’ personnel file contained specifics about the reasons she was denied partnership. In the file, “several reviewing partners criticized her dress and demeanor. One states that she was too ‘macho’ and ‘overly aggressive’ and needed to take a ‘course at charm school.’ Another was concerned that Hopkins was ‘a lady using foul language’” (Levit and Verchick 2006:64). Hopkins was counseled to “talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry” (Levit and Verchick 2006:64).

In *Wards Cove v. Atonto*, a 1989 decision that outraged the Civil Rights community, the court moved the burden of proof from the employer to the complaining victim of discrimination to show “specific employment practices” that are discriminatory

(Americans United for Affirmative Action 1999). *Wards Cove* was also widely criticized by Democrats who then had control of both houses of Congress. The Civil Rights Act of 1990 was proposed to counter this. President George H. W. Bush lobbied against the Act and vetoed it in October 1990. Bush eventually succumbed to pressure from Congress and supported a toned-down version of the Act, which passed in 1991, essentially overturning *Wards Cove*.

The policy for enforcing civil rights legislation for the first 25 years of its existence was clearly weak, providing no serious financial risk to employers and attempting to resolve claims without creating a significant political turmoil for whatever administration was in power at the time (Selmi 1998). It was not until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which allowed punitive damages, that employment discrimination lawsuits became attractive to private attorneys, and the large settlements in the headlines over the past few years have reflected this. Even the EEOC's website plainly states that the 1991 Act was "enacted in part to reverse several Supreme Court decisions that limited the rights of persons protected by these laws, [and] provide additional protections" (EEOC 2004).

The 1991 Act also included the Glass Ceiling Act, which established the bipartisan Glass Ceiling Commission. This commission issued two reports that concluded men continued to progress faster than women regardless of education levels, ambition and commitment, and endorsed affirmative action as one solution (Fick 1997). The OFCCP, which enforces affirmative action, added "corporate management reviews," also known as glass ceiling reviews, to its audit program in 1989. Government

contractors could now be held accountable not only for non-discriminatory hiring, but for retention and promotion of women and minorities (Lynch 2001).

The EEOC's role has expanded from its original purpose of monitoring employment discrimination on the basis of race, to covering a more widely defined group of "protected" employees. In 2004, a sociologist reported that more than three-fourths of the labor force is now part of a protected "minority" group (Wakefield and Uggen 2004). Sex complaints rose as a proportion of total complaints after the 1972 amendment to the Civil Rights Act (Wakefield and Uggen 2004). In addition, the EEOC was inundated with sexual harassment claims after the testimony of Anita Hill at the Senate confirmation hearing of its former director, Clarence Thomas, when he was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1991 (Wakefield and Uggen 2004). The EEOC received 5,849 such complaints in the 1980s and 37,725 in the 1990s (Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004:155). In 2003, 30 percent of discrimination complaints to the EEOC were for sex discrimination. Of those, less than one percent were litigated; 57 percent were found to have no merit and 23 percent were settled in favor of the plaintiff without a trial (Ortiz 2004).

Wakefield and Uggen (2004) criticize the relative ineffectiveness of the EEOC, saying: "It is unlikely that the EEOC reduces discrimination primarily through its enforcement efforts, especially given the recent declines in class-action suits and reduction in its enforcement budget." They do, however, contend that "the agency plays an important symbolic role in equalizing outcomes by serving as the public representative of government on civil rights issues" (Wakefield and Uggen 2004).

Recently, leaders of the American Federation of Government Workers and the National Organization for Women have argued that the EEOC is “being systematically weakened from within to justify its elimination” (DeGroat 2006). Its backlog of cases is steadily growing and it is operating under a hiring freeze, despite having lost twenty percent of its staff in the past five years. It is also currently facing a funding cut of \$4 million (DeGroat 2006). A legal feminist has stated that “today, some argue that the civil rights victories of the 1950s through the 1970s are being quietly rolled back by lax enforcement officers and hostile judges” (Levit and Verchick 2006:72).

On August 8, 2006, EEOC Chair Cari Dominguez announced her intention to step down at the end of her five-year term. She has been criticized for her restructuring of the department and outsourcing of its national call center. Given the biases of the current administration, she has had little opportunity to aggressively fight discrimination, as is apparent in the continual funding cuts she has faced. Instead, she focused on management issues within her department. One of her critics, Dr. Mary Frances Berry, former chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, predicted that the interim chair, then Vice Chair Naomi Earp, would be elevated by President Bush and no change in enforcement policy would be seen during the remainder of his presidency (Millman 2006). On August 31, as Berry predicted, Earp assumed the chairmanship (EEOC 2006).

Affirmative action is needed because “when employers do not take race or gender into account, the result is not neutral decision-making, but rather decisions which unconsciously favor whites and males” (Fick 1997:168). Unfortunately, the concept has been used in such a way that many now consider it a code word for reverse discrimination, the lowering of standards, and the use of quotas (Fick 1997; Erler 1997).

The arguments over affirmative action are primarily about: 1) the rights of individuals versus groups, 2) the concept of “disparate impact,” or equality of treatment versus equality of results, and 3) the “American Creed” of reward based on merit, which many consider to be diametrically opposed to any sort of “preference” program. In defense of affirmative action, when implemented as it was originally intended, studies have shown that reverse discrimination is rare (Neas 1995), and a study by Johns Hopkins in 1987 concluded that employers who demonstrate a commitment to affirmative action show a statistically significant increase in annual wages for black males and are more likely to assign white females to more gender-balanced jobs (Fick 1997).

In 2003, the Institute for Democracy Studies published an analysis by its research director, Lee Cokorinos, entitled *The Assault on Diversity: an organized challenge to racial and gender justice* (Cokorinos 2003). Cokorinos argues that right wing think tanks are systematically working to undermine both affirmative action and any sort of equal opportunity program in this country, holding that they are discriminatory themselves, against white males. These think tanks were started by conservative private foundations in the 1980s, and many of their leaders now serve in the Bush administration. With names like the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Institute for Justice, they are able to hold themselves out as equal rights organizations, while working to abolish affirmative action and any other “preference” programs through litigation support and through the media. They have also supported ballot initiatives such as Proposition 209 in California, which ended affirmative action in that state. Proposition 209 was named the California Civil Rights Initiative, and its official spokesperson was Ward Connerly, an African American businessman with ties to California Governor Pete Wilson (Cokorinos 2003).

It passed by a majority of 54 percent, including strong support by white men, who voted 66 percent in favor of it, and 58 percent of white women, who joined them (Erler 1997).

Another organization, the Independent Women's Forum, a name that sounds supportive of women's causes, got its start to showcase women who favored the nomination of Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court. Cokorinos describes this organization as the leading antifeminist organization in Washington, funded by the religious right (Cokorinos 2003). Although much of the fight to date has been over university admissions, the Executive Director of the Center for Individual Rights, which Cokorinos describes as the most politically extreme of the anti-affirmative action groups, has said that the primary target for these forces in the next few years will be employment discrimination (Cokorinos 2003).

Given its conservative leanings at the time, it was a relief to many when the Supreme Court upheld affirmative action in at least a limited manner in the *Bollinger* (University of Michigan) cases in 2003. It is interesting to note that President George W. Bush filed an amicus brief in opposition to affirmative action in *Bollinger*, while eighty major corporations filed briefs of support (Krislov 2003).

The year 2005 brought major change to the Supreme Court. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, often the swing vote, announced her retirement and, before she had been replaced, Chief Justice Renquist, a liberal, died. President Bush's choices of John Roberts as Chief and Samuel Alito as Justice have moved the court to the right. Both men served in the Justice Department under Reagan and worked then to limit affirmative action (Marcus 2006). Analysts have described the current court as "on the brink," with

Anthony Kennedy “at the center” (Marcus 2006). The most liberal justices, Stevens and Ginsburg, are also the oldest and most likely to leave.

In June 2006, the Court agreed to hear two cases related to the use of race in assigning students to public schools. An education official from the Clinton administration called this a sign that the “more conservative justices see they [now] have a fifth vote to reverse these cases” (St. Petersburg Times 2006). Also in 2006, Ward Connerly turned his focus to Michigan. In November, voters passed the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, banning affirmative action there (Hackney 2006).

On the federal level, The OFCCP significantly overhauled its rules in 2000, which increased the chances of small and mid-sized contractors being subject to audits of their affirmative action programs. Prior to these changes, contractors who followed the technical requirements of the law were unlikely to be questioned despite evidence that “their policies resulted in little tangible progress for women and minorities in the workplace” (Faegre & Benson LLP 2001:1). Even if a contractor failed to adopt an affirmative action plan, as required by the law, it could “almost always avoid any adverse consequences by simply agreeing to implement the program going forward” (Faegre & Benson LLP 2001:4).

In 2001, the EEOC filed a class action lawsuit against Morgan Stanley, one of the largest brokerages on Wall Street, claiming that there was a system in place that precluded women from gaining access to the most lucrative accounts and created a hostile environment where such activities as trips to strip clubs were the norm (Ortiz 2004). The firm stepped in before the trial date and settled this case for \$54 million, although they denied wrongdoing (Velez 2006). Despite this experience, the firm found

itself the subject of another lawsuit in 2006, this time by a woman who alleged that her sexual harassment complaints led to retaliation by the firm that included overlooking her for promotions and taking away important accounts.

Also in 2006, a vice president of Lehman Brothers, another financial services firm, accused that firm of firing her because she complained about remarks regarding race at a training session. The woman stated in her lawsuit that she was told by her boss, also a woman, that the company didn't like women "to be too aggressive . . . you will get further if you are soft-spoken and agreeable." The complaining woman, who is white, was also told not to "align" with the African Americans in the office, who were viewed as negative (DiversityInc 2006).

Boeing settled a class-action lawsuit related to discrimination in pay rates and promotion of women workers for \$72.5 million in 2004, the same year that a sex discrimination case against Wal-Mart was certified as a class action. That suit is the largest class action in history and the potential damages to Wal-Mart have been estimated at \$2 to \$4 billion (Morris 2005). In September 2006, OSI Restaurant Partners, operator of the Outback Steakhouse chain, was named in an EEOC lawsuit on behalf of two women who claim that the company did not give women opportunities that could lead to management and were not hired or promoted into management positions. Although OSI has denied all charges, their local newspaper included quotes that the plaintiff's attribute to their managers. These include one who said that: "he wouldn't let his own wife work" and that one of the women "should turn to teaching." Another allegedly said that: "women managers lose focus when they have children and that 'cute girls' should work as servers" (Barancik 2006).



The headlines created by these large lawsuits and their significant monetary settlements could have an impact on the behavior inside of corporations, despite the lack of funding for the EEOC and the increasingly conservative judiciary. The results of the 2006 federal elections, with Democrats taking over majority positions in both the House and the Senate, also offer hope that the trend away from enforcing the Civil Rights laws may at least be slowed through more balanced public policy. However, the history presented here shows that there has been very little real effort (or intent) to enforce Civil Rights laws for many years, through many administrations and Congresses, and the nation has still not corrected the problems those laws were designed to remedy.

The number of annual complaints to the EEOC increased from 20,000 in the 1980s to 110,000 in 1990s (Chapman 2003). But budget cutbacks are reducing the ability of many federal and state agencies to enforce employment law, and the costs, both financial and emotional, of litigating one's case has to be balanced with the prospects for winning given the conservative climate in the courts and the government (Fick 1997). "Employment discrimination in the 1990s [and today] is more subtle and indirect than it once was, making it harder to identify and prove via litigation, but making it no less effective in its impact on women's and minorities' employment opportunities" (Fick 1997:165).

### **Women and the Workplace**

My research involves white, middle-class women working in executive-level jobs in the United States, primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. To situate this research in the appropriate context, the history of women and work in the United States must be considered. White, middle-class women had essentially no legal standing in this country

as recently as 1900. Not only were they not allowed to vote, married women could not own property in their own names, sue or be sued, or control their reproductive choices (birth control was illegal in most states). Their status was totally dependent on that of their husbands; the Supreme Court said that women were not persons entitled to equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment (Evans 2001).

The women who held paid jobs in 1900 were limited in their career choices. One third were in domestic service, the remainder were primarily doing unskilled factory work. For the educated middle class the only real option was teaching, and later, nursing or library work. Most of these middle-class women who worked at the beginning of the twentieth century were young and single, planning to give up their jobs when they married (Evans 2001). But in the early 1900s employment options began to expand. The need for white-collar workers grew with the invention of the typewriter and telephone and with business consolidations that created large corporate offices (Boyle 2001).

Clerical and secretarial work was now available for educated white women, and by 1920 one quarter of working women had made it their career choice (Evans 2001). This represents the entry of women into the type of workplace that my research addresses. The fact that they began in roles directly subservient to the men running the businesses is important to remember when considering their ongoing struggle to overcome the care-taking stereotypes of wife, mother and now, secretary.

In the “first wave” of feminism, these “working girls,” along with black women who worked as domestics, united with the National American Woman Suffrage Association to form an alliance that would finally win white women the vote (Evans 2001). This required resistance to the cultural mores of the time. As Betty Friedan has

said of the feminist of the first wave, they “had to fight the conception that they were violating the god-given nature of women. Clergymen interrupted women’s rights conventions, waving Bibles and quoting from Scripture . . .”(Friedan 1963:86).

The Roaring Twenties have been characterized as a time of great gains for white middle-class women that included not only suffrage but also more acceptance of female economic independence. But the Great Depression brought about a move backward to a more traditional family structure and work for women outside the home was scarce. At the height of the depression, unemployment rose to 25 percent (Boyle 2001). Women were included in Works Progress Administration programs, but they comprised only 12 to 18 percent of WPA workers, and most ended up in sewing rooms (Tidd Jr. 1989).

The New Deal sacrificed working women in its attempt to salvage American families. Section 213 of the Economy Act of 1932 resulted in hundreds of women being dismissed from their federal jobs; married women were designated as the first to be laid off. Similar “relief” programs in state and local governments followed (May 1988). The “family wage ideology” of the time assumed that men needed to support families and that women were only supplemental wage earners who did not need the same levels of pay (Milkman 1985). In 1939, women earned on average only 59 percent what men did (May 1988). A woman under such policies had no real option for economic independence; marriage was her only choice. The feminists of the 1920s “had destroyed the old image of woman, but they could not erase the hostility, the prejudice, the discrimination that still remained” (Friedan 1963:100).

During World War II, the nation was desperate for workers. Turning to women for help was unavoidable, although most middle-class white men still did not want their

wives to work. A 1943 Gallup Poll showed that 79 percent of married men opposed war work for their wives and that 78 percent of female homemakers agreed (Hartmann 1982; Gluck 1987). When the war began, unemployment fell to zero and women were needed in the workforce (May 1988). Newspapers of the time portrayed working women in an almost comical way, caricaturizing them and emphasizing how unusual it was that they could do the jobs of men. The media was trying to recruit more women to work in all types of jobs but was not ready to concede, even after reporting their success, that this was normal (Heppner 2005).

A wartime pamphlet included this type of propaganda: “it is essential that women avoid arrogance and retain their femininity in the face of their own new status. . . . In her new independence she must not lose her humanness as a woman.” In a textbook of the era, scientific authorities stated: “social freedom and employment for women would cause sexual laxity, moral decay and the destruction of the family” (May 1988).

When the war ended, women were the first to be let go and were denied unemployment benefits if there was a “woman’s job” available to them, despite the significant pay differential (Tampa Morning Tribune 1944). Nationally, three quarters of working women wanted to stay employed, including over half of the working wives (Gluck 1987). For those who were able to stay in the workforce, the prospects dimmed. Women’s pay declined 26 percent after the war, compared to the national average decrease of 4 percent for all workers (May 1988). The limited childcare options that had been made available during the war disappeared and the for-profit childcare industry did not yet exist (Weatherford 1991).

Most scholars agree that the lives of individual women were changed by war work, but public policy did not change along with them. Feminist Susan M. Hartmann's "seeds of change" thesis says that, although the war did not bring revolution for women as a group, there were still enormous changes in the lives of individuals (Hartmann 1982). Sherna Gluck also felt that "the housewives who went home may have transmitted 'private changes,' such as increased feeling of self-sufficiency, to their daughters," who became part of feminism's second wave in the 1970s (McArthur 1987).

The American workplace had changed dramatically by the 1950s. Because the economies of Europe and Japan were so damaged by the war, America became the global leader in manufacturing. Fears of another depression were quickly overcome as continued military spending for the Cold War, combined with growing consumerism, resulted in remarkable economic growth (Rosenberg 1992). Factory and office work increased and farm labor became scarce. By 1950, 12 percent of the labor force was in clerical positions, compared to just 3 percent in 1900, and most of those jobs were held by white women (Boyle 2001).

Despite the growing sentiment that middle-class women should be in the home, they were still needed in the workplace. Although the number of women employed increased after the war, now it was often for that second, supplementary income imagined by the family wage ideology (May 1988). This post-war economic boom resulted in an increase in GNP of 29 percent between 1953 and 1961 (Boyle 2001). It was into this time of prosperity that the women in my research were born. But no organized women's movement developed in the 1950s and white middle-class women were left to accept their fate as housewives or members of a low-paid "pink collar" workforce.

The struggle for equal rights regained momentum in 1961 with the establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission's 1963 report, outlining the continuing inequalities faced by women, helped set the stage for the passing of the Equal Pay Act that year and the Civil Rights Act in 1964 (Evans 2001). Also in 1963, Betty Friedan published "The Feminine Mystique," providing the second wave of feminism its beginnings (Friedan 1963). Friedan's views were based in part on those of French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who published "The Second Sex" in 1949. De Beauvoir held that women were never free in our society; only men led autonomous lives (Evans 2000). Friedan defines the "mystique" this way:

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. . . . [it says that] the root of women's troubles in the past, is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love [Friedan 1963:43].

Friedan primarily credited the male dominated media with creating and perpetuating this "mystique," but she also dedicated full chapters to the impact of both Sigmund Freud and Margaret Mead on this phenomenon. To her, these factors had all combined to create a culture that "does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings . . ." (Friedan 1963:77). She felt that women were encouraged to ignore the questions of identity that are normally addressed by humans when they reach adolescence. This was partly due to lack of role models, an issue still important for the women in my study.

Although it is important to note that Friedan wrote for a specific purpose, she painted this distressing picture of the happy homemakers she interviewed in the early 1960s:

Sixteen out of the twenty-eight were in analysis or analytical psychotherapy. Eighteen were taking tranquilizers, several had tried suicide; and some had been hospitalized for varying periods, for depression or vaguely diagnosed psychotic states . . . their voices were dull and flat, or nervous and jittery; they were listless and bored, or frantically “busy” around the house or community . . . they were desperately eager to talk about the other “problem,” with which they seemed very familiar indeed [Friedan 1963:235].

This “problem” is what Friedan labeled the “problem that has no name,” which is simply the fact that American women are “kept from growing to their full human capacities” (Friedan 1963:364). The solution she recommends is work: “The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. There is no other way” (Friedan 1963:344). In this she echoes liberal political theorists of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century who said that “women’s true potential went unfulfilled because of their exclusion from the academy, the forum and the marketplace . . .” (Calas and Smircich 1996:222).

Friedan’s conclusions include this statement: “it is also time to stop giving lip service to the idea that there are no battles left to be fought for women in America, that women’s rights have already been won” (Friedan 1963:374). It is not surprising then, that in 1966 Friedan helped to found The National Organization for Women (NOW). Its statement of purpose was: “To take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, assuming all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men” (Evans 2000:155).

With NOW, the “women’s liberation” movement had officially begun, taking inspiration from the Civil Rights movement which had already achieved much success (Evans 2001). NOW supported the Equal Rights Amendment, which passed Congress in 1972 and was sent to the states, but never ratified. This support of the ERA caused

disagreements within the organization. This, and a lack of organizing skills, kept it from growing into a national movement that might have had a more significant impact (Evans 2000).

The women's movement actually had many factions, the two most visible being Friedan's NOW group, composed of women professionals like those in this research, and a second, more radical group of activists, such as Women Strike for Peace, who gained attention through demonstrations and "consciousness-raising" (Evans 2000). Although it was not as directly focused on the needs of women in business, this second group's impact on the culture, by challenging the definitions of male and female, has worked to make the professional and policy challenges clearer.

This movement was not without its detractors. In addition to white male backlash, conservative women began anti-abortion and anti-ERA movements and mainstream women began to shy away from the label of "feminist," as the radical groups within the movement became more visible. The early women's movement has also been criticized by many for not including the voices of women of color, while purporting to speak for all women (Gluck 1998). According to surveys, only one-third of U.S. women self-identified as "feminists" by 1989 and this declined to only one-fourth by 1998 (Williams 2000:41). Williams (2000) speculates that this is because feminism inherited the "full commodification" model from Friedan. This model proposed buying childcare and housekeeping to allow women to work full time, like men. Women rejected this model because household work could not be so easily "erased" and, ultimately, it got them more work (Williams 2000). The press played up this image of feminism, that it "devalues family and household work" (Williams 2000:46). But significant progress



continued to be made into the 1980s as the women in my study were joining the workforce.

Other issues of significance for women were the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960 (Evans 2000) and the legalization of abortion by the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Women had finally gained control of their own reproduction, a matter not unrelated to their career options and chances for advancement. The activism of women during the 1970s also brought about the day care industry, which finally offered women who chose to have both children and a career an option, other than relatives, for childcare during work hours.

The white, middle-class women interviewed for this study were not only expected to attend college, they were encouraged by their parents to have careers. The oldest were pointed toward traditionally female careers, but for most of them, the option of business and the professions were considered reasonable. The 1980s brought the first woman Supreme Court justice and astronaut, as well as women in many prominent roles in public and religious life, in addition to the corporate world. This provided girls and young women the role models that had been absent for the previous generation. The eighties also brought us media images of "superwomen" who handled both successful careers and families, essentially blaming the women who couldn't seem to manage to "have it all" (Williams 2000:46).

And the workplace had changed again. The dominance of U.S. factories began to slow with the recovery of the economies in Japan and Western Europe. By 1980, unemployment had risen to 7 percent and inflation was 13 percent. A major shift began, moving manufacturing jobs overseas, growing the service sector at home, and adding

“restructuring” to the business vocabulary (Boyle 2001). In the mid-eighties, the term “glass ceiling” began to be used to describe a “puzzling new phenomenon” which seemed to prevent women from reaching the executive levels (Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004:148).

With the 1987 book, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can women reach the top of America's largest corporations?*, the term became a permanent part of the discourse regarding women in business (Morrison et al. 1992). Its authors describe the glass ceiling as “not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person’s inability to handle a higher level job. Rather, the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher *simply because they are women*” (Morrison et al. 1992:13). Reading *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* today reveals a text that is focused on assimilation of women into a male dominated workplace, what some gender researchers have called “fixing the women” and others would consider “blaming the victim.”

The key to success for women, these authors say, is “to stay within a narrow band of acceptable behavior,” which means dispelling stereotypes about women that would indicate that they cannot be leaders, while not forfeiting “all traces of femininity, because that would make them too alien to their superiors and colleagues” (Morrison et al. 1992:55). They admit that these are contradictory behaviors, but nonetheless recommend that women not only perform their jobs better than their male counterparts but that they: “take risks, but be consistently outstanding, be tough, but don’t be macho, be ambitious, but don’t expect equal treatment, and take responsibility, but follow others’ advice” (Morrison et al. 1992:57).

The term “glass ceiling” was also adopted by the Department of Labor and the Glass Ceiling Commission, as discussed above. A statistical study by a sociologist, based on data from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s, concluded that the glass ceiling exists and that it differs from the accumulation of discrimination at lower levels over the course of the women’s careers (Cotter et al. 2001). This research proposed a unified definition that includes these four criteria comprising the glass ceiling: difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee, difference that is greater at higher levels (inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels) and inequality that increases over the course of a career (Cotter et al. 2001).

It was in 1987 that the U. S. Department of Labor’s “Workforce 2000” report predicted that only 15 percent of net additions to the labor force would be white males by the year 2000, but Kanter (1993) reminds us that “what the raw statistics did not reveal, however, is the likelihood that nonminority white males who are already in place [would] still dominate the upper ends of professional and managerial pyramids, though they may no longer claim exclusive occupancy” (Kanter 1993:315). When Kanter updated her classic book (discussed below) in 1993, she said that the demographic changes in the workplace had “created a large pool of young, experienced women eligible for the same prime career opportunities men had long enjoyed” (Kanter 1993:304). But they did not seem to be getting the opportunities, and many women had moved to smaller, more entrepreneurial companies that seemed more open to women leaders, or had started their own businesses. She felt that the “female entrepreneurial boom” was “in part a response to blocked or distorted opportunities in large established companies” (Kanter 1993:306).

Kanter cites a 1992 poll by *Business Week* in which 70 percent of female executives “felt that a male-dominated corporate culture was an obstacle to success for women” (Kanter 1993:309).

The Catalyst research organization was formed at the beginning of the women’s movement “to help women enter the workforce,” but in 1972 changed its focus from the women, to the businesses, realizing that “while women have broken into the corporate world and have the education and skills necessary to advance, most still hold jobs on the lowest rung of the corporate ladder. It is time to fix the companies, not the women” (Catalyst 2006). A 2004 Catalyst research study found that women and men “have equal desire to have the CEO job” (Catalyst 2006).

Catalyst conducted studies of the glass ceiling in 1996 and again in 2003 (Catalyst 2004; Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004). They surveyed CEOs and female executives of multinational companies, asking them to “account for why relatively few women make it to the top ranks” (Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004:152). The women in the study identified the following three barriers:

	1996	2003
Male stereotyping and preconceptions of women	52%	33%
Exclusion from informal networks of communication	49%	41%
Lack of significant general management/line experience	47%	47%

The CEOs said the following factors were responsible for holding the women back:

	1996	2003
Lack of significant general management/line experience	82%	68%
Lack of time in the pipeline	64%	NA
Failure of senior leadership to assume accountability	NA	37%

The same study . . . “revealed four critical behaviors women must engage in to break through the glass ceiling in their organizations” (Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004:156):

	1996	2003
Consistently exceed expectations	77%	69%
Develop a style with which male managers are comfortable	61%	47%
Seek out difficult or highly visible assignments	50%	40%
Have an influential mentor	37%	NA

Despite Catalyst’s self-proclaimed interest in fixing the companies, not the women, with few exceptions, the factors they identified that impede success, as well as the recommended behaviors they list, show a continued focus on the women.

Other research has also suggested that, in most workplaces, women need to adopt “masculine” management styles, while at the same time avoid being considered unfeminine (Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004). Where women do succeed, it is generally due to their merits and hard work, while men often succeed “because they have

a certain personality profile: they tend to be independent, dominant, and extroverted” (Stroh, Langlands, and Simpson 2004:155).

Andrew Hacker (2003) dispels the common argument that the “glass ceiling” is really due to there not being enough women eligible for executive positions (lack of time in the pipeline). According to his statistics, 8.4 percent of MBAs in 1975 were earned by women, and, if all of these three thousand women had actively pursued the business careers they had prepared for, and had equal talents and abilities to the men of the same graduating class, 84 of the top one thousand companies would have women chairmen in 2002; only eight actually did. Although the 84 would be a high estimate, eight is clearly low. The two principal reasons that Hacker cites for the disparity are the masculine culture of the corporation, for which he says women have not been prepared, and the societal demands on women to be the primary caregivers for children (Hacker 2003).

An historical event of significance for women, and particularly for women in business, was the Senate confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas in 1991. The treatment of Anita Hill and the apparent disregard by the all white male panel of her allegations of sexual harassment, gave women a renewed feeling of solidarity. Complaints of sexual harassment skyrocketed (Wakefield and Uggen 2004) and a record number of women ran for and won public office in the 1992 elections (Evans 2001).

But the political climate became more and more conservative during this time, as the impact of the Reagan/Bush era slowly reversed much of the New Deal. Another consolidation of companies created global “mega-corporations” that defy industrial classification and compete fiercely on the stock exchanges. At the same time, the new high-technology industry grew and provided significant opportunities to highly-educated,

white-collar workers, while following the old-line companies in keeping most of their manufacturing out of the country.

Although much of this change was seen as good for business and, as a result, benefited the types of white-collar positions that were held by the women in my research, most of them also experienced the phenomenon of the corporate layoff at least once in their careers. This gave some of them lucrative severance packages that helped launch their new careers, but it also created a sense of insecurity and distrust that is part of the criticism that they have of the workplace of today.

Women also face obstacles due to informal systems operating within businesses. McGuire (2002) concluded that women get less informal help than men in the workplace, even when the women are in similar positions of power. She criticizes network theorists for assuming gender neutrality, saying that “they tend to overlook the ways in which organizational norms, values and positions have been constructed to privilege men and disadvantage women” (McGuire 2002:317).

Policies labeled “work/life,” which purportedly are designed to address “women’s issues,” have also been cited by researchers as reproducing the stereotype that women are responsible for children, which is not seen as compatible with commitment to a career (Benschop 2006). For example, in 2000 only 15 percent of male workers took time off under the Family Medical Leave Act and 57.6 percent of those leaves were for personal health issues. While most FMLA leaves are taken by women to care for newborns, only 3 percent of males workers took such leaves in 2000 (Levit and Verchick 2006).

Despite the economic gains in the U.S. economy and the dramatic change in the overall status of women during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the century ended there were

significant disparities remaining. Although 61 percent of women were in the workforce in 2000, 70 percent were in healthcare, education or wholesale and retail trade (Evans 2001). Their median income for full-time work was up to 79.5 percent of the median for men in 2003, but only 69.9 percent of men's for women in management, business, and financial operations. Although these are significant gains since the 59 percent in 1939 noted above, the Institute for Women's Policy Research estimates, based on the rate of progress from 1989 to 2002, "women would not achieve wage parity for more than 50 years (Catalyst 2006; Werschkul and Williams 2004). The Feminist Majority Foundation predicted in 1991 that it would take 475 years for women to close the gap in the executive ranks (Morrison et al. 1992:7).

The companies where the women in my study were employed are predominantly service businesses that include large numbers of females, most of them concentrated in clerical and customer service positions. Women as directors and vice presidents, like those portrayed herein, are still considered unusual. In 2005, women made up 46.4 percent of the United States labor force and 50.6 percent of management and professional positions, but only 16.4 percent of the corporate officers of the *Fortune* 500, and only 1.6 percent of *Fortune* 500 CEOs (Catalyst 2006).

The culture of the United States has also changed dramatically over the past century, but somehow women still bear the primary burden of running households and raising children. Although most women work, the workplace operates under the presumption that workers have wives at home (Evans 2001). This presents challenges for women at all levels of employment, including the executive level. A new phenomenon, labeled "Mr. Mom" in popular culture, has evolved for the reverse of the stereotype of



the husband as breadwinner with a housewife to support him. Although still considered unusual, these stay-at-home husbands appear more likely when the wife is a corporate executive. These women can also afford nannies, but guilt from not being the primary caregiver for their children continues for many.

Hacker (2003) noted that many top female executives, including CEOs like Carly Fiorina at Hewlett-Packard and Anne Mulcahy at Xerox, were married to men who had already retired and most of them did not have children. Male executives may acknowledge that they also have a struggle to balance work and home and be a part of their children's lives, but they do not face the same societal pressure to do so. And the presumption that women are more interested in their home responsibilities than their careers adds to the stereotypes that hold women back.

*The New York Times* reported in 2005 that women graduating from elite colleges were choosing to stay home with their children and were not returning to the workforce (Story 2005). Such publicity led philosopher and former litigator Linda Hirshman to find women whose weddings were publicized in the *Times* in 1996. She was not pleased to find that 85 percent were staying home with their children. Her feeling is that they have set back the women's movement and ended the fight for equality. She states that the women's "revolution didn't finish – because it wasn't radical enough. It didn't address the family in an adequately revolutionary way" (Dickerson 2006).

Although I agree with this statement by Hirshman, other research has contradicted these studies, concluding that more mothers are working and those who take time off after childbirth are coming back to work faster (DiversityInc 2006c). Others have seen women leaving not to stay home with their children but because of the limitations for

advancement they have experienced or perceived, and many were going into business for themselves (Stockdale and Crosby 2004).

This trend by the media of painting women's exit from the workforce as a matter of personal choice has been challenged by researchers at the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California. They feel that it is both exaggerated and inaccurate. Exaggerated because women are not leaving in great numbers and inaccurate because they are not leaving by choice; they are not being pulled out by the call to home, they are being pushed out by workplaces that do not accommodate families. These researchers propose that the media is publicizing the "personal choice" viewpoint because it reassures them (the media companies) as well as other businesses that it is not their fault, they are not the ones that need to change (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006).

Another report by the Center documented the increase in lawsuits related to the "maternal wall" and other issues of "family responsibility discrimination" (discussed below.) Such cases have increased 400 percent in the last decade and the average award is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The courts have been favoring the plaintiffs in these suits, which the Center believes is because of their appeal to the conservative "family values" ideology (Still 2006).

In April 2006, *The Economist* magazine raised the issue of the underutilization of women's skills and abilities. They suggest that greater participation in the labor market by women "would provide a sounder base for long-term growth. It would help finance rich countries' welfare states as populations age and it would boost incomes in the developing world" (Economist 2006). Also in recent news, the president of Harvard University set off a furor that cost him his job when he suggested that there might be a

scientific, genetic reason that women do not do as well in math and science as men. And an executive at one of the largest advertising agencies in New York, responding to a question about why women were not seen at the top in that industry, said it was because “they’re crap” (Velez 2005). The former president of Catalyst, who is now a professor at the Stern School of Business, when asked her reaction to this man’s comment replied: “He spoke out loud what all too many men in leadership positions believe but don’t articulate. . . . They act on those unspoken biases, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy” (Fisher 2005). In other words, Hirshman was right, the revolution is far from over.

A leader in feminism’s “second wave,” Elaine Showalter, was interviewed regarding what many have termed the “third wave” of feminism, populated by women coming of age in the 1990s. She prefers to label the current era as “post-feminism,” because she is “very dubious about the existence of a new feminist movement” (Gillis and Munford 2004:60). She feels it is unlikely that a true movement will develop because there is no unifying goal and feminists have exhibited a lack of leadership skills. However, she does not feel that “feminism” itself is gone; “feminism can go on independently of a woman’s movement” (Gillis and Munford 2004:61). In addition, academic feminism has split into factions (discussed below), which has alienated some. Spencer (2004) adds to this that feminists today are having difficulties because many of their activists are “deeply opposed to many of the institutions within which women’s previous gains have been made” (Spencer 2004:11). They are anti-capitalist and anti-corporate, making it difficult to effect change, short of a revolution.

Kanter admitted that her recommendations to work within the system to make structural changes could be viewed as “counter to the goals of fundamental social change,” since “the revolutionary would argue against strategies that temporarily alleviate distress, emphasizing the positive value of present suffering in heightening radical consciousness” (Kanter 1993:286). To this, she responds:

But who bears the burden of waiting? Not the well off. No, it is the people without advantage who continue to lose out; the women who find doors closed to them in certain jobs; the people stuck in dead-end positions, whose lack of opportunity depresses their aspirations and sense of self; the powerless who bear the frustrations of trying to manage without any real resources or influence; the token women or token minorities who suffer from their isolation [Kanter 1993:287].

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

This section provides an overview of the theoretical perspectives that provide insight into the issues addressed by this research. Included are work theorists, feminist theories and critical management studies. I draw upon these theories to develop a theoretical framework for this study.

#### Theories of Work

Theorists of work have written that there is continual conflict between the innate desire to be fulfilled through work and the inability to achieve this desire in the highly specialized jobs that have developed in advanced capitalism. Marx describes the “alienation of labor” as an inevitable consequence of the capitalist system, which, at the time of his writing, had progressed to industrialization. Work theorists also express various forms of Marx’s theory of man as a “species being” who distinguishes himself from animals through his conscious life activity which is “productive life,” or “life creating life” (Leacock 1972).

Work theorist De Man stated further that there is a *duty* of labor in society, while Pope John Paul II believed that work is central to both the moral and secular life of man (Applebaum 1992). According to Bergson, the effects of work “bestow upon man feelings which elevate him, making him rise in every direction, enlarging his horizons as though the grip of intelligence upon matter and the consequence of work within the worker were even more important than the work itself . . . man, in making his world, makes himself” (Applebaum 1992:474,476). In de Man’s book, *Joy in Work*, he says that “workers can find joy in work when they are gaining knowledge from their jobs. . . . working in groups can provide opportunities for inventing new methods of organization and work management” (Applebaum 1992:479).

Regarding women, Pope John Paul II wrote “It is fitting that [women] should be able to fulfill their tasks in accordance with their own nature, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable, but also without lack of respect for their family aspirations and for the specific role in contributing, together with men, to the good of society” (Applebaum 1992:510).

Leacock’s introduction to Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* presents his theory that private property led to the nuclear family which in turn separated women from their support systems and made them dependent on men. In Leacock’s opinion, this made women “virtual slaves.” The nuclear family was necessary so that property can be owned by individuals and inherited within families (Leacock 1972). Prior to this system, Engels believed, a more egalitarian system existed based on women as equal providers. This dependence of women on men has persisted and, since

the work that women do in the household is not paid, it is de-valued by the capitalist system.

Leacock takes a more theoretical view of the responsibility of women for the reproduction of labor within the household and provides the historical basis from which women assumed this responsibility. Reproduction here can be defined as the “replenishing” or “rejuvenating” of labor, providing the paid laborer with food, shelter and rest so that he (or she) can return to the workplace. The capitalists do not have to bear this cost; it is borne within the household, i.e. the person (often the housewife) performing the work is not paid in wages. The nuclear family ideology is what has led women to assume the responsibility for this work (Leacock 1972).

*Sunbelt Working Mothers* provides an update on this theory by describing what happens when the primary provider of this reproduction of labor joins the paid labor force (Zavella 1993). The work within the home still must be done; in fact, the labor of two workers must now be reproduced. One strategy for dealing with this is the sharing of tasks between the husband and wife (Zavella 1993). For childcare, strategies include turning outside the nuclear family to extended kin and friendship networks (Gonzales and Lamphere 1993), or purchasing this work on the market (Zavella and Gonzales 1993).

Zavella and Gonzales (1993) point out that the debate is still centered on mothers’ employment versus mothering, not fathers’ employment versus fathering. This is perhaps the most important evidence of the continued prevalence of the inequality that was created by the nuclear family. It also causes the formerly non-valued work of the housewife to be valued by the system either through purchasing its replacement on the market or negotiating it from the husband through exchange of the wife’s paid labor. In

both cases, the value of the work can no longer be ignored. Leacock feels that this has done more to further the cause of women's rights than the feminist movement because it has forced the discussion of society's responsibility for childcare (Leacock 1972).

### Feminist Theories

Feminist Catharine MacKinnon's dominance theory dates to the 1970s; she stated that male dominance is "perhaps the most pervasive and tenacious system of power in history . . . it is metaphysically nearly perfect" (Harris 1995:256). Although the dominance theoretical view has been instrumental in legal thinking regarding rape, sexual harassment and pornography, critics consider it both essentializing and condescending to women, as it presumes they have no the ability to make independent choices within such a patriarchal system (Levit and Verchick 2006). MacKinnon has also been criticized for shifting the focus away from inequality in the workplace and family relationships (Williams 2000).

Feminists in the 1970s and 80s attempted to create egalitarian organizations, without hierarchy, rather than work within the current structure of organizations. Their goal was to show that there were other structures possible, but few such organizations survived (Acker 1990). In 1982, Carol Gilligan published *In a Different Voice*, which focused a developing split within feminism between "sameness" and "difference" theorists. The early second-wave feminists argued that men and women were the same and therefore should be treated equally, while Gilligan proposed that women are different and required special treatment, the most obvious being maternity leaves. Gilligan's view linked women with an "ethic of care," which still resonates in arguments that women lead differently, are more team oriented and collaborative. The popular media picked up this

viewpoint when *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* was published in 1992 and does not seem ready to abandon it, despite research to the contrary, partly because even women accept this view as truth (Williams 2000:179-184; Gray 1992; Gilligan 1982). A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* confirmed this and went further to report that when women fail to live up to the stereotype of being supportive in the workplace, their performance is rated poorly, while men viewed as unsupportive did not see such a decline in performance evaluation (Hymowitz 2005).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal work, *Men and Women of the Corporation* was published in 1977 (and updated in 1993) based on her years spent inside one of America's largest corporations (Kanter 1993). She described the "individual" model of work behavior that was prevalent at that time, "an assumption that the factors producing inequities at work are somehow carried inside the individual person" (Kanter 1993:261). She challenged this assumption. In her model, "responses to work are a function of basic structural issues such as constraints imposed by roles and the effect of opportunity, power, and numbers" (Kanter 1993:261). The focus must move from changing the women to changing the organization.

The individual model also assumes that people come to the organization a certain way to fit a certain job. Kanter's work showed that "to a very large degree, organizations make their workers into who they are" (Kanter 1993:263). She also discusses the need for trust in managerial roles and how this need has perpetuated the dominance of white males in leadership positions. She refers to this as "the human tendency for managers to pick those with whom they feel most comfortable to serve as confidantes or trusted aides . . .



especially in important, higher level jobs . . . the sometimes-unconscious bias toward people resembling those already in leadership positions” (Kanter 1993:316).

As an intervention, Kanter proposed modification of the way systems of work are organized. But in the 1993 update to her book, she states that “the structural variables that determined success . . . in the 1970s are still relevant to the 1990s” (Kanter 1993:289). She challenged the updated approach to the individual model which attempted to show that women are not only different, but somehow better, a manifestation of the “difference feminism” of Carol Gilligan, discussed above. Kanter referred back to her original study which showed that “when men and women are in similar situations, operating under similar expectations, they tend to behave in similar ways” (Kanter 1993:312).

In 1990, sociologist Joan Acker said this of Kanter’s book: “Moss Kanter sets out to show that gender differences in organizational behavior are due to structure rather than to characteristics of women and men as individuals . . . in spite of these insights, organizational structure, not gender, is the focus of Moss Kanter’s analysis” (Acker 1990:143). Acker is more concerned with the construction of gender, which was raised by Kanter, but not full developed (according to Acker). She describes organizations as “gendered,” in contrast to prior theoretical views of them as “gender neutral.” Being “gendered” means that “advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identities are patterned through and in terms of, distinctions between what is constructed as male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker 1990:146).

Acker further theorized that cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced within the workplace. She called for changing the focus of feminist research of organizations to one in which it is understood that assumptions about gender “underlie the documents and contracts used to construct [them]” (Acker 1990:139). For example, “. . . men’s bodies, sexuality, and relationships to procreation and paid work are subsumed in the image of the worker” (Acker 1990:139). Acker identified five sets of gendering processes at work in organizations: formal practices and policies, informal work practices (which forms of work are recognized and valued), the organization’s symbols and images, everyday social interactions, and people’s internalizations and expressions of their gender identities.

As an example of formal practices, she cites the job description. When job descriptions are written and placed within the corporate hierarchy, they are designed around the male worker whose “life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children” (Acker 1990:149). Since women are presumed to have family responsibilities, they rarely fit the requirements of the job; “the concept ‘a job’ is thus implicitly a gendered concept even though organizational logic presents it as gender neutral . . . [it] assume[s] a particular gendered organization of domestic life” (Acker 1990:149).

Acker refers to this as “hegemonic masculinity,” which is portrayed in the organization’s leadership ideal of a “strong, technically competent, authoritative leader who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family, and has his emotions under control” (Acker 1990:153). As further evidence of hegemonic masculinity and the reproduction of gender in organizations, Acker presents an example of everyday social interactions, “all

male play groups,” where men talk of sports and sex (“boy talk”). These are “symbolic expressions of male dominance [and] also act as significant controls over women in work organizations,” because it excludes them from the place in which bonding occurs (Acker 1990:153).

Bird (1996) did a qualitative study of men aged 26-50 in the early 1990s in an academic community and found that when they are in all male groups in social settings, the men conformed to these accepted patterns of masculinity: emotional detachment, competition and sexual objectification of women. All of these behaviors were considered to be male behaviors, not female behaviors and *better* than female behaviors. Even those men who claimed they did not subscribe to these beliefs and would prefer to act differently, would not challenge the behavior norms while in the all male group. This behavior helps to perpetuate “hegemonic masculinity,” which Bird defines by quoting Connell: “the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men’s dominance over women” (Connell 1987).

In a 1996 organization studies book, Calas and Smircich called for the use of feminist theories to make their field more inclusive. Prior research in this field was “. . . by men, for men and about men” (Calas and Smircich 1996:222). As a result, studies of women in management were focused on how unusual it was to see them there and “the majority of the women in management literature [was] still trying to demonstrate that women are people too” (Calas and Smircich 1996:223). The authors express their concern for the capacity of feminist theories being used at the time to “examine the taken-for-granted organizational conditions which more and more seem to advantage the few at the expense of the many” (Calas and Smircich 1996:242). They cite then recent

business publications as evidence that gender inequities were growing, but that they had become naturalized, and call on feminists to denaturalize them.

Calas and Smircich also provided a discussion of the different feminist approaches and how they might relate to the study of organizations. Their typology begins with “liberal” feminism with roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and includes what they term “radical” (what MacKinnon called dominance), “psychoanalytic,” “Marxist,” “socialist,” “poststructuralist/postmodern,” and “third world/(post) colonial” feminisms. All are critical theories, but they vary in the degree of their critique “leading to agendas that range from ‘reforming’ organizations; to ‘transforming’ organizations *and* society; to transforming our prior understanding of what constitutes knowledge/theory/practice” (Calas and Smircich 1996:219).

The “socialist” feminists, as described by Calas and Smircich, take issue with the lack of attention to patriarchy in Marxism, and the lack of materialism in radical and psychoanalytic feminism. They view gender as socially constructed, but also as a dynamic concept “in both processual and material ways” (Calas and Smircich 1996:232). Socialist feminism has its intellectual roots in the 1970s women’s liberation movement and attempts to “synthesize” Marxist, psychoanalytic and radical feminisms. Their goal is a society in which “all systems of private/public oppression based on sex, gender, race, class, etc.,” are eliminated and social relations are transformed. Case studies and ethnographies are their favored research methods and they choose to “focus on micro-social activities as they connect to macro-social processes” (Calas and Smircich 1996:220-221).

For the study of organizations, socialist feminists believe that the focus must be broader than the organization, it must include the family and society; gender relations in the private sphere impact those within the workplace. As Marxian theorists have shown, the separation of the public and private was brought about by industrialization, which resulted in a gendered structure of work (the sexual division of labor) and “the unequal, and persistent sex-based patterns of employment” (Calas and Smircich 1996:234).

In addition to this structural pattern, “gendering” of organizations occurs through use of symbols and images that lead to inequalities, such as images of the “ideal” employee, the top manager, and the organization “hero,” all of which “tend to be those of forceful masculinity” (Calas and Smircich 1996:234). Calas and Smircich also discuss the Marxian view of women as “the hidden providers in the economy, reproducing labor by doing the work at home . . . [which] also causes the persistence of the inequality at work” (Calas and Smircich 1996:234-235). But they admit that the remedies envisioned by socialist feminist seem to be “naïve and utopic,” as they call for a “complete restructuring” of society that they feel is unlikely (Calas and Smircich 1996:244). This theoretical view, however, has proven useful for applied research with less radical goals (e.g. Meyerson and Kolb, below).

Feminist legal theorists have added “pragmatic feminism” to the typology, an approach that attempts to consider each case of discrimination within its own context, seeking the best resolution from what are accepted as less than ideal options (Levit and Verchick 2006:34). The legal theorists also emphasize the need for unmasking patriarchy and bias, while recognizing that bias, especially structural bias in institutions may not be intentional (Levit and Verchick 2006). They suggest that such subtle bias as “not having

lunch or playing racquetball with a supervisor, and then not being considered as ‘a team player,’” has helped to create and perpetuate the glass ceiling (Levit and Verchick 2006:74). These behaviors are often difficult to recognize, at least by the men, as forms of bias. Because it is so invisible, women also buy into the system as it is, looking for ways to change their own behavior, rather than being interested in understanding it as institutionalized discrimination (Levit and Verchick 2006).

Joan Williams introduced “reconstructive feminism,” in her 2000 book *Unbending Gender*, in which she questions the need for the “ideal worker” norm (Williams 2000). The workplace has been built around such workers, who are available for work continuously and full time because they have no responsibility for housework or childcare (Levit and Verchick 2006). In executive and professional positions, the ideal worker must be available to work fifty to seventy hours per week and be able to travel and relocate. In William’s view, this constitutes discrimination against women, since society continues to expect them to take full responsibility for “family work” (Williams 2000:5). Employee benefits, including health insurance, are also tied to “ideal,” full-time workers, limiting the options for part-time work.

The feminists of the 1960s demanded access to jobs and demanded that men share in the housework, but did not question the “ideal worker” as someone with “immunity from family work.” Although men now have the benefit of a second income in their households, they have not accepted an equal share of this family work. If women have failed as ideal workers, Williams believes it is because husbands are not doing “family work.” Kanter also discusses the fact that work hours have increased and both parents are unhappy when they don’t have enough time to spend with their children but, “if child

care worries are increasingly shared by men and women, child care work is not. Women still do the bulk of all household tasks” (Kanter 1993:321). Williams acknowledges that both men and women are “caught in force fields that suck them back toward ideal worker and marginalized caregiver roles” (Williams 2000:276).

Williams criticizes other feminists for their recent focus (in the 1990s) on only two themes, violence against women and gay issues. She calls for moving the focus to changing “the way we organize work” both in the workplace and in the family. The current structure of men being in the workplace while women are at home with family responsibilities dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a gender system that Williams terms “domesticity.” Prior to this time, when their work kept them close to home, men were responsible for raising children because they were considered morally superior to women. Although domesticity was an improvement over this more condescending form of patriarchy, the result has been new descriptions of the “true nature” of both women and men, and success is now defined as the “self made man.” This, and the goal of “being a good provider,” is still prevalent for the male identity, and women still express their support for men’s careers ahead of their own. A study in 1995 found that 88 percent of women believed it was their primary responsibility to take care of the family. Utilizing Bourdieu’s model of the *habitus*, Williams tells us that this move into domesticity represents “embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history” (Williams 2000:38).

Here is how Williams describes the alternatives available to women under the current system, “domesticity:”

They can perform as ideal workers without the flow of family work and other privileges male ideal workers enjoy. This is not equality. Or they can take dead-end mommy-track jobs or “women’s work.” That is not equality either. A system that allows only these two alternatives is one that discriminates against women [Williams 2000:39].

The statistics that reveal increases in self-employment of women as well as in women-owned business “dramatize the pent-up productivity that can emerge if work is restructured to eliminate the traditional ideal worker norm” (Williams 2000:83).

Williams also believes that the system discriminates against men, who want to work less and have more personal time and time for their families, but don’t, because to do so would cause them to be marginalized, as women are in the workplace. They also are held accountable to the “provider” model, with 90 percent of top male managers having non-working spouses and children at home. The fact that men who stay home as primary caregivers have been labeled “Mr. Moms” reveals the marginalization of the male doing “family” work. Williams believes this label “deflects attention from the fact that men nurture, by coding any man who nurtures as a woman” (Williams 2000:190). She calls for feminists to form alliances with men and “identify their enemy as the current construction of gender and abuse of male power, not as men” (Williams 2000:262).

The current system within the workplace is also, according to Williams, inefficient, both because women are underutilized and because everyone is overworked, due to increasing work hours. She feels that the “people who currently rise to the top are not necessarily the most competent; they are the small minority of people ready, willing and able to work eighty hours a week” (Williams 2000:93). Kanter also addressed this and went further to say that:



There is a danger in excluding from the jobs high in power those for whom family is a priority. This could reinforce a traditional vicious cycle: Managers that rise to gain influence over people's lives are those who place the least priority on family and therefore are least likely to understand the realities of working parents' lives. Working parents - and perhaps, mostly women - are thereby kept out of power [Kanter 1993:322].

Williams outlines three "axes for intervention," which she proposes could lead to change. For the first axis, gender redistribution of housework, she updates the statistics that show most housework and childcare is done by women. This must be taken into account when distributing assets and the husband's income upon divorce, since this work by the wife has allowed him to function as the ideal worker, leading to higher income levels. She feels that this will help to lift women out of the poverty that is caused by our society's marginalization of their caregiver roles. In addition, she calls for a redistribution of the "family" work, but does not feel it can be done in isolation from the workplace. "As long as employers are free to marginalize anyone who does not perform as an ideal worker . . . most men feel as if they have little choice but to resist demands to share equally in housework" (Williams 2000:235).

Williams' second axis is the reconfiguration of public and private spheres. For this argument she cites examples from primarily European countries where the government provides paid family leave and supports quality childcare options. When it was seen that men did not take the paid leave that was offered them, Norway created "daddy days," that were only available to men (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006). But even Williams does not see U.S. public policy moving towards large social programs like parental leave or government funded childcare in the near term. Most of her recommendations revolve around her third axis, redistributing entitlements between

employers and employees. It is here that she challenges the employers' right to expect all workers to perform as "ideal," with no responsibilities other than their jobs. Williams is hopeful that feminists can leverage the current rhetoric around "family values" to reduce the marginalization of caregivers in the workplace. More equitable distribution of family work could follow, as men are more willing to take on caregiving when it does not reduce their earning potential at work. Most importantly, Williams calls on feminists to give up the sameness/difference debate and focus instead on these potential axes of intervention. Her admonition to feminists: "Don't fight with your friends" (Williams 2000:241).

A team of researchers from the Center for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons Graduate School of Management has published the results of what they say is the first attempt to *apply* feminist organization theory in an action research project with the express goal of advancing gender equity. Although the project ultimately was abandoned, they developed a framework for using feminist theory in both the study of organizations and the practice of organizational change, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Here is how they describe it:

Our theory of gender was based in the notion that gender inequities in organizations are rooted in taken-for-granted assumptions, values, and practices that systematically accord power and privilege to certain groups of men at the expense of women and other men. We wanted to transform work and its relation to other aspects of people's lives in ways that would fundamentally alter power relations in organizations and make them more equitable [Meyerson and Kolb 2000:554].

Utilizing the typology outlined by Calas and Smircich (1996) and described above, this research is grounded in a combination of socialist and post-structuralist feminism. Specifically,

Insofar as we attend to the material and symbolic ordering of everyday life, our approach is similar to a socialist feminist theoretical position; because we view gender as an ongoing accomplishment, however, both product and producer of knowledge systems, identities, and social structure, our approach also draws from poststructuralist feminism [Ely and Meyerson 2000:606].

They describe four frameworks that have been used for understanding gender in organizations, which parallel the various forms of diversity initiatives over time. They are frame one: equip the woman, frame two: create equal opportunity, frame three: value difference, and frame four: resisting and revising the dominant discourse. They have chosen to work within the fourth frame, concluding that the earlier frames have failed to achieve gender equity and that interventions tried using them would have been more effective if applied using the fourth frame (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

The definition of gender in this “fourth frame” is more complex than in the others; it is not just about women, nor just about discrimination. It considers gender to be socially constructed and operating as “an axis of power, an organizing principle that shapes social structure, identities and knowledge” and that it is “created and sustained through formal and informal social processes institutionalized in organizations” (Meyerson and Kolb 2000:563).

As part of their action research, they utilized a “dual agenda,” working both to overcome gender inequalities and to improve the effectiveness of processes within the organization. They believe that “gendered” organizations are less effective (Ely and Meyerson 2000). In addition to working to understand how organizations operate, their method includes working with employees to identify “possible experiments – concrete changes in work practices that have the potential to interrupt gendering processes and at the same time improve work effectiveness” (Meyerson and Kolb 2000:566).

Meyerson and Kolb (2000) say it is not enough to ask how many women have moved up, instead, researchers must ask: “how does the organization do its work? What is valued? What is ignored? And in what ways do these taken-for-granted aspects of the organization undermine women’s advancement prospects and, at the same time, compromise the organizations effectiveness?” (Meyerson and Kolb 2000:591). As an example, in a corporate office where they conducted research, they found that a leadership strategy of “heroics” was the most highly valued, but “heroic women were often vilified as ‘too aggressive.’” Commenting on this finding, Acker (2000) says: “I suspect that these gendered identities were important in maintaining commitment to the organization and that, although clearly dysfunctional from the standpoint of the researcher-activist these identities were not dysfunctional for the male individuals who adopted them” (Acker 2000:631).

Commenting further on the Simmons project, Acker has said:

The view of organizations as gender neutral facilitates an individualistic view of relative success, influence and power - the view that people succeed because of superior abilities, dedication, and performance. . . . many women do not want to participate in [projects like this] because they do not want to be identified as whiners and losers; they want to be seen as making it on the basis of their own capacities [Acker 2000:631].

This is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Olsson (2000) confirmed the pervasiveness of “heroic masculinity” in her study of workplaces in New Zealand. She describes it as “the traditional and hierarchical form of management, which depicts executives as solitary (male) heroes engaged in unending trials of endurance” (Olsson 2000:296). Olsson also found that the male executives in New Zealand were also

uncomfortable with this “heroic toughness” being exhibited by women. Women were not allowed to be too much like men, but could not be too different.

Poggio (2000) did a qualitative study of men and women working in the same jobs in Italy. She takes a symbolic interactionist view that, since gender is constructed by organizational culture, it can change if the business wants it to change. Using discourse analysis, she found that although the organizations ranged from very male-dominated (construction industry) to more egalitarian (high tech), “every organization . . . exhibits gender meanings and symbols which are taken for granted, produced and utilized in routine work interaction” (Poggio 2000:384). She did find that the high tech organizations were more open to women in positions of responsibility, and that younger and more highly educated men were more open to different forms of organization as well as different models of parental responsibility. Poggio feels strongly that organizations must change to increase gender equity and that they have a moral responsibility for the way that gender is constructed within them.

A recent report from the Center for WorkLife Law builds on Joan Williams’ theories of reconstructive feminism discussed above. Stories in the media regarding what the *New York Times* named “The Opt Out Revolution” in 2003 were reviewed. Articles between 1980 and 2006 about women leaving the workplace to stay at home with their children revealed a strong bias towards portraying this “revolution” as the personal choice of women. The Center’s goal in issuing its report was to point out this media bias, present statistics to refute it, and provide information that the media can use to properly report the real story, that the women who are leaving do so because the workplace continues to be structured around an ideal worker, as discussed above, and women

continue to be marginalized because of their societal roles as family caregivers. Both men's participation in family work and women's movement into the workplace have stalled. Men are also beginning to leave the workplace because it is taking up more and more of their time, and younger workers are challenging the notion that they must be committed to their jobs around the clock (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006).

The Center's analysis revealed that "intensive mothering" is now the norm for childcare, requiring full time attention to raise "America's most protected, overwatched generation ever" (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006:27). The women who have "opted out" also report being bored, lonely and losing their identities, often resulting in depression. The similarities here to the findings discussed above of Betty Friedan regarding the homemakers of the 1950s are troubling.

#### Critical Management Studies

Critical management studies began in Britain in the 1990s, but the use of critical theory in business has been debated. Some consider it difficult to apply critical tools without them being co-opted by management to further business aims. This seems to contradict the point of critical theory, which presumes that there is something wrong that needs to be changed. Critics also feel that not all uses of critical theory in management have been done well. Consequently, there has been no agreement on what critical theory truly *is* within management science (Fournier and Grey 2000).

British management researchers Fournier and Grey (2000) use the example of gender to illustrate the difference between critical and non-critical work. "Whilst non-critical work takes gender as a 'given' repository of differences, critical perspective may concentrate on the making of gender differences and the ways in which organizational

practices, including equal opportunity practices, are implicated in the reproduction of genders power relations” (Fournier and Grey 2000:17). They use the elements of the business case for diversity (gender inequality as a wasted resource) as an example of a non-critical approach, with working to denaturalize gender being the approach they recommend to be taken by critical management studies.

Jones and Stablein (2006) address this evolving research area and conclude that it is appropriate for the study of workplace diversity because it would “acknowledge a complex web of economic, social and political forces that constitute the positions of the dominant and marginally diverse employees, managers, interested academics and associated workplace and research practices” (Jones and Stablein 2006:149). They provides us with the statement of the Critical Management Studies Interest Group of the Academy of Management:

Our premise is that structural features of contemporary society, such as the profit imperative, patriarchy, racial inequality and ecological irresponsibility often turn organizations into instruments of domination and exploitation. Driven by a shared desire to changes this situation, we aim in our research, teaching, and practice to develop critical interpretations of management and society and to generate radical alternatives [Academy of Management 2006].

Using this approach, Jones and Stablein tell us that feminist post-structuralist researchers are concerned with the definitions being given to “same” and “different” in diversity work and cautions that all categories should be viewed skeptically since they are chosen within the power system. They review two articles on workplace diversity and conclude that the concept of management of diversity “is no more than the seductive veneer of a fundamentally assimilationist capitalism,” since the “business objectives are

taken as a given” (i.e. the business case)(Jones and Stablein 2006:153-154)). Their view is very similar to that of Avery Gordon, discussed above.

Meyerson and Kolb (2006) discuss “tempered radicals,” people in inside organizations that also identify with a social cause and can help bring about change from within. They conclude by asserting that critical theorists can also be advocates for social change and that diversity work allows us to bring social change to workplaces, which can lead to social change on a wider scale.

#### A theoretical framework for this study

I consider this research to be primarily a socialist feminist work as defined by Calas and Smircich, built on the belief that gender is socially constructed, both inside and outside of organizations (Acker 1990). The taken-for-granted nature of the gender roles in the workplace results in a system of privilege that advantages certain white males (Calas and Smircich 1996). This privilege is invisible to the white males in power and, to a great extent, to females and other males.

Our culture has naturalized the sex roles both in the workplace and in the home, resulting in women being primarily responsible for “family” work (Williams 2000; Zavella 1993). This Marxian concept, the reproduction of labor has led to a workplace designed around “ideal workers” who have no responsibility for family work (Leacock 1972; Williams 2000). In most cases the only people that meet this ideal are men who have non-working wives. Even women who are childless and unmarried are held to the stereotypes of the caregiver that follow the responsibility for family work.

Also naturalized in the workplace, as it is in American society as a whole, is the “individual” model, which says that people succeed or fail on their own merits (Kanter



1993). This process is undermined in the “gendered” organization by “hegemonic masculinity,” the value that business places on the masculine (Acker 1990; Hearn and Collinson 2006). Hegemonic masculinity can be seen in the informal processes within organizations. A feminist post-structuralist lens unmasks the symbols that perpetuate this. The gendering process can also be seen to disadvantage men because it requires them to fulfill the role of the provider and of the “heroic masculine” (Williams 2000; Olsson 2000).

Both men and women also suffer from barriers to the “joy of work” that exist in today’s corporations (Applebaum 1992). Although Marx said that industrialization alienated labor, de Man believed that workers could still achieve satisfaction through work that allows them to gain knowledge and invent new ways of work; the executive level work done by the women in this study should allow them to achieve this goal (Applebaum 1992). In addition to seeking joy in work, humans create themselves through it, and women should not be denied this basic human need (Leacock 1972; Friedan 1963). The gendered organization inhibits the ability of women to do so and the “toxic” workplace of today makes it more difficult for women and men alike.

Because I am an applied researcher, I strive to develop recommendations that can be implemented within workplaces as they exist today. This is a “pragmatic” feminist view (Levit and Verchick 2006), and acknowledges that what I propose may be merely the best choice among the poor choices available. However, I do not believe that the workplace is the only location for intervention; we must change the way work is shared and organized both in organizations and in the family (Calas and Smircich 1996). This is the view of “reconstructive” feminism (Williams 2000). Diversity initiatives are one

possible intervention, and this use of critical theory will allow me to evaluate their potential effectiveness (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

Gender is so pervasive and so much a part of well-established power structures, that it is difficult to address in the workplace. Coleman and Rippin acknowledged that “raising issues of gender in organizations appears to be introducing something that did not previously exist” (Coleman and Rippin 2000). In addition, those in power do not have to address issues of privilege and have no real motivation to acknowledge its existence (Acker 2000). “It is also evident that until it is realized that the symbolic order of gender is functional to an organization’s self-preservation, it will be difficult to change” (Poggio 2000:400).

## **Method and Analysis**

The principal goal of my research was to evaluate the effectiveness of diversity initiatives in reducing discrimination against women in the workplace. My primary interest is in assessing the potential of such initiatives to change the “secondary” culture in businesses (Jordan 2003) to improve equality of opportunity. Through my work, I hoped to make recommendations regarding the best practices for diversity initiatives, to the extent that they address gender.

As an ethnographic researcher, I expected, and indeed found, that the direction of my research would change as it progressed. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) tell us that the interview is a process and my research questions evolved and changed as the interviews unfolded. Specifically, my data revealed much more about how gender is constructed in the workplace than about how diversity initiatives operate. Consequently, my analysis changed from one of an interactionist looking for culture change (through diversity initiatives) to that of a critical theorist revealing the processes by which gender is constructed and reproduced in organizations, and how this limits the career potential of women.

The possibility of diversity initiatives impacting this process was still considered, and this continues to be an applied project. As Delgado responded to criticism of why critical race theorists are not “down in the trenches, helping activists deal problems,”

“ . . . theory and practice must work together” (Delgado and Stefancic 2001:93).

Organizational studies researchers have also proclaimed the need for interventions to address patriarchy, “not as some abstract structural force but as practiced in organizations around us, and of which we are part” (Hearn 2000:610).

I collected life stories to construct an oral history of the first generation of executive women in corporations in the United States, a history created by the intersection of ten individual lives around a single topic. In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with thirteen women over a period of four months. Thurlow, et al. discuss the usefulness of feminist qualitative research in the diversity arena, because it allows researchers to gain “insights into how discrimination develops and is maintained . . . (to) develop appropriate change strategies” (Thurlow, Mills, and Mills 2006:218). They advocate for use of a holistic perspective and mention the benefit of a life history approach “for understanding the experiences that influence women’s career choices and opportunities” (Thurlow, Mills, and Mills 2006:225).

Because I was interested in analyzing what actually occurs on the inside of corporations at the highest levels, I did not feel that a survey was appropriate. I did not think that answering survey questions would reveal actual experiences, nor give me time to build rapport so that the women would be comfortable sharing their personal stories and thoughts. I agree with Benschop (2006) that “large scale survey data typically cannot take into account the complexity and social embeddedness of the choice process that qualitative interviews can” (Benschop 2006). Calas has said that socialist feminism “favors case study methods that make visible the informal and invisible processes of

segregation which remain inaccessible to those who favor survey research” (Calas and Smircich 1996:234).

The time required for this research method necessitates that the sample size be kept small. Despite this fact, I found redundancy in the types of situations that the women described, and I do not feel that a larger sample was needed. My results cannot be generalized to a larger population, but I feel they provide a more accurate picture of what is going on inside the corporations where these women worked than would the results of a survey. They answer why and how where a survey would only tell us what. Even diversity researchers at the Harvard Business School have begun advocating the use of ethnographic methods for evaluation of diversity initiatives (Thomas and Ely 2001), and diversity practitioners have begun to see that the issues being addressed by these programs are not easily translated into numerical goals and measurements.

But the use of interview data is not without limitations. There is bias involved in the interview, “an interactive process” that involves sharing of information (Thurlow, Mills, and Mills 2006:226). The researcher cannot be separated from this process, nor can the personal life situation of the subject. Some of the women interviewed were undergoing life transitions, trying to define the next chapter of their careers and personal lives and these influences must be considered as they impact the topics that the individual women chose to discuss and the “lens” each chose to use.

Regarding myself as the researcher, I experienced the difficulties of being a “native anthropologist,” as described by Cheryl Rodriguez, who cautions that “research conducted in our own environs challenges us to deconstruct notions of familiarity in that we are required to gaze deeper into the strangeness of everyday realities we take for

granted” (Rodriguez 2001). I spent over twenty years in corporate and professional service firms and faced many of the issues that my interviewees discussed. Although I often had experiences that I would have revealed if this had been a social conversation, I attempted to remain neutral and let the women’s stories unfold without my intervention. This was not an easy accomplishment, and some of the data collected had to be discarded from the analysis when I realized the woman was merely agreeing with me, using my words to describe a situation. This did not happen often, however, and I improved my role as neutral observer over the course of the research. Thurlow et al. feel that “the researcher’s experiences and involvement in the research process [can be] seen as resources, rather than ‘problems’ to be overcome in the research process,” but that we need to recognize and “reflect upon” our involvement (Thurlow, Mills, and Mills 2006:231). I believe that I have done this.

By studying successful women in the corporate world, I am “studying up” as defined by Laura Nader (1972). Nader believes that the ethics for studying up may differ from more traditional studying “down,” because of the broad public impact of the institutions that we study. She also admits that the ethical dilemmas may be greater (or at least more difficult to face) when studying power structures in our own culture than when studying (and then criticizing) those far away (Nader 1972). Having left the corporate workplace twelve years before the research began, the difficulty of seeing through taken-for-granted assumptions was not as great as it clearly was for most of my subjects. In addition, I utilized the socialist feminist viewpoints described above to review the data, always attempting to keep an open mind and not fall back on how I would have interpreted situations when I was part of a corporation. My viewpoints and opinions

regarding the workplace have changed dramatically since my tenure as a corporate officer, but I was still very aware that the workplace culture is one which has become part of who I am and which I sometimes have difficulty viewing objectively.

Although I have expanded my project to critique the gendering processes in the workplace, my primary research question has not changed: Do today's corporate diversity initiatives have the potential to change the secondary culture within organizations and, thereby, to increase opportunities for women? Employment discrimination against women is my dependent domain and is represented by the fact that women are choosing to leave successful careers. The independent domains are the reasons that these women choose to leave, of which the gendering of organizations may be one, even if this process is transparent to the women themselves. Diversity initiatives are a mitigating domain and I wish to determine if they can have enough impact on the independent domains, including the gendering processes, to allow women like those that I interviewed to stay and succeed. My formative theory is that such initiatives *can* change both the structure of organizations and the way in which the individuals within them interact (through reduction of prejudice and stereotyping) and through these changes increase opportunity for women, thereby reducing discrimination.

Women who have achieved a high level of "success," as it is defined in the business world (position, power, income) were interviewed. Initially, I defined "success" as holding a position that has managerial responsibility over other managers, oversight of a budget of at least \$5 million and a compensation package worth at least \$150,000 annually. Since the women worked in various roles and in different industries, it was difficult to hold to these specific criteria. The women I ultimately selected had

held director, vice president or senior vice president positions, were all highly compensated (in excess of \$100,000) and had significant impact on the corporations in which they worked. This was determined judgmentally, based on my conversations with them prior to beginning the interviews. I provided them with a description of this criteria which also allowed them to self-select into the study.

Thirteen women who appeared to meet this profile were identified through personal networking and referrals. I started by asking female friends and colleagues of mine, who are in executive positions now, or have been in the past, to refer women whom they knew who fit my criteria. They made introductions either by phone or by E-mail and then I contacted each woman directly and shared a brief overview of my research (Appendix A). All but one woman who was referred responded and I stopped contacting referrals after I had what I felt were thirteen good candidates (my original goal was ten).

I chose not to interview anyone that I knew personally, to avoid confusing what I already knew about their lives and careers with what they chose to tell me through the interview process. I had met two of the women on a few social occasions but had never discussed their careers with them prior to this research. I eliminated three women from the analysis portion of this project, although I conducted a complete set of interviews for all thirteen women. The three were eliminated because they did not actually meet my criteria. Two did not hold positions that had enough authority or responsibility to qualify. The third woman told me that she left her position not because of any dissatisfaction, but as part of a long-held plan to retire at 55. She also presented a very different case history from the other women, having waited until her child was grown to join the workforce and never having completed college. Although her career is a fascinating story in itself, I felt



that it was an aberration and, therefore, it was excluded. I will include some stories from these three women in the results, as they fit, but their interviews were not included in the analysis process.

All ten of the women included in the analysis are individuals who have chosen to give up their careers, and are either self-employed or have plans to be in the near future. Although I originally planned to split my sample between women who entered the workforce in the 1970s (baby boomers) and younger women who followed them (Generation X), all of the women in the study are technically baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). They do span a significant period of time, though, some entering the workforce in the 1970s and others as late as 1987. Because I wanted women who had reached a certain level of power within an organization, they generally needed to be older than the oldest Gen-Xers. My network is also older, and I did not have any women under age forty referred. The women are also all white, at least partly because the population of women at executive levels is still predominantly white. I believe that the lack of “diversity,” both in ethnicity and age, in my study is actually helpful. Since my sample size is so small it would be difficult to have a reasonable number of any one segment, and the effects of gender would be impossible to separate from the effects of age or race/ethnicity.

I originally wanted to give preference to women who had worked in organizations that have invested significantly in diversity initiatives or that have been given awards for achievement in workplace diversity. I did not actually screen for this, but feel that I have a good representation of large and small companies with some who have had active programs. The women that worked in those companies were still only peripherally aware

of these programs, so I do not feel that I missed anything by not looking for more women representing such companies. Basic demographic information about the ten women whose stories were analyzed can be found in Table 1 (pseudonyms are used).

**Table 1: Demographics of Study Participants.**

<b>Career Demographics:</b>	Highest Position Held	Career began In	Corporate employment ended in	Years in Corporate
Barbara James	Director	1981	2003	22
Colleen Roberts	Director	1974	2005	31
Joyce Williams	Director	1987	1998	11
Judy Samuels	Vice President	1974	2001	27
Mary Anne Josephson	Director	1987	1998	11
Mary Charles	Director	1985	2004	19
Nancy Michaels	Senior Vice President	1985	2004	19
Patricia Alexander	Vice President	1987	2005	16
Pegge George	Senior Manager	1981	2003	22
Susan Thomas	Vice President	1977	1998	21
Average:		1982	2002	20

  

<b>Personal Demographics:</b>	Age in Fall 2005	Number of Children	Married Yes/No	Notes
Barbara James	46	2	Yes	
Colleen Roberts	54	0	No	(1)
Joyce Williams	40	2	Yes	(2)
Judy Samuels	54	0	No	(3)
Mary Anne Josephson	40	0	No	(4)
Mary Charles	43	3	Yes	
Nancy Michaels	46	2	Yes	
Patricia Alexander	41	2	Yes	(5)
Pegge George	46	2	Yes	
Susan Thomas	56	0	Yes	(6)
Average:	47	1.30		

## Notes:

(1) Colleen was married in the early years of her career.

(2) Joyce did not have children until she left her last corporate position.

(3) Judy was married briefly before her professional career began and remarried in March 2006.

(4) Mary Anne was married twice during the years of her corporate employment.

(5) Patricia was married in the early years of her career, was a single mother for several years, re-married in 2000 and has two stepchildren.

In total, the women were employed by over twenty-five companies, but most spent a significant portion of her career in one or two. In order to protect the identities of the women, I have not named the companies and have only indicated industries where it was important to the analysis. The companies range from very large, international corporations to regional, family-owned businesses, although all would qualify as “big” businesses, companies with over one thousand employees.

All of the women had some connection to Tampa, Florida, where I conducted the interviews, but they had worked in many different cities both in Florida and elsewhere. Several cities in the Midwest and Southeast are represented. One woman spent part of her career in the Northeast, as did two of the women interviewed but later eliminated. Although my sample size for any one city was extremely small (often only one), there was no evidence of a significant variance in the workplaces in different regions.

My primary research method was in-depth, open-ended interviews with each woman, over three sessions of approximately sixty minutes each. The interviews took place primarily in public spaces (coffee shops or restaurants) and occasionally in private homes or by telephone. During the first interview, I provided each woman with a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B) and gave her time to read it and ask questions. Two copies of the form were signed by me and by the interviewee. One copy was given to the interviewee and I have retained a copy, filed separately from other research documents, since they contain the women’s names. Included in the form, which was approved by the USF Institutional Review Board, was the fact that I would endeavor to the best of my ability to protect their identities. Each woman was given a pseudonym which was used in my fieldnotes and transcriptions and is used in this dissertation.

My research questions and the related interview questions and probes are summarized below:

**Research Question 1:** Why are successful women leaving their careers?

Interview questions:

- Tell me about your career path.
- Describe your highest-level position.
- Why did you decide to leave the organization?

Probe for work-life balance issues, complaints about the “old-boy” network, stress from trying to assimilate to male-dominated environments, corporate politics.

**Research Question 2:** What role does the secondary culture within corporations play in the ability or inability of women to succeed in their careers?

Interview questions:

- Tell me about the culture of the company or companies in which you worked.
- Did the culture impact your decision to leave?
- Do you think that corporate culture has changed over the past fifteen years?
- Do you think that corporate culture needs to change? Why?

Probe for understanding of the concept of culture, cultural constructs such as gender stereotypes, acceptance or rejection of the need to assimilate to male dominated culture.

**Research Question 3:** How does the structure within organizations impact the likelihood that women will stay and succeed in corporations?

Interview questions:

- Describe the structure (hierarchy, hiring and promotion policies, compliance with employment laws, etc) within your company.
- How flexible was the organization?
- Did the structure and flexibility of the organization impact your decision to leave?

Probe for bureaucracy and inflexibility, frustration with inability of company to adapt to diverse workforce.

**Research Question 4:** Can the theories and methods currently being used in diversity initiatives affect the secondary culture and structure of organizations in such a way that women will be able to fulfill their career aspirations?

Interview questions:

- Tell me about your experience with corporate diversity initiatives.

- How serious was (is) your company about diversity?
- Do you feel that diversity initiatives are money and time well spent?
- Can the theories and methods of diversity initiatives change the corporate culture?
- Can the theories and methods of diversity initiatives change the structure of corporations?

Probe for understanding of the theories and methods and connection of them to the issues identified in the previous questions.

In order to answer the last series of questions, the interviewees were provided with information about the theories and methods currently used by qualified diversity consultants. See Appendix C for a copy of the document that was provided to them in advance of their last interview.

The interviews were recorded (audio only) and transcribed for analysis. Schensul, et al., tell us that ethnographic theory “undergoes continuous redefinition throughout the life of the study” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:2), and my formative theory changed as the data from these interviews were analyzed. The ultimate aim in this analysis was to find patterns in the data, grounded theory from the data itself. I utilized NVivo software for the analysis and began by reviewing the first one-hour interview with each woman, which covered primarily research question one, above. I conducted this analysis, looking for “items” from the “bottom up” as described by LeCompte and Schensul (1999). Although I had some ideas of the items I was looking for, as described in the “probe for” section of the interview questions, I attempted to remain impartial and did not intentionally look for anything in particular. I just began coding as topics appeared in the transcriptions.

When I completed this process for the first interview with each of the ten women, I went back through them to see if codes that arose in later interviews were applicable to

those done first. I then reviewed each code (free node in NVivo) and eliminated or combined those with very few passages coded to them. A few nodes with small amounts of data were kept, if I felt they would be used more in subsequent interviews that addressed other research questions. When this was completed, I had 50 free nodes. After repeating the process for the second round of interviews, I had 107 nodes. I reduced this to 81 by combining and eliminating the ones that still had very little data, and I again went back through all of the interviews to see if nodes that came up in the latter review were applicable to those coded earlier.

To reduce the number of nodes for the analysis, I then went through a piling exercise. I began with a card for each of the 81 nodes and found that the data fell into 11 categories, plus an “other” category of information in very small nodes that I did not want to lose. I was able to combine some nodes inside of the 11 categories and eliminate some more of the lesser-used nodes, reducing to 52 free nodes.

The third round interviews were coded and 11 new nodes added. I did a final review of all 63 free nodes and eliminated or combined any with less than ten passages coded to them. This left 55 free nodes, including the “other” node, within 11 categories, which I felt was a reasonable number. I then utilized the NVivo tree function to group the nodes into three main trees with four sub-trees each. Within each sub-tree are between three and ten of the free nodes. This gave me the structure to report my results. The main trees are “the women,” “the workplace,” and “what’s wrong,” which are used as sub-sections of my results below.

I then reviewed the first sub-section, “the women,” looking for similarities and differences among the ten subjects to create a normative depiction of what I call the

“organization woman of the 1990s.” This follows the career as a social process, as described by LeCompte & Schensul. I was also reviewing for what they term “critical events,” in this case those that led to career change (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:181). Introductions of each woman were then written to summarize the careers that were being analyzed in the remainder of the results and to provide a “thick description” of the women and their careers.

During my review of the second sub-section, “the workplace,” I started to see evidence of the gendering process in organizations, as discussed above. In the analysis, I utilize the terminology that the women chose to describe this, but attempt to reveal the underlying processes that were almost always invisible to the men in the workplace and often to the women. At the same time, I continued to look for places for intervention, recommendations that could be made to the businesses or the women in them that might interrupt these processes and provide more equity in the workplace.

The third sub-section was originally designed to discuss the opinions of the subjects regarding both the relative benefit or detriment caused by “structure” within organizations and the usefulness of current methods used in diversity initiatives. Since the women had little knowledge of diversity initiatives and were not comfortable with the concept of “structure,” this evolved into a more generic “what’s wrong,” a collection of topics that might help to identify appropriate interventions.

In addition, I have created a specific subsection of results for their experiences with diversity initiatives, or lack thereof, since this was integral to my research questions. That section also includes a discussion of affirmative action programs, which I originally thought were no longer prevalent. When asked about diversity initiatives, many of the



women chose to talk about affirmative action, and I felt their experiences and opinions on that topic were important to this analysis. The women also were asked a more open-ended question of what needs to change or what might make a difference for equity in the workplace. Their responses are included in the “hopes for the future” subsection.

## Results

### The Women

In the 1950s, William H. Whyte, Jr. wrote “The Organization Man,” and provided us with a description of the stereotypical businessman of that era (Whyte Jr. 1956). He is a *man*, of course, and conforms to a strict conservative code, assimilating easily into the office culture of the time. He will be loyal to one company his entire career and his loyalty will earn him job security and the obligatory gold watch, not to mention a nice pension plan, upon retirement at age 65 (Pink 2001).

The workplace was still dominated by these organization men when the women in this study first began entering it in the 1970s. By the 1990s, when they began to leave their corporations, the environment had changed dramatically; there is now little loyalty on the part of either the company or the employee. But the men still looked pretty much the same; and they still had no problem assimilating into cultures that were created by the organization men that came before them.

But what of the “organization woman?” Based on the women that I interviewed, I offer this composite for the organization woman of the 1990s: Although she didn’t grow up expecting to have a lofty title and earn a six figure salary, she finds herself in a beautifully appointed corner office with a large staff reporting to her. She is highly educated, having earned an MBA at night while building her career. She is married with two children and is constantly challenged both by the logistics of a young family and the

emotional energy it takes to hold down an executive position and raise children at the same time, despite having a husband who is also balancing a career with an equal share of the parental responsibility.

But this is nothing compared to the frustration she feels with her employer. Now that she has risen to the executive ranks, she sees the poor quality of leadership above her and is beginning to tire of the constant demands to grow the business bigger and increase profits more, regardless of the impact this pressure has on everyone's personal life. At the same time, she has begun to be bored. Bored with the lack of challenge in her own job and bored with the whole business of business – playing corporate politics, wasting time in meetings, feeding childish egos. Surely there is more to life than this.

Over the course of four months in late 2005, ten such “organization women” shared their stories with me. All have chosen to give up their powerful corporate positions and find independent work as consultants or in smaller businesses. In 2001, Daniel H. Pink wrote *Free Agent Nation*, and gave us a new stereotype, one that most of the women of my study have chosen, after reaching this point of frustration with the corporate world. He describes “free agents” as those who have left corporations and taken charge of their lives, becoming what he categorizes as soloists, temps, or owners of micro-businesses (Pink 2001). Most of the women in this study are soloists, selling their talents to corporations as consultants without having to be a part of what one of them calls, “the bowels of corporate.” Pink quotes a 1998 article in *Fast Company* magazine that says that American business have become “toxic places to work” (Webber 1998). These ten women, who I will introduce now, would not disagree with that characterization.

## Judy Samuels

Judy Samuels was certainly not destined for the business world. Graduating from high school in 1968, she was encouraged to choose to be a teacher, a nurse or a flight attendant, the only careers considered suitable for a girl. Although she was the better student, Judy stayed home and attended a community college, while her parents sent her brother away to a more prestigious four-year university. Not wanting to be a teacher, nurse or flight attendant, Judy took her associate's degree and found a job as a secretary. She quickly learned that this was also not for her, but it led her to her career in the financial services industry.

Judy married and moved away from her hometown, a large city in the Southeast, for a short time. When she moved back and divorced, she took a job working for the president of a financial services company, while going back to school for a degree in accounting and finance. Her goal was to become a loan officer. Along the way she found her real calling, human resources, where she would build her career over the next twenty-five years, eventually reaching the executive ranks of one of the largest financial services firms in the United States.

At this company, Judy witnessed an environment of opportunity and an employee-centered culture through the 1980s and into the 1990s, as her employer grew and merged several times. The growth of the company spurred her own career and allowed her to assist others in their career growth. She worked as part of a leadership group that she deeply respected, including a supervisor who was at the time one of the most powerful women in the state and the industry.

Judy felt strongly that she was part of a team, and thought her loyalty would be returned in kind. Sadly, it was not. As the 1990s wound down, she found herself confronted with a drastically changed culture as one last merger created a much larger company, with new leaders who chose to dismantle many of the people-oriented programs that she had helped create. The focus now was on squeezing the most out of every dollar of revenue, setting continuously higher financial goals and striving to meet them at the expense of everything else.

As the leadership that she respected exited, so did Judy. Luckily, leaving during a major downsizing and after so many years of service meant that she would receive two years salary as severance pay and be vested in the company's retirement program, including health insurance. She had just turned fifty, was financially independent, and had no idea what to do with the rest of her life. After a time of soul searching, she decided to take some of the skills she had developed in her former career and turn them into a business of her own, finding jobs for others in the financial services industry.

Judy helps people leave other organizations that have gotten too large and lost their focus on people. In her words:

You listen and let the person talk. You can hear what they don't like. And ninety-nine percent of the time, it's not the work they don't like, it's the way they're being treated, like the lack of inclusion. They feel lost in the maze. They don't see any opportunities. Ninety-nine percent of the time it's never about the money. It's about the feeling of value, added value and being valued.

These are the same reasons that Judy herself chose to abandon her corporate aspirations.

### Susan Thomas

At age fifty-six, Susan Thomas is the eldest of the women in this study. Like Judy, she didn't grow up expecting to be a corporate officer. Susan graduated with a

degree in liberal arts and her first job was as a buyer in a department store. She left that position to return to school to study business, supporting herself with a job in social services. Then, in 1977, without completing business school, she returned to her hometown, a major city in the Midwest, and began her career in earnest. She was now 28 and was recruited by a major corporation where she suspected, and later saw evidence, that she was “a diversity hire,” a beneficiary of affirmative action.

Although the company and the industry were male dominated, Susan had an excellent male mentor and her career in sales had early success, earning her promotions that required her to relocate and travel. Although moving and being on the road did not bother her at the time, she was bothered by the requirement the company placed on her to own a home and the pressure she felt to break off her engagement. Both of these were ways that the company had of trying to, as she terms it, “find the albatross” that would ensure that she was committed to her career. For men, the albatross was always the wife and children, but the company struggled to find it for someone like Susan. When she resisted the pressure to break the engagement, it was clear to her that this had stalled her career.

Susan ultimately left that company to join her fiancé in another city, where she continued to work in challenging career positions, evolving from sales to marketing to quality management, and completing her MBA. Eventually, her engagement ended and she relocated once again, this time to accept a vice president position with a large professional services firm where she would travel even more extensively. When, as the result of a merger, the company asked her to move again, it was one move too many. Although she was traveling nearly one hundred percent of her time, her direct supervisor

felt that this move was imperative. When she threatened to quit, the company president stepped in and agreed that indeed, given her travel schedule, it did not matter where she lived. She opted to move to a city in the South to be near to her aging parents and remained loyal to the company for a few more years.

When Susan met the man that would become her husband, her travel schedule became an issue. Having waited until the age of fifty to marry for the first time, she now wanted a more normal life. In 1998, she took control of her own destiny and started a consulting business. She has built a professional reputation and manages to find plenty of work without ever getting on an airplane. She even found time to be a stepmother to her husband's young daughter, arranging her client schedule to avoid leaving her alone as a latchkey child.

Now that her practice is thriving, Susan says that self-employment means you get to pick which twenty three hours a day you work, and she admits that she has not had a vacation since her honeymoon over five years ago. Despite the hours, and although she has had many attractive offers, she has resolved never to return to traditional employment because, in her words:

I was always bored in corporate jobs, I was always bored, no matter how challenging the job was, it wasn't broad enough . . . going the same place, doing the same thing, working the same work, day in day out . . . it wasn't like I could go from this problem today to this problem tomorrow and then go back to that problem yesterday with a fresh perspective. It was keep working on the same problem over and over for the next 20 years . . . that was the number one reason I chose to not go back into a full-time corporate position.

This is what Susan refers to as the lack of “intellectual diversity” in the corporate environment.

## Colleen Roberts

Although she is only a few years younger than Judy and Susan, Colleen Roberts grew up without feeling that her career options were limited. While raising Colleen and her two siblings in the deep South of the fifties and sixties, Colleen's mother chose to work, though other mothers did not. There was no financial need; it was a personal choice for Colleen's mom. Instead of feeling abandoned, Colleen was inspired by her mother's example. Actually, she was more than inspired. When Colleen's brother told their mom he wanted to be a lawyer, Colleen, at the time a twelve year old who adored her brother, said she would be his secretary. Her mother took this as a teachable moment, letting Colleen know that she did not have to be a secretary to be near her brother; she could be a lawyer too, a radical idea in 1963.

Colleen's extended family was filled with many such independent and opinionated women. She and her sister grew up thinking that was the way women were supposed to be, that they were supposed to have their own life and find their own way. Colleen followed her brother and sister to a large university campus where she discovered there were innumerable career choices she had never even heard of growing up in her small town. Encouraged to take a variety of electives, Colleen changed her plan from majoring in English and becoming a writer (one of her mother's avocations) to business, specifically the creative business of advertising. After one false start in a too-stodgy organization, Colleen landed a job in an ad agency and progressed rapidly through a series of upward career moves in this fast paced world.

In the early years, Colleen met with no apparent limitation due to her sex, despite the male dominance of the profession. Like Susan, she learned her trade from male



mentors who were generous with their time and expertise. Her career also survived several geographical moves to accommodate the career of her husband, until the last move before their divorce landed her in a place where she was highly recruited, but told that her pay would have to be drastically reduced. Not willing to accept this as an option, Colleen held out until finally, through a contact of her father's, she found a position that enabled her career to continue its forward movement.

Unfortunately, all this success eventually led to a grueling work and travel schedule that finally burned her out. When she asked her boss to change the structure of her job to reduce the travel, he refused, despite her years of service and clear contributions to the success of the firm. Not willing to be dictated to, she resigned, walking away from an extremely successful and lucrative position. Disillusioned by this experience, which she describes as being used, Colleen was enticed to leave the ad agency world and join a family-owned and family-oriented business.

The company was growing and needed Colleen's expertise on staff. Enthralled by the excitement of this creative start-up opportunity, it took her a few years to notice that she wasn't really part of the "family." The epitome of the "old boy network," the leadership of this company was actually referred to as "the boys" by the rest of the staff. "The boys" lunched together daily and essentially did whatever the CEO (who was also the father of the president) requested, not rocking the boat of this strong patriarch. When Colleen found herself in conflict with "the boys" over the direction of the company, she once again chose to walk away, rather than bend to the will of a leader whose choices conflicted with her professional judgment. Since this meant resigning, unlike Judy, Colleen received no severance package to cushion her career transition.

That transition is still in progress. At 54, Colleen is moving back to the deep South area of her childhood to be near her family and determine where the future will lead her. She wants to continue working but says that she will most likely start her own business or become an independent contractor. “ I don’t trust corporate executives anymore,” she told me:

Most of them are male, most of them are money driven, most of them cheat on their wives. There is not a lot of honesty at the top for me to believe in anymore. I don’t want to sound like a scorned woman or anything, but I think for me at this next level in my life, I’m looking for that truth. I’m looking for the sense of, wanting to be a part of something good, something strong, but also something truthful, and if I can’t find it, I’m going to do it myself.

#### Barbara James

Barbara James also stumbled into business when her original career choice, dental hygienist, was abandoned after one semester of college chemistry. She found accounting more her style and, luckily, was at a large mid-western university with an excellent business school. Upon graduation in 1981, she was recruited by a major corporation and given the opportunity to be part of a management development program, working in three different six-month assignments before making a commitment to a locale or division of the company.

The Latin American division intrigued Barbara. She had lived South America as a child, until her father’s untimely death when she was only eight, and she was fluent in Spanish. Her interest waned, however, on her first business trip as a twenty something single female, when she discovered that she was very restricted in her ability to travel alone in that part of the world. She was then attracted to an assignment in a warm city in the southern United States, where she would spend the majority of her career.

On her way up the career ladder, Barbara earned an MBA going to school at night and accepted an assignment in the corporation's New York headquarters. There she had exposure to top executives, but also to high-level corporate politics and a more conservative business environment. Being there allowed her to meet a personal goal of running a marathon before turning thirty, and experience having her car stolen in New York City! She was happy when a former boss recruited her to return to the southern city that she now called home. He asked her to help him with the start up of a new division. Despite working in a major corporation, most of Barbara's career was involved in this type of start-up and other small businesses within this giant company.

Continuing to climb the ladder, Barbara was asked to move back to headquarters. Although it had moved to a more congenial location in the Southwest, Barbara was not interested in yet another relocation. She was established and happy in the town where she was living and had just met the man that would soon become her husband. He was divorced with shared custody of a young child; moving was not an option.

Barbara managed to land another good assignment, but knew that declining the headquarters position would limit her career potential. She had achieved the level of director, but would not move further up. Now thirty-five and married, she stayed in positions with limited travel while having two children, but eventually needed to travel internationally again. She still has to hold back tears when describing scenes at the airport and phone calls home with her daughters. The travel schedule eventually led her to search for a different life, which ultimately meant starting her own business, despite the fact that her husband had been laid off and was also working independently.

The decision to venture out on her own was made easier when her division was sold from the large corporation in which she had always felt comfortable. The culture of the organization lost what little dignity it had when the new management allowed an environment of drinking and partying to take over. Because she had been so successful and stayed with the company so many years, she was making more money than her boss and some other vice presidents. To address this, after the sale of the business, her job was “restructured,” meaning she could keep her title and all of her responsibilities but her pay would be reduced. Clearly an unacceptable option, Barbara chose instead the four months severance pay offered.

Two years later, she has a growing consulting business and no regrets. Asked if she would return to a corporate environment, Barbara quickly responds, “I could never do it, because what I have found is my purpose in life, and my purpose is to inspire others and I’m doing that in what I am doing now and I’m so fulfilled and energized by what I do, there is no way.”

### Pegge George

Unlike Barbara, Pegge George had no problem with college chemistry. She was one of very few female graduates in mechanical engineering in 1981. After two internships and a year of “real” engineering work, she found that she did not enjoy it, but she was able to build this background into a successful career in sales and marketing for companies that manufactured industrial products. Her personality was very well suited for these more people-intensive roles and her knowledge of the engineering behind the products gave her instant credibility.

The work environments she found herself in were predominantly male, but Pegge never felt that she was discriminated against. Once, when being introduced to a plant manager, she attempted to shake his hand but he informed her that he didn't shake, he hugged and proceeded to do so. Though Pegge did not complain, a vice president who was with her went out of his way to apologize for what he knew was inappropriate behavior.

Pegge worked in government contracting for much of her career, an area where affirmative action came early and was well developed by the time she arrived. She enjoyed her work and was good at it, but the companies were the type of large, national and international businesses in which moving up the ladder meant lots of travel and frequent relocation. At one point she was offered a promotion to relocate to a division based in a small town in the deep South. On her interview visit she was charmed by the town but could quickly see that she would not be taken seriously and her career progression would stop. The only other woman officer in the company, who was "paraded" out for her to meet, was clearly a glorified secretary, having no power in the organization.

After marrying and starting a family, the travel and relocation requirements became more and more difficult, and Pegge made a personal choice to take a step back career-wise to reduce her travel while her children were small. Along the way she earned an MBA going to school at night. Her husband was always supportive of her career, but he was also very successful, eventually becoming president and part owner in a business, making it financially foolish for them to even consider moving again.

Pegge was hand picked for a newly created position, including a promotion to regional manager that did not require her to move, but did put her in a situation where she had to travel frequently. For a while she balanced her family responsibilities with this hectic travel schedule and that of her husband. When an acquaintance told her she was considering starting a business and was looking for a partner, Pegge surprised herself by saying she would like to talk about it. When the business plan turned to consulting, Pegge was adamant that she would not be a consultant, believing they are “a dime a dozen.” An epiphany occurred for her, however, when she had to take some time off for minor surgery.

Getting to spend more time with her children during the weeks of her medical leave caused Pegge to realize how much she was missing by being away overnight. One afternoon in the midst of playing with her children after school, she says that it hit her “like a ton of bricks,” and she called her potential partner and asked to look more closely at her business plan. Pegge now saw that the plan was to build a consulting practice that would help others solve problems, something she had been doing her entire career. She and her partner have been in business together for three years now and she says that she would never consider returning to a corporate job.

Recounting a specific client who stood up at a networking meeting to attest to how much she had helped him in her new role, both to grow his own business and balance it with his personal life, Pegge says, “you know that at the end of the day I can go to bed knowing that I made a positive difference in people’s lives. You don’t get that in the corporate world, as much as I did good things.”

## Nancy Michaels

Nancy Michaels took an even more indirect path into the business world. Leaving home and high school at sixteen, she credits her parents with helping her to form her work ethic by not forcing her to move back. Starting out working multiple jobs paying the then minimum wage of \$2.50 an hour, she learned quickly how hard it was to survive without an education. But she was bright and aggressive and eventually her supervisor at a gas station asked her to enter a management-training program. She was all of 18.

Deciding that her career goal was actually to be a chef, she attended a weekend culinary training program while continuing to work full time at gas stations managing other teenagers, mostly boys. Before completing the chef program, she decided the hours of restaurant work would not suit her and started taking business courses at a local community college. Nancy soon found that accounting was something she was good at and transferred to a university, finally completing her business degree in 1985, at the age of 27.

Recruited by a major professional services firm, Nancy rose quickly, but chose to resign after four years to work in a corporate environment because she wanted to leave the advisory role and be more directly involved in managing a business. She worked in two large corporations, rising to be a senior vice president and an officer of a *Fortune* 100 company by the time she reached her mid-forties. Along the way she married and had two children, with the support of a stay-at-home husband. Nancy never missed a day of work due to the children, other than six weeks each for two maternity leaves, during which she stayed involved by telephone and E-mail.

Despite this dedication, Nancy's career was nearly derailed mid-term when she was not considered a candidate for an important promotion. Questioning her manager about it, she was told that he was concerned about her ability to make the necessary commitment, having just given birth to her second child. After protesting this in writing to senior management and clearly demonstrating that she was qualified for the position, she did receive the promotion and her career path continued upward. This situation left a bad taste in her mouth over what she describes as the "old boy" nature of the company, which was actually run mostly by men who were younger than her.

One of those men eventually became the reason that Nancy decided to abandon her career. Choosing her for a prominent senior executive position working directly for him, Nancy thought she had finally made it until she found that his management style was abusive. Yelling, screaming, and cursing at the executives on his staff, this was also the only behavior he respected in return. Nancy adapted to this style for a time, until a particularly ugly confrontation, witnessed by the CEO, led her to begin looking for another way to spend her life.

Now she is working in a business role for an academic institution, something she thought, incorrectly, would be less stressful. Nancy hopes to find something else within a few years. When asked what she is looking for, she says:

I don't know. . . . my preference would be not to work for somebody else, and my real preference would be . . . I'd much rather do something totally different . . . something like buy houses and fix them up and sell them . . . have a coffee shop bookshop or something . . . if you could make a living at it, but really not have to be involved with the bowels of corporate . . . I'm really looking for something that's more free.



## Mary Charles

A self-described “army brat,” Mary Charles chose her college because it was in one of the few states where she had never lived. Originally planning to major in architecture or engineering, she changed her plan when she found out many of the classes were only offered at a neighboring university. Still wanting to please her father, who had always encouraged her to be a professional, Mary chose accounting. She began her career in 1984 as an intern with a small CPA firm in a large southern city, graduating and joining them full time the following year. She quickly found that, far from the glamorous world she had imagined, the profession she chose meant working grueling hours.

Mary was the first woman ever hired by this firm and the managing partner never seemed to learn her name, referring her only as “sweetheart.” Mary never let this bother her, knowing that he did not mean it in a bad way and seeing that she occasionally got treated favorably because she was the only female. With the goal of eventually raising a family full time, she planned to work until she was thirty, just long enough to gain the experience she would need to be able to provide for her family if something happened to her husband.

According to plan, after a couple of years she became engaged and decided to look for a position with fewer hours. Obviously someone who thrives on stress, Mary scheduled her wedding for the week after the annual tax deadline and then accepted a job interview the same week. She thinks this may have helped her get the job, as the interviewers thought she was not a “normal girl.”

The company Mary joined was far from a reduced stress environment. It was a rapidly growing company, run by a flamboyant entrepreneur, and Mary soon became

their key person in the international tax arena, flying around the world on the corporate jet. She lived up to her reputation of not being a “normal girl” when she did not miss a day of work during her three pregnancies, despite spending a great deal of time being sick in the ladies room. As Mary started adding children to her life, the long work hours became an issue again. She successfully convinced her manager to allow her to work part-time, but she was instructed not to let anyone else in the company know of this arrangement.

Mary was persuaded to return to full time at one point, accepting a promotion to a director level position, but soon decided she had to leave to find a more balanced life. This was after giving birth to her third child, who was unplanned and came at a time when she was so stressed she did not even realize she was pregnant for three months. Having lost their live-in nanny, Mary’s husband was staying home with the children, a decision she says was for financial reasons but that obviously left her with some regrets.

Mary felt very fortunate to find a position in a European company with a division based in the city where she lived. She was pleasantly surprised by the culture of this company, essentially the opposite of the one she had left. The company believed and put into action the slogan “a happy employee is a productive employee.” After she had proven herself, they agreed to let her change to part-time status and, just before she was planning to leave to start a business with her husband, gave her a severance package when her position was moved to another city. Now part of a successful small business, Mary still works forty hours a week, but her office is in her home and she takes time in the middle of the day to help with homework, returning to her desk after her children are asleep.

Although Mary was able to work a flexible schedule for much of her career, she knows that by doing so she sacrificed her upward mobility. When asked if she thinks her example helped the companies be more flexible with other employees, Mary says, “they didn't believe it would work for other people, other people will take advantage of that. And there would be people taking advantage of it, but the thing was, you can't know they're going to take advantage, unless you give them a chance. I guess they didn't want to give them too many chances.” Asked what her career goal is today, Mary says she would still like to be “a mom.”

### Patricia Alexander

When her parents divorced, Patricia Alexander saw her family's standard of living decline dramatically because of her mother's inadequate earning power. Patricia vowed to be financially independent herself, which led her to study business. This lesson served her well, as she ended up a single mom for many years and was the breadwinner of the family in her first marriage.

After graduating in 1987, Patricia was recruited by a prestigious international services firm. Although she never planned to stay at this firm long term, she attributes her leaving after just three years to the lack of family-friendly policies. The firm had been hiring women in reasonable numbers for the previous ten years, yet no one in her office had ever had a baby while still employed there. Not wanting to be their “guinea pig,” she moved on when she was ready to start her family, but not before letting the top executive know that this was her reason. The firm eventually began a proactive program to encourage women to stay, possibly due to Patricia's willingness to be honest with them.

The majority of Patricia's career was spent at a rapidly growing, privately owned retail organization in the Southeast. Beginning on the professional staff in the finance area in 1990, she progressed quickly and eventually was the director of a large group of professionals, involved in all aspects of the business, reporting directly to the president. Making the move into this group did not come easily, however. The previously all male department had drawn its staff from the technology area and Patricia had to confront the hiring manager with the fact that she had the skills that he was seeking.

Although she loved the work and considers it to have been a wonderful way to learn business, the environment devolved over the years as the business became more and more competitive, with large national companies threatening the survival of regional companies like Patricia's. The culture change was led by the management of the finance area, the part of the business that Patricia had left. Office politics, primarily in the form of animosity from a manager who felt betrayed by her choice to make this career move, would make her life difficult for the remainder of her tenure with the company. An example of the change in the work environment was the mandate that professional staff keep detailed time records and that those records show that a minimum of forty-five hours per week was worked, net of all breaks or vacation time taken. When she became the head of her department, Patricia turned this negative into a plus, allowing flexible time and telecommuting as part of the logged hours. This also annoyed her former boss and nemesis.

Other management changes and corporate politics eventually meant that Patricia and her formerly prestigious group were no longer considered valuable to the company. This limited her upward mobility and took away much of the job satisfaction on which

she had always thrived. The company was organized in “silos” and moves between divisions were not an option, so Patricia had to pursue her career elsewhere. Patricia also had remarried and added two stepchildren to her household. As the children were getting to be preteens she wanted to be closer to home; her commute was nearly an hour each way.

Through personal contacts, she located an opportunity that appeared perfect. It was a step up to vice president, in the industry that she wanted to join, and ten minutes from home. Unfortunately, it was also with a large corporation that was not well organized and she quickly learned she could not function in the environment. As luck would have it, the business was being reorganized and she managed to land a severance package despite being there just over a year. Patricia used this to take some time off and consider her future. She spent time with her children and continued to study her new industry, gaining professional qualifications in that field and finding contract work that she is enjoying.

When asked if she will consider going back to a more traditional employment situation, Patricia was quick to respond:

Not in corporate, I am done with corporate America, absolutely . . . it's just not good for me. I'm just not good at it; managing up, the kissing up, playing politics. I just want to work. . . . I just think when you're smart and you have energy, I think you can make a lot more money and have a lot more freedom if you work for yourself, or a very, very small company. If you add in all the bullshit meetings and bullshit in the hallways, I think I'm working about the same amount of hours. And that's why I don't want corporate America. I'm not bitter. I am thankful for every experience. It got me to where I am now. I don't want to do anything where half of my time is not adding value. I just want to add value and go home and go on vacation and get rest or have a manicure or work out.

### Mary Anne Josephson

Like most of the women in this study, Mary Anne Josephson's first career choice was not business. Mary Anne wanted to be a teacher. Her father, a successful businessman, assured her that teaching was a noble profession, but he made sure she knew that there was not much money in it. With his encouragement, she took a few business classes and found a place where she could use her teaching skills to help businesses succeed, working in human resources and organizational development.

Mary Anne graduated in 1987 and in her early career worked for two relatively small companies, quickly becoming involved in the human resources side of downsizing, so common in that era. Because of her husband's job, she declined a transfer to the home office when her own position was downsized. She not only received a severance package, she went to work for a much larger company with more challenge and opportunity. When she found herself limited by her boss, she approached the president of the company and convinced him to let her report directly to him. Recently divorced, she became the subject of office gossip, the rumor being that this perceived promotion was the result of her having an affair with the president. Mary Anne chose not to let the gossip trouble her and set out to earn respect through her abilities and accomplishments.

Just ten years out of college, Mary Anne was offered two and half times her salary to join a large professional services firm and add direct selling to her resume. After two years in that position, Mary Anne remarried and needed to relocate to a smaller city where she and her husband could care for his ailing parents. Unable to find a comparable position near her new home, Mary Anne was offered positions in larger cities nearby that would require lengthy commutes. Planning to start a family and continue to care for her

in-laws, she felt she needed a job with fewer hours, so she started her own consulting business.

Mary Anne chose the parts of her former jobs that she enjoyed most and marketed them to smaller business that could not afford her expertise on staff. She was able to work reduced hours, controlling her schedule to fit her personal situation. When she and her husband abandoned hope of having children, she increased her marketing and grew her business significantly. Unfortunately, an ugly divorce caused her to feel the call to return home for the support of friends and family, which required her to give up many of her clients.

After an attempt to return to the fast-track world of the professional services firm she had left, Mary Anne made a decision to grow her own business through the few clients she had continued to serve, eventually adding others, this time in her hometown and in the area of the South where her parents now lived. This is the business that she continues to run, selecting the clients that she enjoys, controlling the hours that she works and traveling to the areas that she chooses.

Although she is single and childless, she feels the same need for balance in her life that Mary did. A recent health scare has solidified her decision to continue this lifestyle and she thoroughly enjoys the work that she is doing. Although she has clients, both male and female, who have created corporate cultures that she feels are a great improvement over older models, she told me:

One of the reasons I'm off on my own is because, even though they're changing, and there are some extraordinary cultures out there . . . you still have to be very mindful of the political and cultural and social dynamics inside organizations if you want to be successful . . . that, some people say is playing politics. You can call it whatever you want, it is a very real thing. And you have to know how to

read the unspoken language of culture to know how to navigate inside of it successfully, and if you don't you're going to get hurt. Somewhere in the game, you are going to get hurt. . . . I don't want to do that every day all day, and that's why I broke off on my own. I don't want to do that anymore.

### Joyce Williams

Joyce Williams' parents are both entrepreneurs who encouraged their children to pursue business. Despite her original career goal of landscape architecture, Joyce chose marketing, the most creative field within business, and minored in finance. Although she always knew she would end up self-employed like her parents, Joyce started out working in corporations to gain experience. Her original plan was to try her luck in sunny California, but the "black Monday" stock market decline in 1987 changed that. Having just graduated, she was concerned about her ability to gain employment, so she stayed in her hometown, a major city in the Midwest, where contacts through her family would help her to land her first job.

Joyce began her career in a marketing role for an entrepreneurial company in the high-tech industry, but soon learned that the company was more in need of her financial skills. After developing a financial analyst position, and convincing the company that it was needed in all of their divisions, she was told that she did not have the qualifications for the job! This made it clear that, to continue in the corporate world, she would need to obtain an MBA. Accepted into two of the top business schools, the company allowed her to stay in the job while she attended classes at night. When the company wanted her to relocate to its headquarters, she had to resign in order to complete her graduate education.

Through her business school classmates, she found a position in the financial department of another major corporation. It soon became apparent that the power in this



company was in marketing, so Joyce negotiated her way into a marketing position and worked her way up, eventually having associate brand manager responsibility for a product line. This company was drastically different from the first, being so conservative that by the time a promotion came the person had to be overqualified for it. Consequently, Joyce felt bored for much of her time in the company and, when her mentor moved to an opportunity elsewhere, she followed him.

Another culture shock, her new company was undergoing major changes that began showing up in an environment where people were screaming at each other, accusing one another, and constantly try to deflect blame away from themselves. The job also came with a lengthy commute to the suburbs that took already long hours and extended them to being nearly unbearable. Although Joyce was promoted to what was considered one of the most prominent executive positions in her division, she began to realize it was time to move on to a business of her own.

Joyce started her new life by buying a small retail business, but quickly learned that she did not enjoy retail. She hired a manager for that portion of the business, eventually selling it to her, and expanded the product into something she could sell directly to corporations, utilizing her experience to help them use the products in their own marketing efforts. The business did well very quickly, but was seasonal, being busiest near the year-end holidays. Knowing that she wanted to start a family, this was not at all attractive. She eventually sold that portion of the business also, and turned her efforts to another dream, writing a book. Her book, about work-life balance, was picked up by a major publishing house, and kept her busy for a few years, with speaking

engagements and seminars, while also allowing her to realize another personal goal, starting a family.

Joyce is now working from home as a part-time marketing consultant and raising her young family on her own terms. Asked if she believes that corporations are a place where a woman can succeed and also have a family, Joyce says:

Yes, there are women breaking through to the senior levels, but they are fully co-opted and they have made every sacrifice . . . you have to just decide I'm going to be one of the boys, I'm not going to rock the boat, I need to have a stay-at-home husband or other support system, I will not see my children. That's what you are agreeing to, to get to that level.

During the time we spent together, the women shared some of their personal beliefs and values. They were all raised in traditional, two-parent, middle-class families and, although they have succeeded beyond their expectations financially and are financially secure, they would probably still consider themselves to be middle class. All of the women are white, several shared their Christian beliefs in their interviews; over half of them were raised in the Midwest, a few in the Southeast, two in the Northeast. Several of them mentioned the influence of one or both parents on their careers choices.

Although their backgrounds, careers and experiences have many similarities, their views are more wide ranging. Barbara and Pegge, for instance, expressed typically conservative views of American meritocracy and the need for personal responsibility. Mary shared this view, though she admitted she might be naive. Having never felt discriminated against themselves, these three women are confident that the doors of opportunity are open to anyone who is willing to work hard and not choose to be a victim.

Susan also expressed dislike for programs like affirmative action, feeling that “anytime you laser in, you focus in on, ‘I’m going to make it better for,’ that’s an exclusionary statement itself.” Despite these views, Susan knows for sure and Barbara and Pegge suspect that they benefited from affirmative action themselves. Regardless, they expressed a bias toward succeeding on your own merits, which they clearly believe is how they personally had succeeded.

Mary: Maybe because I'm too much of a, I live in a bubble world . . . you get where you are because you work hard to get there and you shouldn't spend time making excuses. I'm a woman. I'm too short or too this. That's why I'm not getting promoted, and you're focusing on that thing, you're not going to advance. If you focus on the fact that I can do anything, and you're in this country, and you're given opportunities. You just go find another place. You find that opportunity. . . . And maybe that's just me, just wanting to think that's the way the world should be, and it's really not the way [it is.]

On the more liberal side, Nancy explicitly stated that she thinks affirmative action is needed. Judy talked negatively about the pressure on public companies to grow and show more and more profit and also the greed of those at the top to make more and more money personally. Both Colleen and Joyce traveled to Europe around the time of this study and felt that the quality of life there is higher than in the United States, even if the GDP is lower.

Joyce: Americans tend to puff up their chest at, “oh, our gross domestic product numbers are better than every other country.” And I would contend, and I think a lot of people would contend, that there is more than one way to measure success . . . there is a quality of life issue.

The women expressed concern about being essentialized, what they described as being stereotyped or being token representatives of all women, but some also expressed essentializing views themselves; they felt women manage differently.

Patricia: I believe that women are, they sort of put their heart more into what they're doing. And they have more compassion, and that compassion leads them to be more customer-oriented. It's like an empathy thing. I think we're pre-wired that way . . . and it gives us more empathy for our employees, and it makes women more effective leaders.

Mary Anne spoke of women still working within the corporate environment who love what they do, who "wouldn't have it any other way." However, she does admit that these women have sacrificed in other areas: ". . . they are the bread winner of the family. Their husbands may work, may not work. Many of them don't even have children. They are not traditional families."

And Judy has some very strong opinions about the women still remaining inside of her former employer, a major national corporation:

They are given a bunch of crap and they believe it. They drink the Kool Aid. They drink the corporate Kool Aid. They get handed a small little token, the corporate jet comes and takes them someplace, and they have a lunch with somebody, and they think that that's arriving . . . it's okay if you stay in that as long as you know what the deal is. But you really are fooling yourself to think that it's changing because of you, it's not.

The three women who are over 50, Colleen, Judy and Susan, none of whom had children or traditional families, were also the most negative about the state of the workplace today. This may have been because they have given the most years to it and endured it when women were even less represented than they are now. Despite the trials and tribulations they have experienced, all of the women are amazingly optimistic for the future and had many ideas about what would bring about a change for the better.

The women used words like interesting, exciting, learning and fun to describe times in their career that they were really happy. They used similar words when describing what they are doing now that they have left the corporate environment and are

working more independently. It is clear that these women are financially secure and some could probably stop working if they chose, but they do not seem interested in completely giving up this part of themselves. Even Mary, who never really liked her work and told me her ideal job is to be a “mom,” can not seem to make a complete break from working:

Do I need to have [the respect that comes from a professional career]? I don't think I do, but like my husband said, “you haven't found somebody to take your position [in our home based business],” but I'm trying, but I'm not trying too hard.

Rebekah: Do you still think maybe you will?

Mary: I think maybe I will, but maybe I will just continue working.

Nancy, who has not yet settled on a new career, does not think she could give up working: “I think that a lot of the mental stimulation, challenge, helps to make you feel good about what you know, who you are, and all that stuff, and I think at some point I would miss not having it.”

The one question that all of these women answered the same was, “would you ever consider going back to work for a corporation?” They all said, “No!” They have found work that they feel is more meaningful, or at least more manageable than what they did as directors and vice presidents, and they will not be persuaded to give it up for corporate titles and corporate headaches.

### **The Workplace**

The secondary culture of a workplace is created and transmitted by all of the people within it and includes the “verbal asides of employees, the stories, ceremonies, myths and especially the shared behavior patterns of employees” (Jordan 2003:45). Each

woman was asked to describe the culture of her organizations. I provided my definition of “corporate” culture, but encouraged the women to define it for themselves. My definition was: shared values and beliefs, traditions, what is important to the company and to its leaders, including things like dress codes and meetings, as well as language, and how people treat one another, what sort of behaviors are acceptable. I did not ask specifically for stories about how the culture impacts women, but everyone was aware that my research was focused on female executives.

It was during this segment of the interviews that the tone of my research began to change. In the first interview, the women told me their career stories, which was a very positive experience for them; they are proud of their accomplishments. Although some may have left the corporate workplace before achieving all the success that they were capable of, most had accomplished more than they had ever imagined. Now I was asking them to focus in on the organizations, and specifically asking for stories about the culture within them. This gave each woman an opportunity to share her frustrations and criticisms of the businesses in which she had spent, on average, twenty years of her life. As expected, their experiences varied, but much commonality can be seen in the themes that emerged from the interviews.

The women do not use the vocabulary of feminist theorists, but the cultures that they describe are clearly marked by “hegemonic masculinity” (Acker 1990; Bird 1996). They can see the effects of the expectations that all employees function as “ideal workers” (Williams 2000). Some insights were expressed regarding the unfair nature of these ideologies, but the women found it difficult to articulate what needed to change. Deterioration in the atmosphere of companies was noted and it was attributed to

competitive pressures to grow and increase profits. Although this was mostly viewed as negative, these women are products of this system and have difficulty even imagining a fundamentally different business environment.

### The Old Boy Network

As the descriptions of corporate culture began to unfold, a term that continued to come up was “the old boy network.” Nine of the ten women used this term at least once, although I never used it as a prompt. Nancy provides a good introduction to this topic: “There, through the years, were many occasions . . . where it's very clear that the good old boy, even though they're young professional men (laughs), the good old boy mentality is alive and well. And it's frustrating.”

Much of the frustration stems from the fact that the men are young; another generation has joined the “club,” but hope was expressed that the next generation (their own sons, perhaps) will be different. Several attempted to limit their observations of the old boy network to specific companies or industries in which they had worked. However, their stories include very similar comments, despite the fact that they are describing many different organizations, leading me to conclude that this atmosphere is universal within American business today. For example:

It was still very much a good old boys network. It was also an engineering environment and women hadn't really gotten into it.

Public accounting, especially . . . some of the big firms were still by far kind of good old boy networks.

In general the paper industry is very good ole boy.

There's very much a boy's club in real estate.

Although one might hope that this environment was a relic of the past, even if of the very recent past described by my subjects, I confirmed its continued existence with a friend who works in a large professional services firm that is often cited as a good place to work for women. She told me that her office conducted an employee survey in early 2006. When asked what was the most important thing their firm could do to improve its environment for inclusion, the most common answer was to get rid of the old boys network.

Barbara and Pegge acknowledged the existence of the old boy network but said that it had never held them back; it was not a problem for them. Interestingly, these were the two women who worked for government contractors with active affirmative action and diversity programs (this is discussed further below). Three women complained about business still being conducted on the golf course, and two were clearly distressed that relationships are also being built in the even more exclusionary environment of “gentleman’s” clubs. Nancy expressed her amazement at this, which was still happening in 2003 when she left her position as a senior vice president at a major corporation in the Southeast:

I find it kind of astounding and I’m not really a prude but I find the whole strip club phenomenon sort of amazing . . . I just found that astounding that they didn’t see the inappropriateness of something like that . . . guess they just don’t, to me I draw the link, that first of all it’s exclusionary. If it’s not exclusionary, it’s really weird, if you are trying to bring women in the workplace to sit with you while you are watching a naked woman. But just the whole . . . a group of workers staring at women in a sexual way, they just don’t see that the way I see that, which is pretty astounding.

Mary Anne recalled a recent episode of *The Today Show* that dealt with this behavior:



The CEO of a company racked up like \$240,000 at a strip club in New York City and it was for a client he was entertaining . . . [*The Today Show*] brought out some consultants to interview, to say, “Is this what business is coming to now?” and, “How are women supposed to compete when this is what is going on?” And one consultant, who was a man . . . said, “You know, bottom line, I don’t care how my people get results, they just need to get results.” And the woman consultant said, “This is not ethical.” I mean, how is a woman supposed to, you know, a male client is never going to ask a woman to take me to the New York Manhattan strip club and spend money all night. How is she going to get the customer, develop a relationship and, if this is the way that relationships are promoted?

A more mundane example of a “boy’s club” was described by Patricia, who told stories from two different companies where the culture valued working in the office on weekends, a behavior she refers to as “face time:”

I just felt like it was a boy's club . . . They went in there on Saturday morning, and hung out and shot the shit for a few hours. And didn't really get any work done . . . it was just part of the club, and there were several [top managers] that were there. And I wasn't going to waste my Saturday . . . But I wasn't part of that club, nor did I want to be. I found it distasteful that you have to give up your Saturday to be in the club.

These “clubs” help to perpetuate the “good old boy” nature of business and exclude women from important relationships. Sometimes the women are invited, as Patricia was certainly “invited” to come to the office on Saturday morning, but they chose not to participate. Another example of this was the “boys lunch” mentioned in Colleen’s biography above. She was invited but this is how she felt about it:

It’s the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen how they all run out the door and climb into these big old SUVs. And the president, thirty minutes is all he wants to take for lunch; you have to gobble your lunch down. It’s sad, it’s like something out of a cartoon . . . you get in there, and the guys would embarrass the daylights out of me. They are pulling tables together and yelling, “get over here.” And I was mortified. After a couple of those experiences, I told the president of the company: “It's not that I don't enjoy your company at lunch. But if I have something I want to say to you, I can’t do it with nine people sitting around,” and I said, “everybody's talking loud. Everybody's eating fast. I don't enjoy it. . . .” And he was very offended by that and I think that was a huge mark against me at some point.

Nancy sums up how the “boys clubs” impact the careers of professional women:

There’s places where the boys go and the girls don’t and I think that that continues to sort of build, that when they are thinking about who they want to be their next in command, they think about the person they feel comfortable with and who they know, instead of saying “I’m going to go out and find somebody who is going to break that stereotype.”

Mary Anne, who has worked with many companies over her years as an organizational development consultant, confirmed that even in highly structured organizations with systems designed to prevent favoritism, this happens:

I think that happens, even in the structured organizations. I mean structure’s there on the surface. It looks good. Does it work? Maybe. It does in some cases, but I think ultimately when we dig down deep and peel the onion to the very core, that people are going to hire who they want to hire. Especially at senior levels, which is where you can really make a difference . . . And even though there are formal processes, I think people get hired sort of based on who you know and how you know them and who they want regardless of the structure. I might be a little cynical, but I think that’s what will happen.

Despite how unimportant and sometimes humorous the “clubs” might appear on the surface, they have a serious impact on opportunities for women at the top level of organizations, and most women are painfully aware of this fact. The “old boys network” is their term for the informal processes that systematically privilege a select group of white males and disadvantage everyone else, particularly women. Since men and women often socialize in separate spheres outside of the workplace, this behavior is part of the taken-for-granted nature of the sex roles in our society, making it particularly difficult to disrupt in the workplace.

As much as women like Barbara and Pegge try to ignore these boys clubs, there is still the undercurrent of who knows whom, and it impacts the climb up the corporate ladder and access to the power structure within any organization. Men also discount the

discriminatory nature of this behavior, espousing equal opportunity despite the fact that their closest confidants continue to look just like them. Nancy, who was very perceptive on these issues, explained it like this:

I think, were you to interview, my guess is the vast majority of people would not respond like that advertising guy said [in a recent item on the news] that women are stupid. They would all say all perfectly wonderful things about how capable women are and they can do everything men can do and blah, blah, blah. And it would be unusual, I think, to even get a glimpse of people's real inner-prejudice, because I'm not even sure they recognize it in themselves.

I bet if you asked the average CEO, especially the younger ones, if you said, "if you had two candidates for whatever, president, and one was male and one was female which one would you hire?" I don't think they'd immediately say the male; they would say, "depends on the qualification." And if you said, "would you be open to the woman as much as the man," and they'd say "yeah," and I think they truly believe that they've done everything right, but the numbers don't prove it out.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter brought this tendency toward "homosocial reproduction" to our attention in 1977 (Kanter 1993:54). It dates from the beginnings of industrialization when entrepreneurs (who were all white men) were personally responsible for all of the decisions in their own companies. As the businesses grew, others were needed to fill management roles. Trust and loyalty were keys in such positions and owners hoped they could maintain control by only hiring from a "closed circle of homogenous peers" (Kanter 1993:51), often members of their own family. Although professional managers from outside the family are now common, trust continues to be a principle concern in hiring and this concern grows the closer a position is to the top of the organization. This leads the predominantly white male executives to hire people they know, people who will act like them and most often also look like them. This contributes significantly to the creation and preservation of the glass ceiling.

## Masculine Environment

In addition to specific references to the “old boy network,” the women used other terms to describe the masculine atmosphere in their workplaces:

Patricia: The [operations department] culture . . . was similar to the military. It was very command and control. . . . The top four people in operations, the vice presidents, all had similar, they were either really tall or had a booming voice.

Joyce: So my boss somewhere along the line chose our mascot for our division . . . the rhino, to use for awards. They give you a bronze rhino . . . It was all this “don’t tell me you have obstacles in your way. You are a rhino, you blast through it.” It was very macho, very male.

Patricia also described the industry that she recently joined in this way:

The typical [professional in this business] is this guy that kind of reminds you of a cowboy. Somebody who's a gambler . . .

Mary admitted that the predominantly masculine environment had worked to her advantage at times. For instance, she was able to work a flexible schedule, when others were afraid to even request one:

People were scared. They are like, “well he likes you” . . . “well that's because you're the sweet little cute girl.” It's like okay, and granted I do admit that being pleasant looking didn't ever hurt me . . . I'm not being conceited, but I don't think I'm ugly. I don't think I'm beautiful. . . I don't know if that's the right thing to say for a woman, but it's true . . . you use it and you get around.

Nancy feels that any such advantage was not worth the price of having to give up a part of yourself to fit into a work environment:

I think there was a time when part of what women needed to do, right, wrong, or otherwise, to grow the idea of women in the workplace was to sort of get rid of their woman-ness, you know. And there was a time when women had to be, you know, they had to dress more like men, they had to tough things out like men do . . . they had to do all these things like men did, so that they would kind of fly below the radar screen.

This observation by Nancy was made while she was describing a woman who had been a vice president at her company several years before she herself reached the executive level. It is an excellent depiction of the women of my own era, those of us who entered the workforce in the late seventies, when we were very often the only female in a meeting or on a management team. Books like *The Woman's Dress for Success Book* and *Games Mother Never Taught You: Corporate Gamesmanship for Women* came out around that time with advice on how we could assimilate as much as possible into a world that was created by and for men (Molloy 1977; Harragan 1977). Kanter (1993) discussed the dilemmas facing women in this token position, revealing that most reacted to the visibility of it by attempting to be invisible, what Nancy calls “fly[ing] below the radar screen,” which sometimes involved ignoring the behavior of the men:

Colleen: Well I'm here to tell you that I never met the biggest bunch of egomaniacs in all my life. And of course I was always “darlin” to them . . . darlin and honey. And I realized there wasn't a lot I could do about that. If you acted like a real bitch about it you didn't endear yourself to any of them.

The women are describing examples of what Joan Acker terms “hegemonic masculinity,” exemplified in the ideal of the leader as a “strong, technically competent, authoritative leader who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family, and has his emotions under control” (Acker 1990:153). Bird further defines hegemonic masculinity as “the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women” (Bird 1996:120). The women try to assimilate to this ideal. For example, they are expected to “tough it out” like the men, but there is an ill-defined line they cannot cross. Being too much like the men can be unacceptable:

Mary Anne: Women . . . have tried to conform to the male dominated culture and the male dominated leadership team and it's gotten them in trouble. They have

tried to be too much like the men in terms of how they dress, how they act and it's gotten them in trouble. They have been labeled as bitchy. They have been labeled as ineffective. They have been labeled as inflexible. So there have been women trying to create a place for themselves and move up through organization ranks where they have seen what has been successful, they have seen what has gotten promotions, they have seen the heroes, so to speak, and they have tried to emulate that, and it comes off wrong. And it does more damage than good to them in their careers.

The best example of a behavior that was read differently when seen in a woman is aggressiveness, a trait that is rewarded in men in the workplace but can be threatening when seen in a woman:

Nancy: I firmly believe . . . the men at [my last company] could not accept aggressive behavior in women the same way that they expected it in fact, in themselves and in men . . . because people look at you like you are a bitch, you are not supposed to be that way. Aggressive with a woman is sort of a dirty word, while aggressive with a man isn't really. It's bizarre. . . It's fascinating and it used to frustrate the shit out of me, and it's very true.

When I asked Nancy where she felt this leaves women in the workplace who want to succeed, she responded: "I think that most successful women, albeit sad in a way, have to be able to tone down their aggressiveness or whatever and still be really good at what they do."

Once again, the rules are very confusing, if they exist at all. The culture values the "heroic masculine" but women who try to emulate it are considered "bitchy." The narrow band of acceptable behavior for professional women was identified in the 1987 book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* (Morrison et al. 1992). The book included a graphic of two overlapping "hoops" with a very narrow "acceptable band" of behaviors in each hoop. The hoops are labeled "masculine or like men" and "feminine or unique to women." The authors hint at how difficult it would be to even know what behaviors fall in the band, much less to stay within them, then proceed to state that doing so is the most

important factor for success for women, and provide a discussion of the contradictory behaviors that they must exhibit. These were discussed above and include, notably, “be tough, but don’t be macho” (Morrison et al. 1992:55-57).

In contrast to the struggle by women to find the behaviors for success, Susan gave an example in which the roles were reversed, where a man found himself in a stereotypically female situation and was unable to determine what behavior was appropriate:

I had the first employee that ever got pregnant. And I remember saying, “Hey, we’re going to have a sales meeting [at a nearby resort], let’s have a baby shower.” And, as it happens, the VP for sales came in for the meeting, and he didn’t just, he knew that, I think he was politically correct enough, not to be upset that I had done this, but he did not know how to act. He honestly was literally out of his element so much so that somebody thrust a teddy bear in his arms to hand to her, and it was like, he could not do it, could not do it.

Picturing this hapless male may be humorous, but it is doubtful that his inability to behave properly limited his career success in any way. The contrast between this and a situation in which a woman is not sure of the appropriate behavior helps to illuminate the power differences between men and women in the workplace.

The masculine dominant environment also manifests itself in raised voices and use of profanity, which the women generally chose to ignore:

Mary: I was never one to say, excuse me; don’t curse in front of me. You know, I’m a little girl; no I never did that . . . every so often, they would recognize that I was in the room. And they might recognize it and say something like “oh, let’s not curse so much.”

Rebekah: Did they apologize?

M: Oh goodness no, it was more an amusement for them when they realized they were cursing and that there was a woman there.

More than one of the women felt that the fact that they did not allow cursing to bother them was a plus in their careers:

Susan: If it makes people uncomfortable, then it's improper. I think that now people are much more sensitive to it. You almost have to be coached that it's okay to a certain extent to make people uncomfortable. And some people can't communicate without it. So if you want to communicate you're going to have to make it okay for them. I can't say that that was a problem. I considered it a compliment when another woman says to a guy at the table, [Susan's] okay (Laughing).

Barbara: (Laughs) You will get a pardon my French. I never ever took things as I'm a woman therefore, I will take it a certain way. I don't.

But can women join in when the language gets "colorful?" In the 1989 Supreme Court case *Hopkins v Price Waterhouse*, discussed above, the men evaluating Ms. Hopkins' potential for partnership in their firm were concerned with her behavior, including her being "a lady using foul language" (Levit and Verchick 2006:64). Nancy is the only woman who admitted that she participated in this practice, feeling that she had to conform to the confrontational style of her boss, but she admits "that's not a style that I turn to as a reaction, it's a style that I use when it's necessary, I'm confronted with it." She provided the most dramatic example of this in the story of an interaction that she had with her company's president while she was serving as a senior vice president at a *Fortune* 100 company:

I mean at one point, probably within a year of when I finally left, he pushed me so far. I was in his office, and his office was separated only by a conference room from the CEO's office. They were in sort of their own little suite. And I was in his office and the door was open. And I'm sitting there going over some things with him and he said something that just pushed my button, big time. I started cussing at him (laughs) yelling and cussing at him. I was like "you're an [expletive] asshole." And I just went off. I've never done this before. I lost my mind. I'm like "you're an asshole." He's like, "I'm not an asshole." I'm like "you are," and the secretaries are out there and everything else. And finally, the CEO appears at the door, and he said, "So, how's it going?" (laughs), and it was just



enough, obviously, you don't like being caught by your parents. It was just enough that we both sort of stopped and looked at each other. And I mean I could just feel my blood pressure was probably maxed out. And you know, eventually, [the CEO] talked to him for a few minutes about something else or distracted us. And later I went back to my office and I called my husband, and I said, "well, I'm working on my severance package today" (laughs) and my husband said, "oh, you have to go back and apologize to them." I said, "I can't apologize to him. That's what he's all about. He's all about power and if I go back like a girly girl and apologize to him, I'm going to lose anything from him that I can stand on my own." So, eventually, I went and said to him, "You know, sorry I yelled at you, but you really did piss me off." I tried to take a masculine approach to it. In any case, after a few years of that you just get sick of it.

Not all environments accept this sort of behavior from women *or* men and it is not always acceptable within the lower ranks of the professional staff. Joyce, whose first job was in a "maverick" culture, was reprimanded for raising her voice on two occasions after she joined a larger, more formal organization:

I mean swear words were not unusual at [the "maverick" company]. It wasn't a preponderance, but nobody would be offended. It was perfectly fine for swear words to be in a meeting or whatever. NEVER at [the more formal organization]. Oh no, no, no, you should never be. It should never be colorful language; you were never allowed to lose your temper. Unless you were a director; directors could, general managers could, maybe a VP could. But us analysts, a manager or whatever, oh, no. You were supposed to have your stuff together at all times.

The rules continue to increase in complexity. Some say that women cannot be too much like a man, some say that you have to act like the men do or they don't respect you. And it's not just gender; it's rank. Managers with less power cannot lose their tempers, but executives can. Men are forgiven because they cannot communicate without profanity. The women feel pressure to be considered "okay," meaning it is okay to use profanity in their presence. The use of this type of language can be viewed as another symbol of hegemonic masculinity, since profanity is identified with masculine, and not feminine, behavior in our culture. The men for whom it is amusing, as in Mary's story,

may not be conscious of it, but they are exerting their dominance in these interactions when they use a language that is not available to Mary. Nancy refused to allow her boss that power over her, but was eventually worn out by constantly using a style outside of her comfort zone.

Other language implications are notable here. The women do not want to be labeled “bitch” or “bitchy,” but do not comment on the fact that these words are never used to describe male behaviors. Terms like “aggressive” and “heroic” are used for the men, often for the same “bitchy” behaviors. The women do not want to be “girly girls” or “little girls,” terms used to describe negative behaviors by women; but the childish behavior of the old “boys” has a very positive, powerful connotation.

Drinking is another area where there are different standards for behavior:

Susan: I can remember stories about some real old-timers, had to have their boss go to the hotels where they were on the road, because they had gone into a drunken stupor. And I'm sorry, but I would have been out on my you-know-what . . . There was certainly behavior that was acceptable for the guys that wasn't acceptable for the women.

Barbara, who said that she was not bothered by the “old boy” nature of business, told some of the most outrageous stories about drinking, and was clearly fed up with having to be a part of such behavior:

They flew down . . . they were all VPs . . . and they are just talking about how they were drinking all night and Rosie the flight attendant, and I'm thinking these poor people who were on this overnight flight to [South America]. So . . . we meet them in the afternoon, we had dinner, talked about what we needed to do. I went back to my room, the three of them went out to the bars . . . They were out till 3, 4 o'clock in the morning. Two of them were late coming down in the morning. . . They have no sleep, they are at this meeting and they are like (sighs). We managed to get through what we needed to get through but we went to lunch without the [customer] and they are just laughing about all the, just like a fraternity, we drank so much and weren't we funny. And I'm thinking, I'm in [South America] with you guys, and I really want to be home with my family.

We finished the meeting, we are at the airport executive lounge and they can't wait to start drinking again and I'm exhausted . . . get on the plane . . . they are drinking and they are laughing and they are loud. . . So finally, a passenger in front got up and yelled, I won't do this on your tape, but yelled an obscenity at them and they are all of a sudden like, "Why are you getting so mad?" And I'm looking at them . . . and this fight is breaking out.

This incident was a catalyst to put Barbara on what she calls her "faith based journey" to find a new career. "My whole thing is just respect. I have no respect for them," she told me. So, she does not feel that they discriminated against her, but they put her in a position that was clearly in conflict with her values. Despite this, she makes excuses for finding the behavior objectionable, telling me that she is not a "teetotaler," she just can't drink like she did in college. She does not address what might have happened if she had attempted to keep up with them and their "fraternity" behavior, or had complained about it, choices she likely did not feel were available to her.

Barbara told a second story about this same group of executives and draws her own conclusion about what their behavior contributed to the culture of the organization they are running:

How can it get worse? The big annual customer conference . . . every one of these vice presidents is so drunk. One of the customers is a nudist. And she is not into sexual anything or whatever but she just feels comfortable in her body. So after a night of drinking, she strips and goes into the pool and is skinny-dipping. One of the vice presidents drops his drawers and gets in with her. Now, you want to talk about corporate culture? What are the employees saying? "Now I know I can't do anything. If he didn't get fired, there isn't anything I can do at this company that is going to get me fired."

Certainly there are men that would not accept either the skinny-dipping or the rowdy drunkenness on the airplane as reasonable business behavior, but in this company it was acceptable. The executives in this situation were leading a business that had

recently been purchased from a large corporation where they held similar positions. That company had what appeared to be a very structured environment and a well-developed diversity program. Any lessons they might have learned there do not seem to have carried over once they were outside of the control of the large corporate structure.

Susan's story also indicated that drinking while out of town on business was not uncommon and others alluded to the use of alcohol both during business travel and office functions, including routine happy hours after work. Stories of sexual harassment (not always labeled as such by the women) were often tied to situations where alcohol was involved. Drinking is clearly a part of the culture of these businesses and an area that is difficult for women to navigate. If they act too much like men they open themselves up to allegations of being unfeminine, but if they are not tolerant of this behavior, they are considered pruders (another female-only term) or too inflexible. This was even more of an issue after Mary Anne became the subject a rumored affair with her boss:

That organization kind of had a lot of after-hours get-togethers and I was selective about going to those because of [the rumor]. And I was selective about after-hours, still walking the line of being friendly, but professional, particularly with my boss, because I was aware of that. And I was bound and determined to prove that rumor mill wrong. So I had to be selective, but I think that's just smart.

Although it may well have been smart, as it might be smart for women to avoid many of these situations in which the rules are so unclear, it does not change the fact that relationships are being built, "clubs" are being formed, and, right or wrong, these impact everyone's career potential.

The masculine environment also lends itself to stereotyping of women. A female senior executive told me that when a major layoff occurred at her company, the male executives stayed in their offices and left the two female leaders to deal with the

emotions of the day, an arena in which the men, and this woman, believed that women were superior:

[The other female executive] and I were conferred with considerably in regard to the handling of a layoff of over two hundred people, in terms of the management of the day, the emotional impact, and we were looked for, just understanding we might have more, and it's very interesting, males, at least the males in this company, found it very hard to walk the halls and face the disappointment and the hurt by the people that are still there and the people that were in the process of leaving, and they tended to stay in their offices. Where [the other female executive] and I were more comfortable in getting some of our management team to walk the halls and be visible. And I remember her going into the office of [a senior executive] and she said [he was] hiding in his office and he said, "what's going on out there?" and she said, "I don't think I'm going to tell you, see for yourself." We thought they were a bunch of wusses and couldn't handle it. On the reverse side, they did ask for our input and were grateful that we acted in that, I don't know, maternal way. They wanted to do the right thing.

This female executive not only appreciated being seen as "maternal," she forgave the men who were trying to do the right thing, but were just "wusses." For a woman to represent the situation this way reveals the taken-for-granted, naturalized sex roles that operate, even among male and female corporate executives.

Comments were also made about women needing to work harder than men or be more competent to get to the same place. Judy felt that they and other women had been taken advantage of in this way:

Well, I also believe, and this is difficult to say, but I believe that in the seventies and eighties a lot of these men in high positions they took tremendous advantage of women that wanted to move up in their careers and they took advantage of them in a way that was unacceptable. From a sexual standpoint, from a leading them on, there's a lot of that that went on, a lot of that and that was not, that has never been, really, I think, really highlighted.

The competitive nature of business itself can be viewed as an extension of hegemonic masculinity. A well-accepted stereotype (Hymowitz 2005), endorsed by some feminist theorists (Gilligan 1982), considers women leaders less competitive than

men, and some women in this study appear to accept this. Research on differences in leadership style between men and women has been criticized. Evidence of gender differences has been found in lab studies, but research done within organizations has shown no difference. Benschop (2006) cautions that this is because leadership is contextual, depending on the type of organization. Regardless, some of the women here identify with the stereotype and consider it a positive.

Patricia: I think male-run businesses tend to be more command-and-control while women are more collaborative, willing to adapt. Like we will stop for directions. There is an analogy. But it's a joke, because men won't do it and women will. So when a woman is at the top of a company, she is asking the customers, what do you want, she's asking the employees, what do you need, and reaching out. Our expression was "captain of the universe" . . .the captain of the universe mentality, which is what 90 percent of the leaders were. You know, you don't have to have the whole universe on your back; we all do it together. And I think that's more of a male perspective.

Although this sounds positive, the workplace continues to value the competitive, "heroic masculine" leader (Olsson 2000), for which Patricia's company has its own label, the "captain of the universe." When women accept stereotypes about themselves, they affirm the taken-for-granted nature of sex-role differences, which makes it much more difficult for others to challenge them.

Part of the competitive nature of business is the continual emphasis on business growth, something that benefited the women in their careers:

Joyce: The whole company was \$250 million in sales [when I joined it], which is tiny. By the time I left two and half years later they were a two and half billion-dollar company, so huge growth. So it was an exiting time to be there because they were growing so rapidly, the opportunities, you create it.

Judy: So [the company] was what I would consider to be a growing organization. So they were kind of finding their way. They were ever-changing, the people were having fun, because they were tapping people who were very young to take on bigger and broader scopes of responsibility which made my job fun, because I

got to be part of that perception and be able to grow with an organization. That was a huge opportunity for many, many people and to take their careers to another place. . . . and the great thing was that you had a group of people that were talking about the growth and being part of the growth and if you do this you will have career opportunities. So that was a really wonderful place.

The comments above have a positive tone because the growth is seen as the key to providing opportunities, but both of these women could also see the downside of this focus on growth:

Joyce: There are tremendous growing pains and so many times they were growing so fast they would eventually promote people beyond their capabilities and you go from being the star to being the fool in a matter of six months.

Judy: And so [the company] just continued to grow and broaden in scope and the bigger it got and after [the chairman] left and retired [the president] who was the heir apparent became the chairman and there was a huge shift in my mind in the culture. A huge shift and the shift had a lot to do with just, you know, winning at all costs. The idea of people who brought you to another level, the respect factor, and a lot of those things, were not upheld in the same fashion. It was a different mindset. We're gonna grow; we need to get more market share. We need to get more shareholder value.

Nancy reflected on another downside of a rapid growth environment; it masks poor management:

When times were great, you know the whole land of milk and honey. . . you had kids with two years of college, pulling down \$100,000 a year in sales, because it was "yee ha!" You know, it's like these kids that went into the dot com and just got in the right time and made a ton of money . . . Nobody really cared about good management. If the kid is twenty-one and making \$100,000 a year, if his boss ever yelled at him to hurry up and get that sale, well, who cares? He kept working and everybody's happy, and they go out drinking later and that's the end of it.

When I asked Joyce how her company had been able to grow so quickly (tenfold in two years), she told me:

Actually this was just growth [from] very aggressive sales tactics, some might say, and, certainly in hindsight, I might say some fairly unethical behavior. It was sort of "get the deal done no matter what. I'm going to look the other way, and I

don't want to hear what you did to book it.” It caught up with them . . . but that's why when the whole dot com thing that happened. I was like, “oh my god, this is the same thing,” accounting irregularities, in quotes (motions quotation marks).

Pegge worked for a company that grew through acquisitions, something that led to its own set of issues: “The core group that I worked with got bought and sold about five different times. . . . When you are bought and sold, every time your culture gets chipped at, so by the fifth time . . . and if you study acquisitions . . . acquisitions often break in two.”

Mary, who worked for a very entrepreneurial company, characterized by long hours and a high level of stress, told of the impact on one person's life:

[The] CFO . . . he, in fact, he died really early, because he had a heart attack from the stress. He died like at fifty, because it was fast-paced, and I think they would go out at night, too, and [travel] to these [companies they were acquiring.]

Rebekah: You really think that was brought on by the stress?

Mary: Oh, hush yes.

Part of this competitive, growth-oriented environment is the focus on financial results. Although these women accept that profits are needed to keep companies in business, some saw a movement toward goals of higher and higher profits, resulting in less and less for other things.

Colleen: [My last employer], it is privately owned, they just wanted to put more money in their pockets. I remember the year we had the largest sales increase in the history of that company, I got the same bonus I got the year before. They didn't throw a party, they didn't give us a pound cake, they didn't do anything. And we had worked, it was two years ago, and it was just, I don't know, very crazy. I got a pen . . . And a lot of us said then, “it doesn't matter how hard you work, how much money the company is making, year after year, it doesn't trickle down.”

I think most companies, large or small, have become so profit driven that money is such a motivator for the guys at the top, and for us as middle managers, we



wanted to make money, but the guys at the top, man, they want more money. . . . People say they want you to have balance in your life. They don't. If it impacts the bottom line, "get up here on Sunday morning, we are having a meeting."

Competition, a focus on growth, and the continual need to increase profits are described here primarily as negatives, but are considered "natural," taken-for-granted in the business world. This explains the somewhat ambivalent opinions of the women, who seemed to think competition is a positive thing and that a growing company provides the best "opportunity" for career advancement. But their belief in this version of business seems to be faltering. Most of them felt that there was too much focus on money and that people, and ethics, were being pushed aside in the relentless pursuit of more and higher profits. Whether these feelings are more prevalent in women than men would be an interesting subject for further research. This is certainly an area where men are equally affected, both in terms of the opportunities and the downsides such as stress-related illnesses.

#### Leadership, Values and Loyalty

Strong opinions were expressed about the leadership at the very top of corporations. Of course, not all of the leaders were bad, but only a few of the women volunteered positive comments; Joyce for a CEO who stayed only a short time at her last employer, and Mary Anne and Barbara of the CEOs of two small business clients of their respective consulting practices. The majority was negative, and played a part in why the women left the corporate world. Lack of leadership, lack of vision and just plain lack of management skills were mentioned.

Colleen: [The president and CEO] have no vision for the company. . . . When I would sit in meetings with them and try to talk to them about . . . the things that

we need to do to make us a better business down the road, not a larger business, but a better business. I couldn't do anything with them. Could not.

Nancy: There's a lot written about, and they try to teach people about, to be supervisors and managers, but being presidents is something that they just assume people can do . . . In fact they [can't]. If anything, they turn into more jerks, because what happens is that the people you're managing are higher and higher up and not so fragile.

Joyce: I never felt like the senior people at the company were the best and the brightest. . . . It was a great place to learn but I felt like the people who moved up were the people who towed the line and sort of stuck it out. They weren't people that dazzled me, I can tell you that much.

These observations are examples of another phenomenon that Joyce Williams (2000) identified. In her view, those who rise to the top are not the best; they are the ones that are “ready, willing and able” to work the eighty-hour weeks required by the “ideal worker” ideology. Some of those that are ready, willing and able believe that they make the choice freely, as Mary Anne saw with a client of hers:

. . . he is behind the bleachers at his kid's soccer game [on his cell phone]. And his wife has told him, “I'm about done with this.” And I'm coaching him and he said, “. . . gotta help me get control of this. For one thing, I'm setting a standard on the inside [of my company.] But I don't wanna lose my family.” What he told me is that, “I know this is out of control, and I know that this is not a good example I'm setting on the inside or for my marriage and my family.” But then, he said that, “I am so passionate about what I do, it's such a huge part of who I am, I can't stop it.” And I said, “Aren't you a father? And aren't you a husband?” . . . Then he really, he got tears in his eyes. And he said, “I almost feel like I don't know how to turn it off,” and he said, “honestly, I don't want to.”

He loves it. He loves it and I think a lot of men who are successful, at the top, feel that way. They work those hours because they love it so much. They're passionate and it is so a part of who they are, they're almost not able to see why it isn't that way for everybody else. They really struggle understanding that. And if people say that: “I have a family,” they say: “So do I. Why can't you give more? Why aren't you more committed?”

This presents an interesting example of the way that the ideal worker role has impacted men. Although he thoroughly enjoys his work, this man also wants to do the

right thing for his family. Given the business culture that he faces, he cannot see any way to be successful without working the long hours, sacrificing his family time. This also provides a demonstration of Kanter's theory that people who rise to the top are those who do not put family as a priority, and once they are there do not create workplaces that are family friendly, which hurts women disproportionately (Kanter 1993).

Related to leadership are the values exhibited by the leaders, embodied in part by the way that they treat people within the company. Once again there were both good and bad examples, but the predominant feeling was negative:

Barbara: He will call the people and swear at them and threaten to fire them, "who made this big screw up?" and he's the CEO of this business . . . the culture followed the leader, which is a total lack of respect for people. There's just no respect for the people.

Colleen worked for a relatively small, family-owned business, but did not feel that she was treated like family, especially not on her last day when she was escorted from the building with no prior notice:

"We just want you out of here." The thing that bothered me a lot about that company was they presented themselves as, "Oh, we care about our people, we're family." And then they treat me the way they did, after years of hard, hard service and dedication.

Nancy offered her theory about why people at the director and vice-president levels are treated poorly, which may help to explain some of the blatant discrimination experienced by executive women, i.e. the glass ceiling:

You know, when you manage a bunch of minimum-wage people, they're more likely to sue you, complain about you, than the higher up you go. It's kind of expected, and I think that just by our nature, we put up with more. It's much more unusual to hear about some vice president or senior vice president who has some action against the company. Even though the things that companies do from a sexism, from a you know, whatever, are just as bad if not worse at those levels. They just aren't careful anymore, because they don't think they need to be.

Pegge felt that her company treated people well, but as part of her job she worked with supplier companies that did not. She expressed her philosophy and that of her company as the golden rule:

If you are driving a customer service, customer-focused organization, first and foremost you have to treat people like you want them to treat the client. I say that and I worked very closely with other companies that were [suppliers] for products. One of the real challenges was that lack of professionalism, lack of core values in treating employees like you would want to be treated or like you would want the customer treated . . . it was use and abuse the employees, provide them no support, versus what I was in was more professionalism, respect of employees, treat them like you would want them to treat the clients, invest in them. . . .What happens then is that you create a loyalty among the employees, you create an environment in which they can shine in the areas you want them to. And it all starts at the top.

Barbara and Mary provided these specific examples to support their assessment of certain companies having strong values and treating people well. The simplicity of the examples underscores how bad the situation must be otherwise:

Barbara: [The company president] . . . he's really cool, he said that they had a woman who was going to have a baby, single mom, and the supervisor was going to have the receptionist order flowers and send them, and he said "no, I want you," the president said to the supervisor, "I want you to get her something you know she is going to want, not just send the flowers." So they got her a gift certificate to Wal-Mart to buy diapers or whatever and she called the president and said, "I can't believe." Those little acts of kindness mean more than if they sent the flowers, instead of just doing the easy thing. "What specifically does that person need?" It was really impressive.

Mary: [The company] was a really good environment. I mean, they were nervous if you got, you know a happy employee is a productive employee. They absolutely believe that, that a happy employee are productive employees. They believe that, they followed it.

Rebekah: What kind of things did they do?

M: They had a refrigerator in their kitchen. They had . . . some people like Diet Pepsi, some people like Diet Coke, some people like Diet Coke Caffeine Free . . . Perrier lime or lemon, "What kind do you like? We'll make sure it gets put on the

list of what we order.” Always stocked. Never did you run out of whatever kind you like.

As simplistic as this example might seem, Mary told this story during two different interviews and was clearly very impressed by this attention to the comfort of the employees. When questioned, she admitted that part of her reaction to this treatment was its dramatic contrast to the environment she had been in prior to joining this company, the one where the CFO had died of a heart attack at fifty. An example of that environment was when her boss left \$100 in cash in her desk to thank her for doing some extra work. He felt that money was the only thing that people cared about and chose not to actually *say* thank you, something that would have meant a lot to Mary.

Nancy spoke of the attempts she saw by leaders to create more humane organizations, “but as soon as times got tough, they hunker down and turned back into assholes, which was their normal . . . and that's probably a charged word, but they turned back into sort of an onslaught of authoritative, autocratic, ‘good because I said so,’ type management style.”

In relation to values, the concept of loyalty also came up, loyalty on the part of employees and on the part of the companies towards their employees. Both were seen by the women to have declined since previous generations or, for the older women, during their own careers. One manifestation of a lack of loyalty is high turnover. Many comments were made about high levels of turnover in a variety of different companies, but especially in the younger, more “maverick” companies. Susan worked in a company that provided loyalty, but only to those who assimilated, a price she felt was too high:

I remember thinking back in my very naïve days in the company. You know, all you have to do is perform, and they will take care of me for the rest of my life.

Well, you know, you've got to get over that real quick too. The cost of taking care of you was too counter my own set of values.

Judy, who worked for one company for over twenty-five years, only to see herself and most of the long-tenured workforce offered “early retirement,” finds that most executives today are willing to talk to her when she recruits them to change jobs. They recognize that there is no job security:

They [the companies] are the ones that aren't loyal. . . . and when the workers of today have seen their parents, their grandparents, their sisters, brothers, because we saw that across corporate America, everyone has been touched by [layoffs] once, twice, five times.

The phenomenon of low levels of loyalty was sometimes attributed to a new generation of employees, but most agree that the “rightsizing” of workforces represents a lack of loyalty by businesses to their employees and led the employees to be less loyal to companies. As Judy pointed out, being laid off can, and most likely will, happen to everyone who works for a large company in the U.S. today.

A woman who left a corporate position to start her own advertising agency recently told me that she is surprised when people ask her if she is worried about the lack of security in having her own business. Being a corporate employee, in her opinion, is much less secure. She, at least, has some control over her future. Like most of the women in this study, she has chosen to be a “free agent,” as Pink (2001) has termed this move to self-employment. Williams (2000) considers this phenomenon among women to be evidence of the abilities and creativity that they have been unable to use inside corporations.

The workplace of today has been described as “toxic” (Webber 1998), an assessment that is confirmed by the stories shared here. Many of the problems that these

former executives describe are bad for women and men alike. When we look deeper, though, we must acknowledge that their workplaces were “gendered” in very specific ways. Networks were created through social activities that exclude women, building relationships of trust and familiarity that limit who has access to power and who will succeed the current leaders who are overwhelmingly white and male. Behaviors that are glossed as masculine are valued, but women who display them are criticized. Women continue to be encouraged to adopt styles that men are comfortable with (Catalyst 2004), but those styles are not associated with power and success. The women leaders themselves often agree that they are less competitive, despite research that disputes this stereotype.

The women are a product of their environment, they consider competition and profit maximization to be inevitable factors in business, but they are also a product of their socialization as females. They value things like respect and loyalty, which appear to be evolving into “feminine” traits, as the workplaces they describe value them less and less. As they achieved executive rank, the women discovered that the men at the very top lacked important leadership qualities and basic management abilities, and that many of them were not concerned with how the executives below them were treated.

Since all of the stories presented here are from women, it is not possible to determine from this research how men feel about these issues. The women are also all white, middle class and all at about the same life and career stage, which certainly impacts their viewpoints. Most of them spoke of happier times early in their careers. The workplace has changed, but so have these ten women. Other research projects need to be undertaken to reveal the viewpoints of men and of younger women, as well as

women of color and women who have remained inside the corporate environment. But these are personal life stories, told in the voices of ten women from the first generation to reach the executive offices, and they speak for themselves.

### **What's Wrong**

There is certainly much in the descriptions of the workplaces above that could be considered wrong, but specific topics raised in the interviews were more obviously classified as problems. Blatant discrimination and the existence of the glass ceiling, as well as lack of role models for women executives fall here. The women also gave some specific reasons that they chose to end their corporate careers. These help to illuminate issues that must be addressed for businesses to retain women. The stories and opinions of what is “wrong” in this section are more factual, more straightforward than those in the previous section, requiring less analysis to determine what is happening. They would appear to also be easier to address; a law exists, it should be followed. The continued persistence of these factors, however, reveals that they are part of the taken-for-granted sex roles in our culture and they, along with the more subtle factors in the prior section, are difficult to remedy.

### **Discrimination and the Glass Ceiling**

Much of the literature, as well as popular rhetoric, holds that blatant discrimination has been eliminated and replaced by a more insidious form, more difficult to identify and prove (Fick 1997). Given this, it is somewhat surprising that six of these ten women related personal experiences of overt discrimination. Only three, Barbara, Mary and Pegge feel that they were never discriminated against. Mary acknowledges that her view may be naïve. Pegge and Barbara worked in companies with strong affirmative



action and diversity programs that should have worked to reduce the likelihood of overt forms of discrimination. These two women did not, however, identify those programs as a reason for their positive experiences.

Pegge is an engineer and worked in very male-dominated fields where she was often the only woman in a particular job but felt that “in general, if you performed you had opportunity. And in general it was gender neutral. That’s what you want. That’s what you want.” Her company was a government contractor who had a track record of hiring and promoting a diverse workforce. These efforts were probably in place for many years when Pegge arrived in the early eighties and she benefited from the resulting environment. This most likely influenced her personal opinions regarding discrimination:

For the companies that I was trying, coming in as a senior manager, responsibility in a very tactical environment, I never, well personality exceptions, I never, a few individuals, but in general, I never felt being a female in that field was a disadvantage . . . if we stop to focus on “poor me,” or “I’m a woman therefore,” and just focus on professionalism and exceptional results; if you focus there, even when there is a barrier, you break through it easily, easily and . . . you know, good ole boy in a [manufacturing] plant in [the South] and they spit their wad of tobacco out before they shake your hand, to across the country in various different, and even when there would be a little not being taken seriously, if I just focused on, remembered helping them solve problems, focused on . . . I’d do exceptionally well. . . and so many people make the opposite mistake . . . and if more women would [think]. . . “I can’t change them but I can change how I let it affect me” . . . focus on being the best professional you can possibly be, which produces results, and any barrier is going to be so temporary and there is credibility.

As positive as Pegge is about her ability to overcome obstacles, she does admit they exist. Words like “a little not being taken seriously,” indicate that some of the men she dealt with did subscribe to sex-role stereotypes, not believing that a woman can perform in a traditionally male career like engineering. Pegge is sure she was able to overcome these initial impressions by “being the best professional.” Her efforts may well

have pushed the glass ceiling upward, as the men she encountered changed their opinions. Unless, of course, they just assumed she was an exception, different from other women.

Barbara's experience and personal philosophy are similar to those of Pegge. She speaks more about the corporate structure that aided in creating the environment, however, and also related a story she had recently heard of a woman who quit her job because she was asked to fire someone because they were African American. By bringing this up she is acknowledging that such things occur, but holds firm that she was not a victim of discrimination herself, and does not feel that her former employer discriminated:

Could be, you know that big of organization, certainly, they put a lot of stuff in place, to avoid the lawsuits. But I personally never observed or felt that I was discriminated against. Now, that's not to say that I did not observe or think there were good ole boys, but to me that was their problem.

Rebekah: It didn't stop other people from getting in?

Barbara: No. Certainly, there would be statements of bias, just because I felt there are male chauvinist pigs, for lack of a better term, who worked there. But that was who they were. And there were also lots of other kinds of people who worked there. For me it was always your performance. And this was my perspective on it. I don't like affirmative action because I think that's as discriminating as, you know, people, should be based on their performance, their merits, their capabilities. . . . and that's not to say that other people didn't feel it. But I think there's a whole problem with victimism in this world, where people simply don't take responsibility for their own lives and their own actions, who say, "I can't." And it's men and women, white, black and Chinese, it doesn't matter. There are people in this world who fall on the victim side of the scale as opposed to the responsible side of this scale.

Like Pegge, Barbara acknowledges that there were barriers, "statements of bias."

She also agrees with Pegge that if you don't take on the victim role you can succeed on

merit. Barbara does admit that she may have benefited from the affirmative action program that she does not support:

I never felt it. And I don't think even in the reverse I haven't, yet may have. Well, when I was promoted to my first director position, I was the only woman. Maybe they felt compelled to bring a woman in because they had all these men. I don't know.

The experiences and opinions of these two women are important in the contrast that they provide to the stories of the others. As I have speculated, their positive experiences may have been the result of years of affirmative action in their companies, although they clearly are believers in meritocracy. They trust in what Kanter (1993) called the “individual” model; that you succeed purely through your personal abilities and hard work regardless of the culture and structure of an organization. That they have managed to maintain this belief after many years in corporations may be evidence of the benefit of affirmative action and diversity initiatives, or may be purely a reflection of their worldview or their specific career experiences.

It is important to note that these two women are currently in business together, primarily as executive coaches. Since the role of the coach is often that of cheerleader, their positive attitudes may be the result of spending the last few years learning how to cheer on other business professionals, or it may be that they were attracted to that work because of their own positive outlooks on business and meritocracy.

Nancy and Patricia, on the other hand, experienced blatant forms discrimination as recently as the early and mid 1990s. Not only did they uncover biased treatment, the male managers responsible were so bold as to admit to it. Nancy was told explicitly that

she was not considered for a promotion because she had just had a baby, what Williams (2000) calls the “maternal wall”:

When they were looking for [someone for the higher level job]. . . I had been there for several years in the director role. I was clearly the best director they had. I was clearly a viable candidate. And even though in a lot of other cases they did plenty of promote from within things, they were really jerking around for quite a while, in terms of whether they were taking me seriously as a candidate. And they were parading in people with my exact background, but men. You know, people who looked like a bright shiny penny like a résumé looks, in comparison to someone who's actually worked for you. So I decided to update my résumé and actually sat down with my boss and said, “Look, I'm just as capable on paper as all these people, plus, you know me. I have the skills.” So what my boss told me, a man probably five years younger than I was. Most of them were young . . . What he says to me was, “Well, you know, we're not really sure,” because I had had a baby, “we're not really sure if, because of your family situation, you'd be able to make the commitment we're looking for.”

Rebekah: Blatantly illegal statements.

Nancy: Yeah, but also even forgetting all that, my husband was the stay-at-home dad, had been forever. I had never missed a day of work. When I had my kid, I was out exactly the six weeks, and oh, by the way, still doing E-mail, conference calls, having meetings and everything else during the whole time. There was absolutely no reason, no nothing to even justify the concern. And again, that's the kind of thing they would never have said to a lower-level person, but they feel like they can say that to me.

So I ended up writing a letter to the CFO, who was his boss and him, attaching my résumé: “I feel that, number one, here's why I think I'm a great candidate.” Made the letter as positive as possible, but also said: “I feel it's important to respond to [your] concern that my family situation, blah, blah, blah.” And I reminded them that I'd not missed a day of work. And I've not gone home early. My husband's the primary caregiver. And I pulled a lot of the cards that men pull, you know, I'm the primary provider, I need to provide for my family. Blah, blah, blah, blah. And you know, ultimately got the job. . . . anyway I moved on and did that, cracked and broke through a little bit of the glass ceiling, and so forth.

Patricia, who was also the breadwinner in her family at the time, found out that she had been paid less than a male with the same credentials, and the manager responsible had done it intentionally:

And there is a guy who started after they brought me in and they brought him in at a higher salary. And I know from [my boss] that [she] questioned [her manager] about it, because this other guy who came around the same time, went to work for another department, with the exact same background as me, and . . . [her manager's] response to [her] was, "He's got a mortgage to pay." . . . I mean, I was married to a [blue collar worker]. I mean, he was making \$15,000 a year. I had a mortgage to pay.

In both of these incidences of overt discrimination, the male perpetrators of the discriminatory acts are basing their decisions on the naturalized sex roles in society. The women are not expected to be the breadwinners and are not expected to commit as much to their careers, particularly if they have a family. What makes it even more interesting is that, although they were married, both of these women *were* the primary providers in their households. In addition, Nancy's husband was staying home, in the caretaker role, so that she was able to perform as the "ideal worker." These factors apparently were not sufficient to overcome the stereotypes.

Nancy provided another example of the maternal wall in her company. A younger woman who she feels is extremely well qualified was held back, subtly, early in her career:

There was a time early on where they had an attitude about [her]; a real, incredibly sexist, stupid thing. Her first child was born with a birth defect. Her baby had open heart surgery at like two weeks old and [she] stayed out on, that was just when family medical leave [FMLA] came out, and she stayed out the whole twelve weeks, and they had an attitude about it. How stupid is that? And she was only a manager then. They had an attitude about "she took so much time off." That's arcane, but true; it was pretty bizarre.

This woman may never have identified a specific act of overt discrimination, but Nancy, an executive several levels above her in the organization, was aware that the men in power used this instance as proof of reduced commitment to the job. The fact that this woman's baby had a serious medical condition, and that she only took time that is

available to her by law, causes them to look particularly heartless, but does not stop them from perpetuating the stereotype. The Center for WorkLife Law has also identified cases where women were routinely assigned less important work after returning from maternity leave. One notable quote in their work is from an attorney who was given work that could be done by a paralegal when she returned. She said that she wanted to tell them, “Look, I had a baby not a lobotomy” (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006:45).

When Judy’s employer of twenty-seven years went through a major downsizing, she feels that they particularly targeted executive females and employees over fifty, two categories that she fit:

I think what happened is that corporate America, in my mind, from what I've just seen in the last few years [as an executive recruiter], and looking at it from the organization I was with, had the opportunity, through the auspices of downsizing, to do their right-sizing in who they wanted from who they didn't want, and the percentage of people they didn't want were older, and were predominantly, in my industry, female.

Rebekah: And did any of the women survive this culture change?

Judy: There's a few. But a few of those women were viewed as pets or had personal relationships with some male people. They are not viewed as people who did it on their own. That's a tough thing to say but I'm gonna have the courage to say it.

Judy’s company was large and had a long history of providing opportunities for women and minorities. Like those of Barbara and Pegge, this company had long-established affirmative action and diversity programs. Judy believes that they used “downsizing” to reverse those years of progress, reflecting the underlying bias that still existed among the top managers. The company had undergone two significant mergers, so these top managers may have come from other institutions, but this experience left Judy bitter about the true state of “equal opportunity” in the United States. This bitterness

can be seen in many of the passages that I have included from her interviews and was clear from the tone of voice she used when discussing her departure from this company, although five years had passed.

Colleen's boss, with whom she had an ongoing conflict that finally led to her departure from the company, told her that she was not what was needed for the "environment" of their business. This attitude also manifested itself in a pattern of discrimination that was reflected in the demographics of the management in the retail operations of her company:

And I was actually told by [my boss] that he needed somebody that was better suited to work in the male environment in the [retail locations.] In other words, get down and dirty in that environment, in the stores, and he said that to my face.

Rebekah: What about the ultimate customer, the retail customer [were they mostly male]?

Colleen: No, the research we've done it's fifty-fifty.

R: So even for a manager . . .

C: Our stores have no black [managers], we have a couple of Spanish [managers] down in Miami. But no, all males. They have one female [manager] in [a nearby city] and they treat her like she is from outer space.

Susan experienced more subtle forms of discrimination, early in her career at a *Fortune* 100 corporation that was very male dominated.

Rebekah: So do you feel like you were stopped from promotion at that company?

Susan: Absolutely. Absolutely. My immediate supervisor, when I would have conversation about paths and careers . . . after a period of time. . . . "Well, we'll talk about that." I think the ceiling was in [that office]. I asked the question again, and he looked at me and he said, "You will not go anywhere until I say you'll go somewhere. It will be my choice."

R: And you think that was because of your fiancé? Because you were a woman?

S: No, I think in that case, it was because I was a woman. He was let go from the company a few years after that.

R: Still, at that point, he had all the power. You said they told you to break off an engagement. Would they have done that to a man?

S: No. I will tell you that when I was in [the headquarters], was hired into . . . within three years or so I was promoted into running the [headquarters] market, which was the largest market for them in the country, and up until the time they hired me, they hired only men with either a fiancé or a wife with plans to have children. And they were very honest. They said, you know, this is our strategy. We want people to have a reason to have to stay.

Susan referred to this as a game that the company played with its employees, a game that finally got to her:

It was a game. . . . as I look back, I knew it was a game. And the insulting part, and that's the first time I've ever used the word insulting, the degrading nature of that, which eventually causes you to walk in and say this is it. Is they didn't think it was a game, and they didn't figure out that I did. It was almost like employees are too stupid to figure our game. We'll only let people through the bottleneck we can trust with our game, and that's just editorializing.

And there were other parts of the game in this organization that she felt were discriminatory and very personal. She is clearly still disturbed by this bias:

The cost of taking care of you was too counter my own set of values.

Rebekah: How so?

Susan: Lack of challenge. The image thing. The weight issue.

R: Was that because you were calling on clients?

S: Yeah. Right. Even the men, there were certain physical, no one with a beard, no one with a mustache.

R: And the weight issue, did that apply to men also?

S: I don't know that it did.

R: Really?



S: (Sadly) I don't know that it did.

Although she was not a party to it, Patricia worked in a company during the time it was settling a class action lawsuit regarding promotion of women. She worked on the team that developed a new career path to correct the situation:

For two or three years, and it gets to the crux of the class-action lawsuit, because the class-action lawsuit was only in [one department] that women were not having success becoming [department] managers. That's what the whole class-action lawsuit was about . . . So what we did, it was a group of about ten of us that worked for a long time on this. We reorganized the organizational structure within the [the department]. . . . So we put in a structure that had all these different established departments and career paths. . . . 95 percent of [the managers of the company] didn't want to do this because it was so different. It was not the way they came up. They came up being “second man,” and you had to be [in the manual worker side of the business]. And you had to be able to [do heavy lifting].

This class-action lawsuit received a great deal of media attention, which I believe was primarily because of the popular belief that women have equal opportunity today. Patricia's description of this situation reveals that the discrimination was at least partly structural. Entry-level positions that women traditionally held never led to management, while those for which men were recruited, jobs that required no more experience or education, had a direct path upward. If a woman could perform as an “ideal worker,” and manage the manual labor in those jobs, she might also make it to manager, but few were ever willing or able to try. Similar cases, mentioned above, are now facing Wal-Mart and Outback Steakhouse.

Half of the women used the term “glass ceiling” for the more subtle forms of discrimination that kept them from moving upward within their organizations.

Colleen: After that many years in the company and after [the president] knowing my abilities, my contributions to the organization . . . It was an eye opening experience that the good old boys have decided that they do not want a senior

level woman making decision in that company. . . And I think also [the CFO] did not think I was worth \$120,000 year. No woman is. I make twice as much as any woman in the company and I just don't think he could deal with that. And my head was banging on that ceiling. And he couldn't handle a woman at that level.

Several became very philosophical on this topic, sharing their personal views based on their years at the highest levels in America's corporations. Judy, who was regional vice president of human resources for one of the largest corporations in the country, describes it this way:

There's people that know they have to go through, and especially what I consider to be high-level managers. They understand the law. They know what the company stance is, but they have a personal agenda and a personal mantra that is diabolically different, and it shows from the way they promote, from the way that they give out their increases, the way they stand up and praise someone, to their inclusion, in the sports activities that they pick. How they eliminate the female. Every aspect is geared towards, subliminally, their feeling that women are not the same as men. . . . So I think there's been a lot of lip service to the aspects of the glass ceiling. I truly believe the glass ceiling has been bulletproofed. I don't think it's been permeated.

And Nancy, who overcame the "maternal wall," as discussed above, and went on to become a senior vice president of that *Fortune* 100 company has this viewpoint:

I think that the world sort of kids themselves. Or at least this country kids itself, when they think there's no glass ceiling. It's just higher than it used to be. It used to be that women were allowed to be good secretaries, nurses, and their teachers, and [now] women are allowed to be good managers, and good middle managers, middle-level executives, but you still don't see women respected as much as they should be, more in some sort of gender-neutral fashion, in my mind, in the board rooms or at the highest levels. Just like you see, we're not ready for a female president [of the United States], apparently. It's that same thing as people can deal with congressman, because there are so many of them. If you get one woman, that doesn't take one of your two spots. But then there's far fewer senators from a percentage standpoint and president and vice president have never been touched. . . . and I think it's less of an issue, and I think this is why people kind of pooh-pooh it, I think it's less of an issue at lower levels. And the average person is at a lower level and they don't really see it. They say, "when I look around the office, I see black people, I see women, so it must be fine." But from an actual higher-level case, it's just not the case.

Rebekah: They are just not moving up?

Nancy: Well they are, but only to a certain point. And I think, I personally, like I said, I really believe that affirmative action practices, it's not like it was sixty years ago, or forty years ago, whatever the number is. It's not like trying to find a woman with an MBA and twenty years of strong business experience isn't going to happen. There's tons of us who could sit in the seat of a president of a U.S. corporation, tons of them. So, to me, to have any impression that they're not out there is just silly. And I think what they do is they go in their own little network, and this guy tells you about that guy who tells you about that guy, and it's all guys.

As to why things haven't changed, Mary Anne, who has worked with many companies in her consulting practice, feels that the top managers are comfortable and don't even recognize that the issue needs to be addressed:

I just don't think the men who are still largely running our organizations today see this as a problem. They don't see glass ceilings as a problem. They don't see the diversity issues that are happening at lower levels, because at their level it's not usually real apparent. They haven't had any problems there.

Susan, the eldest of the group, dealt with much of the latent discrimination that Judy described, and had this to say when I asked if she thought she could have been the president of her company: "I would never have gotten to be president. That would've been viewed as lack of respect for the legacy that many years had built."

These reflections on the phenomenon of the glass ceiling illuminate the personal feelings of the first generation of women to *reach* the ceiling and sometimes move it further up, only to then find it has been "bullet-proofed." They reveal an understanding of hegemonic masculinity in their use of phrases like "their feeling that women are not the same as men," "no woman is [worth \$120,000]," "it's all guys." They recognize the function of power in keeping them from breaking through the ceiling, as well as the importance of informal processes. They also recognize that the men deny that the ceiling

exists, something they find frustrating. This is an example of white male privilege, as Joan Acker pointed out, “one of the privileges enjoyed by those with power is the privilege to not see the systemic sources of privilege” (Acker 2000:630).

### Lack of Women Role Models

As women move up within organizations, they both move the glass ceiling higher and provide role models for younger women. Not too surprisingly, few role models were available for the women in this group. They were the first of their gender to occupy many of their jobs. The older women in the group had the least exposure to other female executives. Susan and Colleen, for instance, occasionally worked with women who were roughly their peers, but never as supervisors.

Susan: When I [transferred to a new city for a promotion], there was one other woman and I swear that the CEO that recruited me went to her and said you have to be [Susan’s] friend because he had no other way of knowing how I was ever going to adapt to [the new city] and so we became friendly, I mean . . . I swear it was in her job description to be friendly. We were so opposite, she was born and raised in [that city] . . . But it was still just her and me. I never got a sense that it was a real breakthrough that he had hired a woman to come out there.

Colleen: When I was an account manager on [a large corporation], when we launched [a new] business, [I saw] a change. Because I worked for, my clients . . . all big, powerful men, all corner offices. I was constantly the only woman in the room on a lot of those meetings. What was so good . . . it was a company that even though it was a spin-off from [an old fashioned regulated industry] and all that stuff, which was probably the most rigid corporate environment that ever was, it was a spin-off and I began to see more and more women in those rooms and more and more women in decision-making positions.

Judy, in her human resources role, saw many women move up inside her organization, but was not positive about what they had to do to succeed:

When you look at it and you see the numbers of women who are making it and had made it, it's just all typical. Most of the individuals are single. They work exponentially more than their male counterparts. More hours, and they are doing things from a social or from an environmental standpoint, or from a community

standpoint, that just raises them up and gives the organization leverage, because of their ability. They're really kind of saying, "I want my career to blossom, and I'm going to use all the mechanisms that I have." And that's what I think women have done very, very well. Have learned to do, they learned how to play in a male world.

The younger women sometimes did have women in positions above them, but they, also, did not often like what they saw:

Joyce: So again, in terms of advancement, the opportunities were there as long as you were willing to kind of buy into: this is my life, and I have a lot of help at home, a spouse or a nanny or whatever . . . I mean [that company] was touted all the time, it seems like every year, and I may be exaggerating, or every other year, *The Wall Street Journal* does an article in their marketing section of what a great company [it] is for women, because they have these women in senior management. And of course, [one woman] had made it up to [a very high level] until she was "moved to special projects." But I always hated those articles, even when I worked there, because I never felt that . . . I knew what these women were like . . . Yes, they were there, and I suppose that's progress. In other companies, maybe they're not there, . . . they are general managers. But the life and the trade-off those women made is not a trade-off I would've wanted to have made.

Nancy's early career experience had very few role models, and none that she wished to emulate:

I remember when I was in [a professional services firm]. It would have been eighty-five, which wasn't that early, but at the same time, back then, there were like two women partners and this was in [a large northern city], back to your fifteen hundred professionals. There were two women partners . . . one was just your classic old-time woman professional. She dressed very, very much like, very conservatively. She had children yet she worked like a dog, a million hours. Gave up her life basically to sort of prove something. She was the classic woman of that day. And I remember thinking to my self, and I wasn't even interested in children back then, didn't think I ever would be, but I remember thinking to myself, "if I have to give up who I am, I don't even care, it's not worth it." But thank god for those women because, again, it's back to those women certainly were the ones that laid the groundwork.

Mary had women supervisors who tried to mentor her, but she did not want to follow their path:

The comptroller, she was a one, a woman, but she didn't have children or anything like that, so she was just blazing her way . . . we hired a senior VP for tax . . . and it was a woman.

Rebekah: Did she help?

Mary: Yes, and no, because she was married and never had children, which I have nothing against, but she just seemed to think like “well, if you get a nanny.” That's the type she was. I mean, she'd gotten up, she had risen through the ranks at [a major retailer]. Started out like in sales tax, you know, and she got her doctorate, J.D. to be a tax attorney, so, but she really wants me to go back to school and expand my career.

I asked Mary whether or not the men she worked with were married or had children. She responded, “They had stay-at-home spouses, I guess all of them did, or else they didn't have kids.”

Being the first woman in a job where the men all had wives at home lent itself to stories that were more light-hearted, but still very frustrating. Susan remembers some situations in the early part of her career in which men just seemed to be oblivious:

None of the wives worked . . . to where I would even challenge when they say, you know, “You'll fly in on Sunday night. On Monday we need you so-and-so,” and I go, “When am I going to do laundry?” And they would look at me like I had three heads. Laundry? Never talked about that. I pointed out one day that every one of them had a wife who packed his suitcase, did the laundry, and so they miraculously have the suitcase. The practicalities of life was something that the men, never, never understood, and it wasn't like I was a prima donna about it. I'm not a prima donna. (Laughs)

Mary Anne, one of the youngest women in the study, told me the story about the office rumor that she had an affair with her boss to get a promotion. I asked her if that was because she was the only woman executive in the company:

No, there was two others, a chief marketing officer, married with children and another woman from customer service, and she was in the process of a divorce with three kids. Neither of them were very trendy women, in terms of how they dressed. They were very traditional, in terms of how they dressed; they were older than me. I was single at the time and had just gone through a divorce and

was younger. So you know, I was the target. . . . Because I wore trendy suits. I had no fear; I was brazen. . . . and outspoken.

Patricia had a few women role models in her company, one who was in a very powerful position, an officer of the corporation and on the board of directors. Although she admits that this woman was very capable, she did not like her style and felt that it was a factor in the woman's eventual fall from power:

She is very vocal, very controlling, very smart and very tenacious, a tenacious negotiator. Anything that we had that was big, big bucks, she was involved, because, by virtue of her personality, she would get involved with everything. She works gobs of hours; no detail is too detailed for her . . . just a slave driver mentality, she's a workaholic. Never had any kids; married a man ten or fifteen years older, who has been retired for five years . . . And she benefited by the class-action lawsuit; she got put on the board . . . And I knew that [the president] wasn't comfortable with a lot of her philosophy. He trusted her opinion about financial decisions, because she is so smart, and she is so detailed, and she was going to tell you what she was feeling. She was never playing any games or being manipulative. But she was more emotional, and lots of words, and in the weeds. And there were some times that I knew he was just not comfortable with her approach. He didn't want emotion, he just wanted facts and he wanted it to be condensed, and quick. . . . So, sure enough, [she] is no longer on the board. That happened after I left . . . I think that he was sick of listening to her.

Not too surprisingly, both Pegge and Barbara, the two women who worked for the companies with the most developed affirmative action and diversity programs, felt they had role models. Pegge did not see many other women engineers above her, but she saw that women in other areas of the company were being given opportunities: "it was very successful in promoting women, in moving them into positions of responsibility, and the first woman to be on the board, the person to be in key management and top director position, those were all in the time I was there. They were all milestones that they set."

The need for total assimilation seems to have decreased as more women have entered middle management. The change can be seen in the demographics of my study

population. Although my population is small, none of the women over fifty had children, and all three of them were single for most of their careers. All of the women under fifty had children, except Mary Anne who told me that she had been unable to conceive. The idea of balancing a family and an executive level job seems to have been abandoned by many of the women who entered the workforce in the seventies. It could, of course, be that these three women were not interested in having children, but this split in the demographics did not surprise me, given that all of my professional female friends who are near or over fifty, did not have children either, or did not have them until late in their careers. Patricia's company had an unwritten rule that a woman could not reach the executive level unless she had a stay-at-home husband:

[The senior female executive] had no children and a husband that is retired. You can't apply that lifestyle. Do you want people who don't have families? Can we not procreate? What's the deal?

Rebekah: And they build themselves to be family oriented?

Patricia: They don't want your spouse to work. That's why [another woman executive]'s husband doesn't work anymore and [another women there], the two women who got VP, the three women who got VP in the last three years, two of them, their husbands retired before they got promoted, and the other one is not married. And that's what [the senior female executive] would push them to do.

Colleen expressed some hope that women would be able to change things as they achieve higher levels, but was unsure that any would stay long enough:

Yes, I think we certainly can affect change, but there have to be more of us that want to change things. And I think what's scary, and you are going to find in talking to all of us, we don't want to go back in that corporate world and try to change it, because it's just too painful.

Although she expressed a strong view about the continuing presence of the glass ceiling, Judy's company had many high-level female executives. I asked her if she



thought that women could make changes to the way that business is done. She responded, “I don't think they're allowed to change it. It's like a creed, like smoking a cigar, you know, not once have martinis been introduced to the boardroom. No, the scotch, the cigars, and the dirty jokes.” At one point, she worked directly for one of the most powerful women in both her industry and her geographic region. I asked specifically if that woman, at that level, could effect change. Judy’s answer was still negative, “I think that's part of the reason why she never got on the big board [of the corporation.] And that's part of the reason why she never moved up [to president or CEO]. Because they don't want someone to rain on their parade.”

Nancy provided an example of a younger woman who she had mentored and who she felt might be able to achieve the top level at her former company:

She is very calming, likable . . . comes across, and I can't really give an example because I can't do it but she . . . makes you feel like you are getting a positive response. [She] just has a way, a very positive way. She is not Polly Anna but she just has a very positive way of making you feel like she said yes to you . . . You like, especially men, who I think have more fragile egos, they like to deal with someone, especially when they are a woman, that is in fact meeting their needs. And I don't mean that in any sort of weird way, but basically she is being supportive. She just has a way. And to me when you combine the smarts, which I think has to be a foregone conclusion with women, her attractiveness, which I think, as silly as that is, helps men like you more, and then her pleasing way and her calming, pleasing, positive way of dealing with people; it's just the perfect combination.

Apparently Nancy, having struggled trying to adopt a style as much like the men as possible, now agrees with the Catalyst organization, which recommends that women adopt a style that men are comfortable with (Catalyst 2004). She does not say that she could do this herself, but the woman she believes might actually break the glass ceiling is someone who has such a style. She also feels that a woman must be considered attractive

to be successful in business. Bell and McLaughlin researched the issue of appearance as it related to discrimination in the workplace and found that “attractive women are advantaged in lower level jobs and in jobs held predominantly by women, but not at higher levels, in professional jobs or those perceived as men’s jobs” (Bell and McLaughlin 2006:457). Attractiveness was found to be associated with negative stereotypes leading to the conclusion that the woman is less intelligent or competent as a manager or executive.

With so few others above them on the corporate ladder, these women have encountered many challenges in deciding what style is appropriate. As discussed previously, the business books written for them at the time encouraged them to assimilate to the male model, but not to offend men by losing too much of their femininity. The stories here reveal that the women who had role models were generally not willing to adopt the styles that they observed, which were much like the men. As Nancy said: “I think part of how we as women can help is by not giving into the temptation of trying to be just like them. Just be ourselves and let them get used to it.” To their credit, most tried to be themselves. Unfortunately, it has not led them through the ceiling.

### Reasons for Leaving

The reasons that the women gave for leaving their corporate careers were as varied as the women themselves. Unwillingness to travel or relocate was the most concrete reasons. Although the women did not see this as discrimination, they viewed it as their personal choice, it is yet another example of the “ideal worker” ideology. Companies create jobs that presume the workers who fill them have no outside responsibilities, they are free to travel and relocate at the will of the company. Other

reasons were the draw to self-employment, a need to have more control over one's life, and general job dissatisfaction and conflict with the leadership of their companies.

Regardless of the specific reasons given, all of the women told me that they would *not* consider returning to any corporate job.

Travel was the primary reason given by half of the women. For three of those the travel was complicated after they had children. Susan, who had no children, wanted to be at home more after marrying for the first time at age fifty. Mary Anne just wanted to have a more balanced life, something that became clearer to her after dealing with a serious health issue. Both Barbara and Mary mentioned being out of town on business and away from their families when the terrorist attacks occurred on September 11, 2001, an experience that increased their desire to travel less and be with their families more.

Pegge and Barbara told very heart-touching stories about their children, who played a big part in their reasons to give up jobs that required travel:

Pegge: I had to take some time off, had to have some surgery, not a big deal but I was off work for a little while. And [my husband] was out of town. And that day I had picked the kids up at car line, which I didn't even know what that was . . . I didn't know what car line was, it's long (laughter). So I'm in car line and I get the kids home and we get all their homework done and we have this really healthy dinner because I actually cooked and we had all this playtime. So we got out the Lincoln Logs and we are in the living room and we've got Lincoln Log forts everywhere and we've got cowboys and Indians and we are just having a ball and it suddenly hit me like a ton of bricks: I am missing way too much and I need to change my life starting tonight.

Barbara: I had taken a trip to [South America]; it was supposed to be my last trip of the year. It was the first week of December and the next week I had to go to [a large northern city], a last minute, and I missed something at my daughter's school. And I was on the phone with her like I am every night when I travel. She's in tears and I'm trying to tell her, "I'll be home tomorrow," always trying to be real upbeat, positive, "I miss you a lot, but this is important for Mom, and I'll be home tomorrow." So I started to ask about her homework and I asked her what did she have for homework, and she said, "I had to write a letter to Santa

Claus. You want to know what I asked for? It was for Mom not to have to take any more trips” . . . that was like (cringes). So I came back from that, took two weeks off at Christmas for vacation, and when I went back to work, I knew it was temporary.

But it was not only women with children who felt that they were missing something in their lives:

Mary Anne: I should also tell you, that said, that besides job responsibilities and time, I was diagnosed with a health issue last fall . . . I was running around, traveling around so much . . . I really stopped, took a look around, and said, “I am unbalanced in my health, for one area, and there is a multitude of other interests” . . . just some other things, that I said, that are really meaningful to me, and I’m not making any time for any of this. And so that drove me to want to get in control of my schedule. . . . I’m really in a work-life balanced time in my life again which is important to me, and it had nothing to do with kids.

The jobs they held included a requirement to travel and, generally, they had no hard feelings for the companies who had placed that requirement on them. There was some hope expressed that technology could overcome some of the need for travel in the future. As more companies become national and international, however, it seems likely that many jobs will continue to require travel and this will be a challenge for women, and men, who want to have balance in their lives.

Colleen and Judy both left their careers during times that were emotionally trying. Judy took a severance package when she saw that her company was moving in a direction that she could not support, after over twenty-five years. Colleen stood up to a boss who eventually won out, and she left a company where she felt her contributions were no longer valued. Patricia left under similar circumstances. Her boss, the company president, changed, and she no longer felt that her work was considered important to the business. Both Patricia and Colleen also felt that they had outgrown their respective companies. Mary, who received a generous severance package when her position was

moved to another city, made it very clear that she never liked her work; she only did it for the money.

Joyce had the shortest career and left for a myriad of reasons, the most concrete being that she had always wanted to be self-employed and the time seemed right. Contributing factors were a corporate environment in which she felt it was impossible to succeed and a long commute. She also wanted to start a family and her work hours, combined with the commute, would not allow her to spend the time she felt she would want with children. Although not their primary reason for leaving, Patricia and Judy both commented on the time that is wasted in the corporate world in meetings and other activities that they do not feel add value. Mary Anne and Barbara commented that they do not miss the corporate politics and the energy that is expended on it while making the climb to the top.

The women also understand that they are privileged in that they are able to quit their jobs to pursue their own paths, through the security provided by savings they have built over years in lucrative positions, generous severance packages and, for some, the income of their spouses.

Patricia: I could stop working, I don't even have to . . . we could easily get by on my husband's salary. I want to [work]; I need that. It's just me, and I want the kids to know that the mom has a life outside. I know their wives will never thank me, but I want them to be good husbands. I don't want them to think that my world revolves around them. It's been nice to do that for a while in a lot of ways, but I feel good about working, doing cool stuff, and making money.

Joyce: [My husband] and I, base salary-wise, were making roughly the same thing. His bonuses were a lot bigger than mine were but they weren't as consistent. And so we first talked about, could I leave, could I go out on my own, could I do something else. Luckily, I had [my husband's] support. He basically just said, you need to do whatever you need to do and we'll figure out the other piece of it.

Implicit in many of their reasons, and coming out even more when they talk about what they are doing now, is a lack of job satisfaction when confined to their corporate roles. Pegge and Barbara, for instance, who had few complaints about their jobs, both say they are much more satisfied now; they feel a true calling to their new roles as consultants and coaches to other business professionals.

When describing work they enjoyed early in their careers, or that they are enjoying in their new self employment, the women used words like: learning, development, contributing, challenge, exciting, making a difference, feeling fulfilled, a lot of fun, valued. When describing their reasons for being unhappy in the latter years of their corporate careers they used: boring, hard to make a difference, don't have much control, ideas not being heard, lack of inclusion, it wasn't fulfilling, it wasn't intellectually diverse; and this is at the director and vice president levels.

Nancy, the highest ranking of the women, was the most philosophical about her departure. She had a stay-at-home husband, so the work hours were never an issue for her and her job required very little travel. She just could not support the company anymore. She had gotten close enough to the top to see that she did not respect the leaders and no longer felt satisfied in her work:

So then after eight years with [a *Fortune* 100 company] and probably many more than I was all that happy with, at least the last few I wasn't all that happy with, I had really gotten to the point where the money was nice and all, it wasn't worth the unhappiness side of things . . . it's not about the hours, the work, the travel, although I didn't travel much. It's not about any of that. Because I think, at least for me, if you're fulfilled, you're making a difference, you're appreciated at least a little bit; you're appreciated by your boss anyway. That's okay, all those things. Where you have an achiever type personality, you can endure a lot of peripheral stuff, if you feel like you're getting back that sense of accomplishment and gratification. That was nowhere.

When I first met Colleen, she had gone through the emotional experience of leaving her job just a few days before. Over several years, she had created the advertising and marketing function for her company, and conflicted on a regular basis with the “boys” at the top. By our third interview, she had spent time reflecting on her career and was more introspective about the entire experience and about her future:

I think if there is anything I know, the reason I’m leaving that corporate environment is because there was no balance in my life at all. And I don’t even know what that word means, because I haven’t had it in so long. I’m pretty much a workaholic, for so long, and I just want to step back and try to understand how I can contribute to society, how I can hopefully make a difference somewhere and make a living without the trappings that our society tells me I have, to live a certain way. I don’t want to live that way.

The women express a need for meaningful work while giving their reasons for leaving their corporate jobs. They recognize that their frustration level may be partly due to burnout after many years in the workplace, or just part of their current life-stage. But it appears that they also seek what de Man identified as “joy in work” (Applebaum 1992). Most of the women had this joy, what they would call job satisfaction, early in their careers, but could no longer find it inside large businesses. Several have recaptured this feeling working as consultants and in smaller organizations. They do not want to abandon this part of themselves; they want to work, it defines who they are. Following Marx’s theory of man as a “species being,” this illustrates that “man, in making his world, makes himself” (Applebaum 1992:476). It is no different for *woman*.

Although Marx’s theory of alienation of labor is more easily understood when applied to less skilled workers, these women seem to have felt it at very high levels of responsibility. Despite the seemingly powerful positions that they held, they began to see

that they had little power or control over their work product. Being laid off, as several of these women were, is the undeniable proof of this loss of control. They were also kept from achieving their career goals through blatant and latent forms of discrimination, as well as the constricting nature of the corporate workplace, all of which cause them to feel powerless.

### **Diversity Initiatives**

The women's knowledge of diversity initiatives varied. Judy was the only one who had extensive experience with them. She worked in the human resources area of a large corporation that had undertaken extensive efforts in diversity. Mary Anne also worked in human resources, specifically in the field of organizational development, but saw very little activity in this area, either by her employers or by clients of her consulting practice. Barbara and Pegge, as mentioned earlier, worked in companies with well-established affirmative action programs and had some exposure to the diversity efforts in those companies.

Although Susan and Joyce worked for large, publicly traded companies, they had almost no exposure in this area. Susan was in the workforce before the beginning of the diversity movement and ten years after, and had essentially no exposure, although she was involved in equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. Joyce worked in a large, well-established corporation well after Susan's experience, but also had very little personal experience with diversity initiatives, although her company had one. Nancy and Mary both worked in companies that had recently grown to be large and publicly traded, but that did nothing formal in this arena other than training to prevent sexual harassment.



Patricia's company, though private, was forced into addressing diversity by a class-action lawsuit, and she was part of a team that worked on the structural issues that were identified. Colleen also worked for private companies and her only experience was with sexual harassment training. Some of the women had also seen mentoring programs and networking groups, components of diversity initiatives, but neither was significant to any of their careers.

Overall, other than Judy, the human resource professional, these women have experienced very little in the area of diversity initiatives, which is evidence that there is really very little being done. The majority of the "billions" reported as spent in this area is either being spent by only a select few mega-corporations, or is misclassified from other areas, such as sexual harassment awareness programs or affirmative action training. It may also be that the use of one-time, half-day programs, although expensive when given to many employees in large organizations, does not leave any lasting impression on the participants. A few of the women remembered attending diversity training, for instance, but could not recall anything specific about it.

Three of the women also identified personality-profiling programs and training to work in cross-functional teams as being part of diversity. This may be the result of the recent broadening of the definition of diversity, or it may be just their attempts to think of something to share, given that we had scheduled an hour to discuss this!

Despite Judy's extensive experience with diversity programs, she was negative about their overall effectiveness. She expressed disappointment that the programs she helped to build had been all but abandoned when new management took over her

company. She does not feel that these programs can really change the deep-seated prejudice that she saw within its new, male-dominated, management team:

So I think the reality is that a lot of times organizations have all the right buzzwords, whether it's sensitivity training, or diversity initiatives, or inclusionary management style, and whatever, but if the individuals don't really believe that women are as smart and capable as they are. If they really don't want a female, or only view a female as a person that should be at home or lying flat on a cot, that you can have the thousands, different processes and opportunities and training sessions, and none of those are gonna work, people innately that don't believe that people are created equal.

She did admit that some of the programs had made a difference. I asked her specifically if the programs I had described in my document (Appendix C) were similar to the ones she had seen:

Oh, for sure, very much. As you know, we've gone through a lot of blood, sweat and tears, and a lot of people have gone through a lot of good process management . . . And I think all that has been very beneficial for some people, and some leaders and some managers, and I really do believe that some of them, you know, have been forced to do some things, because they've come to realize that if they don't, you know, look like their client base, they might miss out on some profitability, so they've been pushed into it, or backed into it, or shamed into it almost (laughs). But I really, really, feel that no matter how progressive, and no matter how real and sincere the core leaders are that are putting this together, if you don't have people that are really, I want to say, embrace these ideas . . .

Judy did not seem very interested in going into the details of any of the programs that she had been involved in:

We had a lot of training over the years. All the way into the sensitivity training, into the ability to look like the customer, to the form of, really one-on-one basics of to be inclusionary, what do minorities feel like, elderly . . . It was very successful. I think it was very successful for a lot of years, because in the building process, say the building times, the organization had to step out and tap people and take risks [through hiring and promoting a diverse workforce]. . . But when it starts to get more political, when it starts to get a situation where people can control more, and you don't have as many people looking, because obviously you're so big, then I think some of these pitfalls and some of these unacceptable things really happened.

She summed up her opinion this way:

So I think that the reality of this is that it looks really good on paper. It sounds really good to say you are a work friendly, and you have all these diversity programs. But peel back the onion and look at what do the numbers say? Who are the role models? Are they at the table with the big boys? Do they socialize with them? Do they get included in the strategic, real plan, not the one they go and tell everyone about, the real goals of the organization? Are they in the inner sanctum? And the answer, in my humble opinion, is very, very, very rarely, if at all.

Mary Anne has spent the last seventeen years in the field of organizational development, but told me: “I don't know that I've seen any really successful programs per se in my work.” She was familiar with some, and had actually designed a mentoring program for women at one client (discussed below) but, overall, does not think the area is getting much attention. She feels this is primarily because it is being driven by human resources and the individuals in that area are not usually able to make such strategic changes happen.

Barbara worked for a large corporation that had a very diverse workforce. Although she worked there for nearly twenty years, she could only recall attending one program that was specifically designated as diversity training and it was less than one half day. Although she personally enjoyed it and felt that she learned something about herself, she did not think it made any difference in people's behaviors in the workplace, primarily because it was just one session and she did not feel that any one session could change people's behavior.

Barbara also had a recent experience that told her big companies don't take diversity seriously. Her consulting practice got a call asking if they would participate in a “diversity fair.” Here is how she described the conversation:

[The caller said:] “I don't know if you can help out, but Wal-Mart wants to do something for women, kind of a fair, a diversity fair.” And I said, “Well, what are they trying to accomplish?” “Well, the manager says he doesn't really care. Do whatever you can do, just so I get this requirement done.” . . . He said the manager of that store didn't care what the heck it was just so he could say he had done a diversity program. Basically, he wanted the vendors to come in who had things for women and show their wares. I'm like, “I can't. I have nothing to do there.”

Rebekah: How does that help women?

Barbara: It doesn't at all.

Joyce worked for a very large, well-established company, which she said gets a lot of press for being a good place for women to work. She could only cite one session that she remembered as being overtly diversity training, although she worked there for more than five years and was at the corporate headquarters. She could not recall the content, but remembered the session because it was conducted by a psychologist and every employee was offered a free counseling session with him after the class. Since she was planning to marry soon, she and her fiancé used her free session to discuss their future marriage. She was familiar with diversity programs through her research for a book on work/life balance and she shared her personal opinion that all of these programs are done merely for show, and that there continues to be pressure to assimilate:

My impression of companies in general is they're supposed to do it, so they do it. (hesitation) To me, unless you're going to address the cultural structure of a company that makes it difficult. There is definitely more pressure to assimilate to whatever the company's culture was. The programs were there so that they could say they were there.

Susan began her professional career ten years before the start of the diversity movement (generally agreed to be 1987) and left ten years after it began. Although she worked for large corporations with international operations, none of the companies she

worked for had active diversity initiatives while she was there and she did not see any signs of a move in that direction. Her first employer, however, was clearly attuned to affirmative action and equal employment opportunity and actively recruited women, but the women didn't always stay:

There was a tendency for those of us women who recruited other women to hang on to them, but the ones that were recruited by men, who were doing it because there was a bonus attached to it, got the women in and it was an unfriendly culture and they lost them, some sooner than others.

Rebekah: So they didn't do anything to try to change it, to make it more welcoming?

Susan: No. It was just unimaginable. They were a long way away of understanding that they could.

The professional services firm that Susan worked for near the end of her career was a much more welcoming environment. She believes this was due partially to a more "enlightened" CEO whose wife also had a career. When asked if she thought there continues to be a need to address diversity in the workplace, she responded: "I always argue too, if you have to ask about diversity, if you have put a diversity goal in your plan, you've got a diversity problem. If you have to talk about it, it's still an issue."

Nancy entered the workforce in 1975 as a sixteen-year-old high school drop out. She worked for some large companies before she obtained her college credentials and began her professional career. She says that: "A fair amount of that awareness sensitivity stuff was still going on, I think, when I went into the workforce so [your summary] did ring true." She feels it is important, though she does not think it has made a major difference over her thirty years in the workplace, during which she advanced all the way

to senior vice president with a *Fortune* 100 company. I asked Nancy if she felt such programs were worth continuing, considering the low impact they seem to have had:

I think you have to continue to do them. I feel like young people of today, and they have made some significant strides, depending on [what] culture you come from, from your background and everything else, on where you worked, depends on whether you really are sort of gender blind when you reach the workplace. . . You cannot say it's not better today than it was in 1960 [when] you never saw anybody in a position like mine that was female. There have been huge strides made. But I think to keep doing that you have to keep, as you say, pushing the envelope, exposing them to things that are working in other companies, exposing them to other ideas, and I think the rest will come.

Despite her favorable views of diversity programs, the company where Nancy held senior leadership positions did not have a formal program: “other than they did a lot of management training and I’m sure, while I can’t remember a specific, I’m sure a component of their general management training was affirmative action and diversity.” In probing for why her company did not have a more visible diversity initiative, she said that for the founder/CEO to become interested in something it would have to be by example:

If he read it in a *Harvard Business Review* article, then he believed it. But if me, or somebody [inside the company] told him, then he didn't believe it, so the *Harvard Business Review*. And trainings and things evolve into demonstrating other things that help retain and grow, embrace women or minorities in the workplace. I think that will push their envelopes a little bit, and as they push their envelopes, it'll get better.

Patricia’s employer, a private company, was forced into doing diversity training by a class-action lawsuit related to the career path of women in their operations department (discussed above.) This was in the early nineties and she described it as an awareness program, based on my descriptions of the different paradigms of diversity, although she also refers to it as multiculturalism. She told me that there was a lot of

resistance to the structural changes that had to be made in the company to correct the career path problems, but she felt that many of the people who were in the diversity programs were impacted by them to change their behavior. Patricia's description however, is a good example of the dilution of the concept. The examples she gave were all related to diversity among various functional areas:

I truly saw a lot of people in the company that really bought in to it, not just different cultures, and sex, and gender, but just even different backgrounds. And that's when we really laid the groundwork for what we did with cross-functional teams, because it was value the differences. My department took that a step beyond and said, "well, you were an [operations] guy and that influences you, and you were in marketing, you're a techie from the IS department, we all have to come together to try to figure out how to enter [a new market]. So that we would use this (referring to my diversity document) to help cross-functional teams work better together and value the fact that you have different education, you have different work experience . . .

Her choice of this example may have been because this was how it impacted the department that she ran, where the cross-functional teams were organized. So, instead of a dilution of the concept, this may be an expansion of it, since the company was also addressing gender in the structural issues:

There was a very concerted effort in the early nineties at [that company] for multiculturalism, to put it into practice. . . after that took hold and then we had cross-functional teams, and then we had people talking that it was actually helping the business, I would guess that about somewhere between a half and two thirds of the men, now this was a male-dominated industry, truly believed it, believed that diversity was a good thing. And that, and this is my subjective, and over a course of about five years, I'd say we went from zero or five percent of, to somewhere between a half and two thirds, truly saw the value in it.

Although this appears to be a very positive assessment of the results of the program at that company, Patricia was philosophical regarding the overall value of such programs:

It depends on the person. I think if you're an open-minded person and you're wanting personal growth and you approach life like you want to learn, and you're open to new ideas and new perspectives, then you are a person who's going to change.

### Mentoring Programs and Networking Groups

Mary Anne was involved in designing a mentoring program for women at a client company. This is the way she describes it and its success:

And that was an attempt to help younger women in the organization appreciate the dynamics at the senior levels, and how they can adapt to those models and what they could do. All the feedback was that it was working . . . Their goal was to help them be prepared to move up, prepare [the company] to take a better advantage of the talent internally than they would be if they didn't have the program. . . . The feedback was that it worked exceptionally well; they expanded it globally.

This was clearly a program designed to help women to assimilate to the current management culture, which was seen as the only way to succeed.

Only Joyce and Pegge discussed their experience with employee networking groups. Although her company had such groups, including some for women, Joyce was never a member of one. She remembered that they were formed by the employees themselves, in a rather informal manner. The meetings were not held on company time, but the company did provide them the space to meet. The groups did not have any voice in the company or try to lobby for any cause, as far as Joyce knew.

Pegge was involved in such groups at two different companies:

They formed a group for women in management, and it became a very strong group, a very supportive group, had guest speakers, different executives come in and talk, one of the more effective women's groups I've seen. . . . they structured it around value. When you went there to those meeting you always got something out of it. Always walked away with some sort of value. . . . It wasn't just for fun, it was something of value, a structured issue. Now, sometimes it was a structured education, but there was always something you walked out of there with and so everybody had a reason to go.



Rebekah: The culture didn't keep you from going, like you don't want to be part of it?

Pegge: No, not at all. Much earlier at [my first employer], this was early eighties, it was. I was in a technology group, on projects. There used to be some razzing, "that's the secretaries' group." It didn't really bother me, but it wasn't viewed as . . . [the latter company's] group was very much focused on professionals that want to grow and develop. The other one was more social.

R: Did it have secretaries in it?

P: It had any woman, any woman could join, it probably had more of those, which was fun, and it was good for them, that's what it's about.

In all three of these examples, the groups seem to be focused on "fixing the women." There was no mention of the groups taking any proactive moves toward "fixing" the workplace, nor did the companies utilize the groups to help them tailor their marketing to female consumers.

Joyce's company sold its products primarily to women and they did recognize the value of having a woman's view in decision-making, but she did not feel they were asking the right women:

You know at [my company] it was a big deal because women purchase like 85 percent of all [our products], and so that's why they claimed they wanted women in senior management and marketing, because we are talking to our own audience. Okay, so there are some women bodies in senior management. But that doesn't necessarily mean they're . . . and I'm sure almost everyone has some [of that company's] products in their [home], but my guess, hypothesis, would be that the average person buying [our] products, well, buying significant volumes of it, is probably not a general manager of some corporation.

Joyce's observation is an example of the essentializing nature both of many networking groups and of attempts to "value" diverse viewpoints. An individual woman, in this case an executive, was expected to speak for all women, which Joyce knew did not make sense:

You know as well as I do all women don't think alike, all African Americans don't think alike, all Asians don't think alike. There may be some small amount of sensitivity. You need to know that certain words for different groups can be offensive, but beyond that, I don't think being a woman defines me per se.

### CEO Commitment

Colleen worked for smaller, privately-owned companies. Her experience only included sexual harassment training that was included in a larger program about effective management, and a program that identified personality types among the management team to help them learn to work together better. She felt that these programs were interesting but didn't change anything within the company, because the top managers did not participate. Joyce agreed: "I think so much of it is top-down. If the senior guys, and I say guys because it's almost all white males, if they believe it . . . you can put all the policies in place, but if the senior people don't buy into it, the culture won't change, because everyone takes their lead from that." Patricia also shared this view, discussing a senior leader in her company that did not fully support their diversity efforts: "I think there's people under him that probably would have converted, if they saw that he really walked the walk." As to why a leader might not be supportive, Mary Anne, who has done extensive consulting in organizations, said, "I also think that a lot of leaders in the organizations, predominantly men, don't think there's an issue, so why spend all the money? There's nothing showing us we're going to get any great return, and we don't really have an issue anyway."

Joyce shared two examples of executives who blatantly stated that they were not supportive of attempts to change the culture, at least not in how it related to the treatment

of executives. The first case was in the large corporation where she worked that had an active program:

And I remember his boss, who was the general manager at the time said to [my boss], “You know, I don't think work-life balance, or I don't think diversity works at the director level.” I mean, he literally came out and said that . . . I just thought it was interesting that a general manager would come and say, overtly, “I don't think this works at the director level.” Like if you want to be successful, higher up the chain, that doesn't work anymore, that's for the people [at more entry levels].

Joyce's second example was from a company that she interviewed when doing research for a book on the issue of work-life balance:

One of the senior guys basically said, “Yeah, I'm not sure I really believe in the whole work-life thing; I'm not sure I believe that it's our responsibility. That's the employee's problem.” So that's what I'm saying, like the only way to really get through to those guys at all will be financial, [proving the monetary value of such programs].

Since Joyce wrote a book on the topic of work-life balance, it is not surprising that she interchanges that term with diversity. Although they are not the same thing, work-life balance issues are directly related to the concept of the “ideal worker.” These executives may not have been talking about diversity programs as I have defined them here, but they are saying that they do not think that the requirements of the “ideal worker” need to change, especially not once someone reaches a certain level in the organization. Once again, this impacts women disproportionately due to societal expectations that they are responsible for care-giving and “family work.”

#### Diversity of Personality/Style

The subject of style difference came up several times, in the context of personality profiling tools, the most popular of which is Myers-Briggs. Joyce considered this related to diversity in that it helped people identify their differences in style and learn to work

better together, but she admitted that there was a preferred personality type in her company, and pressure to assimilate:

So there was a difference of styles, and I think it's relevant in terms of how it affects a culture and it does get some [credibility], simply because, Myers-Briggs is so, at least at the time when I was in corporate America, was kind of viewed as credible in terms of how a work group works together.

Rebekah: When they did the Myers-Briggs, did they use that then to increase diverse views, or do they prefer one?

Joyce: That was the idea. While both, I mean there clearly was a dominant way of being . . . the model of behavior was to be very thorough and very detail oriented, and they were called in Myers-Briggs a J, I'm a P. Js were definitely the dominant, preferred behavior. And so I adopted some J behavior, just because I had to, to assimilate to the culture, but J behavior is not my natural way of being.

So there was a dominant one, but yes, the idea was certainly . . . that ideally, on the team, you need some people who are innovative thinkers and some people who are executors. Did they try and structure teams such that that was the case? I'm not so sure. Did they really reward people like me who could be coming up with all the new ideas? Now I'm not so sure, but that was the idea of it, really to have the best team, you want to have these different types.

Nancy had also experienced Myers-Briggs training and felt that it was related to the topic of diversity:

That's been popular, and I think what that's done, though it hasn't necessarily talked about the color of your skin or your sex, part of their pitch is that it is good to have different types of people together. One of their pitches, when they meet with an executive group, is that you don't want to all be, whichever that one it is, I think it's INTJ, or there is one of them, that sort of wild, high-stress types. You don't want to just have those people. You want to have some of these other people. I think, even though it's not touching on sex and race or whatever, it's the idea that different people help better solve problems. I think that's interesting.

I am familiar with Myers-Briggs profiling and the training that accompanies it, but would not have considered it related to “diversity” as it is being used in this study. I found it interesting that more than one of the women did. This may be because the document I shared with them (Appendix C) discusses the value of diverse viewpoints and

this personality-profiling example is the closest they came in their careers to experiencing that concept. If it had been used to actually support diversifying styles on teams, it might at least show a willingness to consider the idea of the business case for diversity.

Unfortunately, it seems to have been used more to reify one style, the “heroic masculine,” or what Nancy calls the “wild high-stress types,” than to suggest that there are other styles that might also be successful.

Mary, who worked in a very fast-paced, high-stress environment, agreed philosophically with the idea of value in diverse views (which she first saw in my document), but also felt that it would be a more time-consuming way of making decisions and the people in her company just would not take the time:

I like that. You're working towards the same goal and the same goal might be okay, how do we become a more profitable company. There's lots of ways to get to that goal, and different people have different ideas of what profitability is, so a diverse group would be kind of good in that sense, but you would also be spending a lot of time in meetings . . . well, then it has to be well run, the meetings. But you have to make sure you have people that have open minds. It doesn't matter what culture you are, but if you have an open mind for like, I will listen to what this person that's sitting in the meeting has to say. But I think most people are either too tired or too busy, too tired and too busy. So like, I don't have time to think about what you have to say, because it's more work for me.

This is a reflection of the preferred personality type in Mary's company, someone who is action oriented with low tolerance for process, like meetings or, for that matter, listening. From the other stories Mary told (the CFO's heart attack, etc.), it is clear that the preferred style was also the “heroic masculine.”

These preferred leadership styles help to reinforce a power structure, which excludes women because they value what society considers “masculine.” As discussed above, women who adopt such styles are usually not effective. In Joyce's story she felt

compelled to use some of the dominant style. Mary chose instead to work part-time and sacrifice some of her upward mobility. Nancy chose to adopt the dominant style almost completely (as described in her story about the shouting match with her company president), something that eventually wore her down. None of these options represent equality of opportunity for either women or men who do not have the dominant personality and style that is rewarded.

### Affirmative Action

When discussing diversity, affirmative action inevitably came up, especially with those women whose companies had government contracts and were, therefore, required to file affirmative action plans. This did not surprise me, since the diversity movement grew out of earlier equal employment opportunity and affirmative action programs. Most people are familiar with those concepts, which have been part of the business vocabulary for many years. The fact that they are still conflated with diversity is another indication of the weakness of the diversity movement. The stories shared are also of interest in the search for interventions to create a more equitable workplace. It is interesting to note that this is the topic where the women's views are the most divergent, not unlike the division among the general population, as discussed above.

At one point early in her career, Susan was the equal employment opportunity officer for her company. This is how she describes that responsibility:

I was required out of these piles and piles of resumes, to track how many responses we got, how many were minorities, because in those days you could figure it out, and it was legal to figure it out. How many people you interviewed, what percent were, it was a matter of counting things. That was the extent, and once a quarter, it might have been more often, you made a report. You did your EEOC report. There was really no strategy that drove from that. . . . It was data collection for the sake of data collection. And I suspect it was audited somewhere

down the road if they thought the EEOC was going to come knocking on the door. That was the extent. There was really not even an awareness to start talking about what this text says, the cultural stuff (referring to my document). The whole idea of putting any kind of feelings of frustration or personal experience, wouldn't happen there because that was what their idea of diversity was. Diversity was defined as counting, counting, how many.

Rebekah: What about men versus women.

Susan: They didn't check women.

R: They weren't worried about that?

S: No. Now years later I came across, years later as I worked up the chain, up the ladder if you would, I had access to data at a corporate level that identified a goal of having three women. Imagine that. Which was three times as many as me. And I think there might have been an incentive among, I believe it was part of senior, senior leadership bonus structures to find those three women and let them through. The whole time they were in that reward system, two of the women spun out and the ones that I recruited stayed.

Mary Anne also had responsibility for writing an affirmative action plan at one of her employers. Although it occurred several years later, her experience was similar to Susan's:

It's a matter of punching in numbers and getting data. It's all numbers based. That's really what, all it was, that's my point. We were affirmative action regulated because of a government contract, but it was all a numbers-based plan.

Rebekah: It wasn't culture?

Mary Anne: No . . . At least it wasn't then, and that was in the early nineties. I mean, there was some lip service to the effect that we needed to recruit different talents. As long as we can slap together a written plan, is a part of our numbers. That was good enough to call it a plan, that required, because at least we said we were trying. And all it really was a lot of language, word-smithing. It wasn't really a different recruiting program. There was no training.

Although Mary Anne said there was not a different recruiting program, she did describe efforts by the human resource department (which she was part of) to bring in

people that would help them with their numbers. She felt that this could be a disadvantage to the person hired:

We would say for example of the two applicants, a white male and a black female, while their credentials on paper, education and experience, they had very similar, comparable backgrounds, we would try to advocate for the minority, because of affirmative action. And a lot of times management, who would have the final say about who we hired, would comply with our request to hire the minority, because of the plan . . . But it really hurt that woman. It didn't help her, because they felt like they had to hire her, they didn't really want to hire her. Because they had to hire, sometimes it will work against her, and that they almost sort of subtly, not overtly, but maybe covertly, be out to prove a point, that they could have hired the other person, would've worked out better.

Mary, whose female mentor encouraged her to climb a career ladder that she did not desire, acknowledges that she may have benefited from affirmative action, but she is also not a fan of it:

[My boss] really wanted me to go back to get my masters . . . because she really liked to keep moving me up. So she promoted me. If that was because I was a woman or not, I was there, I was at the right place at the right time.

Do you spend most of your time trying to, okay, I've gotta make sure I promote the first Haitian? And sometimes I think people miss the boat. Especially like, when even on the news like, this "black" judge, or this "woman" senator, said that, okay, when it's a white male senator, it's [not] the "white" (laughs) . . . They're just, you know, you pick the best person for the job. Stop this labeling.

Barbara is also not a fan of affirmative action, despite the fact that she was most likely a beneficiary of it:

We had some measurements they would measure at the end of every month. How many females, how many Hispanics . . . whenever you had hired. And like I say, I resented that, because I want to hire the most qualified person and not make a quota. You know, they did have targets built in. I hired an Asian woman. She's fantastic. I remember her first coming and she's fantastic.

Rebekah: You didn't hire her so you could check the boxes on a form.

Barbara: No.



Nancy, who was a senior vice president at a company with an affirmative action program, was the strongest advocate for it among the women in this study:

They had affirmative action practices that they followed, because they had to, and again, I believe that once you get a woman or whoever into these positions, you realize, geez, they're not different than from some white male. So they can be just as good, and then you get over it. . . . I'm a firm believer in affirmative action. And I know a lot of people aren't from the standpoint of sort of a quota mentality. Frankly, I don't think like you have to get 51 percent because that's the population [of women]. But you shouldn't have 5 percent, you know (laughs).

In describing why she feels so strongly that affirmative action and diversity programs are still needed, Joyce talked about what she saw hiring managers doing in the workplace:

I don't think a single one of them would tell you that they have an ounce of prejudice. And I doubt that it's deliberate, but there is a difference between hiring the best candidates and being open to minorities and saying we're going to hire five candidates and I want to make sure four of the five are minorities. . . . one is much more affirmative than the other, do you know what I mean?

Despite the fact that, in an earlier interview, Pegge was very clear that she felt there was no discrimination in the companies where she worked and that people only need to work hard to get ahead, she gave the most specific description of an affirmative action program, admitted she had benefited from it, and felt it was fair:

The culture was changing to the point where in various roles in the . . . organization it was to my advantage. They were consciously looking for ways to promote women and minorities into those positions . . . If you look at when I was hired, anywhere from an intern to a [professional staff member] to someone for the office staff, always a consideration given to how are we going to recruit candidates that were women and minorities. How are we going to, what resources are we going to reach, what is the percentage pool we are looking at. Now we have narrowed it down to six candidates, what is the mix of that, a diverse pool to make the final account. If we didn't, there was that check, is there something we didn't do? And if there's nobody that's out there that met the qualifications . . . if the situation is such that I have a diverse pool of people and now I come to pick, okay, you've got to pick them because we need them, but if I have a diverse pool of people, I'm allowed to pick the best candidate. If there is a tie, then it goes [to

the minority]. That's fair. If it's not a tie, you've got to pick the best person. If you have done your work in the field, and document very thoroughly the pool so if there is ever a question. When I hired I didn't have to justify whoever it was whether it was the white male or a cultural minority. I still had to have the paperwork there that they were the best candidate . . .

Judy does not feel that laws and policies like affirmative action are really being enforced. She spoke of her hope that this would change in the future, under a different administration, perhaps with a women U.S. President:

So that's the way I see it, and I think government will then, with the helm of someone that really does know how to do this, then I think that in their audits, when they are looking at things, like the [Sarbanes-]Oxley bill, they are going to have something that looks at, really a litmus test, of are you really discriminating. Not just this pseudo thing, where when there is a charge we will go in and look at it. I mean what a joke. What a joke. We have an affirmative action plan. We have laws in this country and they are not even [held accountable]. Lawyers get them out of it. Big business has the most money to get umpteen different lawyers. And even when they are guilty, they still get free. That's despicable.

Although the women's views, both of the fairness and the effectiveness of affirmative action, are quite varied, there is evidence here that these women, along with the rest of their generation, benefited from it. Some of the women feel they have succeeded on merit alone, but others recognize the importance of policies that were coercive to businesses. I think that even Judy would agree that the programs had an impact, but she saw so much of that progress reversed by a change in management that her viewpoint is now jaded. The women who benefited from the program at her company are some of the people that she now recruits for high-level positions in other organizations. They gained the necessary experience because of the affirmative action program, even if it is no longer in place.

I was disappointed that the women had so little experience and knowledge of the state of the art diversity initiatives that I have studied and experienced while doing this

research. Upon reflection, I recalled that when I became interested in this topic a few years ago, I had little knowledge or experience either, despite my twenty plus years in the business world, including several in employee recruiting. In fact, my impression was that the topic of workplace diversity was mostly disparaged by business people. I did not hear that negative viewpoint from these women, but there was a strong sense that they did not expect the workplace to change dramatically through these efforts, even if they become more widely dispersed.

### **Hopes for the Future**

Despite their low expectations of diversity initiatives, the women were surprisingly positive about the future for other women in corporate workplaces. I asked them to think specifically of what might change the circumstances in corporations so that women who are in similar executive roles in the future would not also choose to leave. None of the women could think of any specific interventions, and they did not feel that diversity initiatives would make a big difference. They were, however, able to share their ideas of what they felt were the catalysts that would bring about changes.

Three of the women brought up the subject of a woman President of the United States. Others brought up the changing workplace from the standpoint of technology and an increased need for creativity and innovation. Mary Anne added that the next generation might be more open to women in power. For Mary, the most important thing is flexibility in work hours, a specific recommendation, but she cannot envision a workplace where everyone has it.

## A Female President of the United States

Overcoming the perception that women are not capable of the highest office in our government was seen as an important symbol that would help to create a work environment where women could no longer be viewed as less capable than men. Judy, who was the most negative regarding the current state of the workplace, was the most vocal on this issue:

My optimistic view is there will be a woman president. There will be a woman president, I really hope in my lifetime. And when there is a woman president she will obviously select a lot of other women in roles and tasks and I think the ability to get things done, the ability to multi-task, the ability to move it to the next level is going to be like Superman. Because once women have the power and once there is belief in this country that good things can happen and women do know how to handle things like economy and environment and war and famine and healthcare and all those factors and that we are making true inroads, we are not talking about the same issues fifty years from now, then I think we are really going to thrive . . . so in my humble opinion you almost need a true huge leader that has a major voice and major power and all eyes will be upon her and a lot of doors will be open because the key that opens all the doors is that position.

Judy not only thinks this will be symbolic, she feels it will change public policy so that we can put some of these issue behind us for good. It is interesting that her optimistic view is that women in leadership will be like *superman*. Nancy was not as philosophical, but also indicated this symbolic issue is a problem for women:

How stupid it is that the United States is not ready for a woman in the White House? I mean, that is just so stupid. For those of us who are professional women, we just sort of shake our heads at that.

The three women who brought up this subject did not go into any detail on how it might happen. Given their views of the women who preceded them in the workplace and those who are there now (see women role models, above), it is interesting that they ignore the obstacles that have kept this from occurring, the same glass ceiling issues they

encountered in the workplace. Most of the women agreed that executive women have to be as much like a man as possible, without crossing that undefined line that might offend the men. How a woman who has succeeded in those circumstances could act differently after reaching the Presidency is an interesting question. This does not, however, undermine the symbolic significance of women in powerful positions.

### Changing Technology

The rapid changes that are occurring through the intensive use of computer technology enabled Colleen to envision a different kind of workplace:

I think that communication and what's going on in the world is going to recreate the business environment on its own in the next decade. I think the office as we know it will go away because of the connectivity. And once that happens and managers at the top lose control, they don't have people along, then, you can't bring anybody into a room. What happens then? I think that that is going to force the next evolution in the business world and what will be beautiful about that is you don't have to come in and they don't care if you come in a skirt or a pantsuit. It won't matter because they can't see you. So hopefully that will begin to help.

Colleen emphasizes the benefits of not seeing the other person, now knowing if she is male or female, perhaps, at least not knowing if she has assimilated to the appropriate dress code. But implied here and mentioned by others is the fact that this becomes a less structured workplace, where managers have less control, a place where people can be more free to achieve in their own way. They felt that these changes would lead to increased emphasis on results and less importance of relationships. This might also lead to reducing the influence of the old boy network.

## Workplace Flexibility

The use of technology has also provided many people with increased flexibility in their work hours and the ability to work at home. This is something that several women felt was key to making the workplace more hospitable, especially for working mothers.

Mary: If they gave you, like to allow for flex time, like if I wouldn't feel guilty because I had to go to my kid's program, because then you're dealing with this guilty conscience. I'm guilty because I'm not working for my company who's paying me and put some faith in me that I'm going to get this job done. And I felt guilty because I'm not with my kids.

But Mary did not feel that everyone in the company could have flexible time:

You can't give it to everybody. So how do you keep the good people? I guess if I was considered a good person, they did keep me by offering me the flextime. But okay, I can't offer everybody flextime. Some of these people I know. I know myself, there's a couple people that worked for me, I wouldn't offer them flextime because I know them. It would not work.

Nancy expressed the hope that women who choose to work shorter hours in order to be with family would eventually be viewed the same as men who work shorter hours for other reasons:

I think as people get more comfortable with working around people different from them and realizing that here's this awesome executive and she leaves by 5:30 every day because she wants to be home with her kids and that doesn't make her less professional or less capable or whatever. You might have in the workplace, you'd see here's this male executive who leaves at 5:30 because he's some particular orthodox faith who has to be in some church thing and they never think that person is less capable. They think he puts in fewer hours but they don't think he's less capable. Today they look at the woman who makes a family-type choice as less capable.

Nancy recognizes that when the choice is for the caregivers role, it has resulted in women being marginalized. Note that her comparable male example is not choosing the caregiver's role. This is interesting, especially since Nancy's husband is the primary caregiver in her family.

In their earlier interviews, some of the women discussed the issue of inflexible work hours or the need to be seen in the office, “face time,” as problems, but did not raise this when we discussed potential solutions. They too might think that it would not work for everybody, or possibly just that the workplace is far from being open to this on a large scale.

This is an area that was discussed often in the literature. Workplace flexibility and work/life balance are terms that have come to be associated with retaining women. Because they have been tied to women, and specifically to women’s roles as caregivers, they seem to have done as much damage as good. Women who want to be viewed as serious about their careers and not to have their prospects limited have shied away from them, even when they are offered openly by the company. Attempts to make these policies apply to men and women equally (e.g. FMLA) have failed because men are not going to avail themselves of a policy that results in them being marginalized, like women. If care-giving roles were more equalized in the home, flexible time in the workplace might be more in demand by both men and women. This is what Joan Williams seems to be aiming for with her fight against the “ideal worker” ideology (Williams 2000).

### Innovation

Poggio’s research (2000), discussed above, found that high tech organizations were more accepting of women in power. Susan echoed this with her belief that the innovation required in the new economy will change the workplace for the better:

I think that with all the focus on innovation and fast cycle time, fast to market and all that, I’ve seen the structural issues, org chart and silos, you can’t have all that, you can’t have. So companies are moving, and maybe this is a hopeful, I’m going to be naïve or Pollyannaish about it here, it seems to me that in this day of recognized need for innovation, that implies in my mind the eroding formal

structure, formal silos, territorialism, territorialism as a form of good old boy system. . . . If innovation is the key, what difference does it make where the innovation came from? . . . If innovation gets rewarded, people will figure out how to be innovative, or they will hire people that are innovative, and innovation doesn't have a face, or a skirt, or a pair of pants . . . To me I think a continued emphasis on innovation and the culture of innovation will by mistake or chance create that more family-friendly, and in turn more diversity-friendly.

### Generations X and Y

There was also hope that the younger males in the workplace would be different, or that the younger females would be able to change things. Poggio's (2000) research also suggested that younger men were more open to women in powerful positions, perhaps because they were raised by working mothers.

Mary Anne: [I] think the only thing that is going to change it is perhaps a generation of new professionals coming into the organization. . . . more and more today women are filling the business schools and they're coming out with MBA educations that allow them to demonstrate talents and the expertise that for a long time only men had.

Susan: Maybe you don't make it female-friendly, maybe you make it family-friendly. As more and more men become more balanced in their personal life around family, then it's not a matter of male versus female, it's a matter of that holistic approach to family-friendly.

All of these ideas are hopeful, but do not lend themselves well to proposing interventions. They generally require us to wait and see; to hope that time (and, perhaps, technology) will heal the problem. I agree with most of them, they are difficult to dispute. I am hopeful that there will be more women in high positions, including the United States President, which will provide both role models and important symbols that the people in this country believe that women are truly as competent as men. Much has been written about Generation X and the changing expectations they are bringing to the workforce. Their resistance to the "ideal worker" model may be sufficient to bring about



changes as they move into higher levels within organizations. Changes in technology should also allow more flexibility both in work hours and location that can lead to better balance for all workers. I am more skeptical about the need for innovation as a catalyst for change. Although I agree that organizations know that they need to reward innovation over conformity, the management challenges that it presents make it unlikely to succeed with the current generation of leaders in power in corporations. I have the same reservations about the technological changes. Even Mary, for whom flexible hours was key, did not think that you could trust all workers with flexible schedules. This attitude by managers will undermine the acceptance of a more flexible model. Technology also can be used against employees, as in the case of the PDA. Instead of allowing workers more flexibility to be in the office, they are now expected to both be in the office long hours and to be available to answer messages at all other times, including weekends and while on vacation.

Although the women are no longer inside of corporations, they are to a great extent a product of that environment and, although they may be critical of it, find it difficult to envision another model of organization that could be successful in the competitive environment that they experienced. Many of the ideas that are discussed in the literature would be considered revolutionary to women so recently inside the workplace who lack the perspective of an outsider or researcher. For this reason, I am not surprised that the women in this study did not suggest them.

## **Recommendations**

The intention of this research was to make recommendations for workplace diversity initiatives. In addition, it has provided data that can be useful for making policy recommendations as well as identifying structural changes needed for businesses to attract and retain women executives. Because sex-role stereotypes transcend the workplace, recommendations must address changes in the wider society, specifically regarding responsibility for what Williams (2000) terms “family work.” Structural, policy and cultural changes needed both inside and outside of corporations are interrelated and must be considered as a whole.

The goal of these recommendations is to disrupt the reproduction of gender stereotypes. One manifestation of this is the “ideal worker” ideology, but it is broader. When the women in this study were willing to adapt to the requirements of the ideal worker, we have seen them stopped by a “glass ceiling;” those with power are still making assumptions about their capabilities and commitment. Informal systems, such as the “old boys network” further undermine the chances for women to move up. Men are also impacted by gender stereotypes that require them to conform to roles that demand long hours on the job and specific behaviors that are defined as masculine. Interventions must be designed so that they benefit all workers to avoid furthering the “white male backlash” that has resulted from previous diversity programs and public policies.

My data do not provide much insight into diversity initiatives specifically. The fact that my informants had very little to say about them is evidence that they have not had a tremendous impact. My literature review, however, and my attendance at several of these programs over the past few years, gives me a perspective from which to make some limited recommendations.

The initiatives that are being done today are vastly improved from earlier models that were criticized for raising negative emotions and perpetuating stereotypes. Awareness training educates managers (the primary attendees) about the history of discrimination and the impact of stereotyping. When awareness is combined with skill building, allowing trainees to practice utilizing their new knowledge, individuals within workplaces who are open to new ideas may change their attitudes and behaviors, which may lead to an overall cultural change.

The broadening of the definition of diversity, however, is troublesome, as it reduces the time available to focus on issues like gender. The “business case for diversity” is also of concern, since it supports the belief that changing the workplace culture to be more inclusive is only worthwhile if it can be justified economically. As Sinclair (2006) so aptly stated, the business case diverts diversity practitioners “in never ending efforts to please senior managers, while those managers get on with the real business of holding on to power” (Sinclair 2006:521).

But Meyerson and Kolb (2000) liken the business case to a Trojan horse, “on the outside are the [economic] arguments, on the inside is a passion for justice . . .” They assert that “workplace diversity struggles are necessary to bring social change into workplaces – and workplace diversity with a broader social agenda can create

organizations as sites of wider social change” (Meyerson and Kolb 2000:160). Diversity initiatives are our opportunity for access to workplaces.

Consequently, I support the continuation of diversity initiatives. The women in this study, who represent both business leaders and individuals who have experienced discrimination, are also generally supportive of these programs. In addition to providing awareness and skill building through training by qualified facilitators, these initiatives must engage CEOs in a discussion of the issues that this work addresses. The focus must be moved away from “fixing the women” (and others targeted by these programs) and toward changing the culture at all levels of the organization. As Sinclair (2006) suggested, consultants should work one-on-one with CEOs to reframe the problem. The current momentum towards “corporate social responsibility” is a positive sign that the profit motive can be complemented by a social motive, the responsibility to do the “right” thing. If it is important, as this ideology is suggesting, that companies do not harm their communities or environment, surely it follows that they should not harm the lives of their own employees.

In order to address the problems faced by the women in my study, there must be a component in the diversity training specifically addressing gender. A principal objective of all diversity programs is to reduce stereotyping and examples of stereotypes for both men (heroic provider) and women (nurturing caretaker) can be included to begin this discussion. The fact that business values the “heroic masculine” can be addressed, as well as the undervaluing of qualities considered “feminine,” including care taking of children. As Coleman (2000) has said, just bringing gender into the discussion seems to

be creating something that was not already there; it will not be easy to address. It will also be difficult to overcome the assumption that “gender” means “women.”

Diversity initiatives, if well designed, also address structural issues within organizations. Employment policies, including job descriptions, should be reviewed to reveal where they result in discrimination, even if unintentional, such as where the “ideal worker” is assumed and “heroic masculinity” is endorsed. More difficult to address are job requirements such as long work hours, travel and relocation which are part of the “ideal worker” ideology that must be disrupted. These issues were significant in the lives of more than half of the women in this study. The “old boy network” must be undermined by strict enforcement of policies designed to give equal chance at promotion to all qualified candidates. The women spoke out loudly on this topic. Enforcement of all equal employment opportunity policies must be reviewed and strengthened. The blatant discrimination experienced by the women in this study is evidence of the lack of enforcement of policies that were surely adopted as part of the structure of their companies.

The data presented herein provide some evidence that affirmative action policies have improved opportunities for women to move to higher levels in corporations. Barbara and Pegge were the most positive about their corporate experiences and they were also the only two women who worked in companies where there were strong programs based on these policies. Their companies’ compliance seems, by the time these two women moved into the workforce in 1981, to have actually changed the way that women were being treated. Since my sample is so small, I cannot make a broad generalization about the effectiveness of affirmative action, but this does provide us with

some insight into how a company might be different because of it. Judy and Susan, on the other hand, worked for employers that were subject to these federal requirements, but did not embrace them. The culture of the organization is an important factor and the attitudes of the leaders, whether they believe the policies are important, or that they just need to comply superficially, determines whether a policy will be effective. Federal enforcement has also been lax, without a real threat, and leaders who do not believe in equal opportunity ideologically are likely to merely pay them lip service.

The policy arena, however, is clearly a site for intervention in employment discrimination. The “ideal worker” was created through both an ideology of a male worker supported by a stay-at-home wife *and* legislation, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA), which created the forty-hour workweek and overtime pay. Although the purpose of FLSA was to prevent employers from requiring employees to work excessive hours without appropriate compensation, the result has been a system of “exemptions” from the rules, which now encompass over one-fourth of the workforce, including almost all managerial and professional occupations .

Because they are “exempt” from overtime for hours beyond 40 in a week, managers and professionals have come to be seen as “owned” by their employers 24 hours a day. The layoffs and “downsizings” of the 1990s, which continue today, have resulted in fewer employees with more work to be done per person, leading to documented longer workweeks. The criteria for exemption from FLSA were revised in 2004 after years of discussion that centered around changes in the economy away from manufacturing and towards services. There was concern (and lawsuits documenting) that even low-paid office workers were being considered exempt from overtime based on

outdated salary-level requirements and complex rules regarding the use of “discretion and independent judgment.”

The hearings and analyses regarding these rule changes did not include any indication that this basic presumption of the rule is suspect: that “exempt” workers, due to their managerial status, are not forced, or even coerced, to work excessive hours. There is evidence in this research that executives are working longer and longer hours and that being seen in the office (“face time”) is a rewarded behavior. This seems to be against the spirit of the original FLSA, which was enacted because Congress found that there were “labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers.” A change in the FLSA to disallow such exemption for employees who do not actually have control over the number of hours they work is conceptually attractive as a way to bring the “ideal worker” at least closer to the 40 hour workweek envisioned in 1938.

Glass ceiling reviews are another policy that has the potential to improve opportunity for executive females, but only if the OFCCP has enforcement power. As has been seen with affirmative action reviews, without strong enforcement powers, companies can remedy poor findings by submitting written plans for the future and will not be held accountable. One of the women in this study worked for a company that received negative feedback on a glass ceiling review during her time there. Shortly afterward, the only two female senior vice presidents in the company left and were replaced by white males.

One of the issues that surfaces often in the discussion of the ideal worker is maternity leave. Although FMLA is not gender specific, few men utilize it to take time

off to care for their newborns. One reason is that it is associated with the care-taking roles of women, and men who take it are similarly marginalized. But it is also unpaid leave, which discourages its use. If structured as a government benefit, as parental leave is in many countries, with at least partial pay, fathers might utilize it more, reducing the stigma. The state of California recently began providing partial pay for six weeks during otherwise unpaid leave like FMLA.

Kanter (1993) has suggested the use of a “flex-year,” instead of a flexible work schedule on a daily or weekly basis. Since so much work, particularly by managers and professionals, is done on projects and in teams, it seems feasible that individuals could take rest periods after each project is completed, if the company is willing to schedule the work accordingly. Although this will still present challenges to getting “family work” accomplished while on each project, it would overcome some of the stereotypes of using FMLA for parental leaves. If it becomes a norm to take blocks of time off, using it when your baby is small should not be looked at any differently than using it to take a trip around the world. According to Kanter, some of the high tech companies in the nineties were allowing sabbaticals of three months every five years.

The recent report issued by the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California, discussed above, mentions day care, equal pay for part-time work and universal health care as areas that need to be addressed if the ideal worker is to be supplanted with a new ideology more conducive to raising families (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006). Many European countries have government-sponsored day care which is neighborhood based and high quality. Statistics show that the options in the United States are not only expensive they are lower quality. This discourages one parent,



usually the mother, from working. Part-time work is another option to help working families, but most part-time options pay less per hour and do not include benefits. Some countries require that part-time work pay the same hourly rate. Countries with socialized medicine also avoid the need to work full time to have health insurance. The professional women interviewed would benefit from such policies since they are in an income level that allows them to support families on part-time work, if paid fairly with access to affordable benefits (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein 2006).

The potential for such large-scale policy changes has certainly improved by the recent election of a Congress with a Democratic majority. Public opinion also influences policy and, in a 1996 survey, “nearly three-fourths of all respondents said that ‘reducing stress on working families with policies like flexible hours and affordable child care’ would be a very effective way of improving their economic situation. Concerns over the pressures on families outweighed even people’s desire for increased salaries and concerns over layoffs” (Williams 2000).

But policy changes and changes in organizations cannot be made without also reviewing the need for change in the roles assigned in the larger society, specifically responsibility for what Williams (2000) terms “family work.” It is much harder to legislate things like husbands and fathers taking equal responsibility for childcare and managing the household, and as long as it results in them being marginalized in the workplace, men cannot take on such “feminine” roles. Families don’t benefit when both parents are marginalized by lower pay and reduced opportunities.

It is important to mention that the ideal worker ideology results in the marginalization of all women, not just those who are married or who have children. The

ideology is based on a stereotype of workers with no responsibility for day-to-day life activities, which is an expectation that is difficult for single men and women to fulfill. It also results in discrimination against women when their superiors act on the perception that women will marry and have children *someday*, and either quit working or lower their commitment to their jobs. In the example of one of the women in this study, even when she had no intention of reducing her commitment after having a baby, her managers did not consider her a candidate for promotion based on their own perceptions. Working to reduce these stereotypes and the ideal worker ideology, therefore, benefits all women.

Consulting work like that being done by the researchers at the Center for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons Graduate School of Management is another method for intervention in gender construction in organizations. Their use of a “dual agenda,” which includes business process improvement as a goal of equal importance to disrupting gender stereotypes, helps to “sell” their work to companies who have a difficult time understanding how gender issues are important. They cautioned, however, that not keeping gender at the forefront was a large part of the failure of the research they attempted. They offer a theoretical framework and published an analysis of their work that can assist other researchers who wish to continue to move feminism “out of the armchair” (Meyerson and Kolb 2000). I believe that this work can also be incorporated into diversity initiatives, the “Trojan horse” that gives us access to the workplace.

Any changes to the workplace must benefit men and women alike. Many of the stories that the women told revealed a culture that fits well into a depiction of the workplace as “toxic.” Improving things like the long work hours and out of control stress that results in heart attacks should be attractive to men. But if some have a goal only to

acquire power and money, and they have been successful in the current environment, the idea that there is a need for a revolutionary change in corporate culture is preposterous. Yet the success of diversity work is unlikely without their support. The women in this study are hopeful that the *next* generation will be different. It is important that both the men and the women who will be the business leaders of the future are exposed to the ideas discussed here as part of their business school and early career experience.

#### Further research

My sample includes only women who have chosen to give up their careers. Similar interviews should be conducted with executive women who are still working within corporations to determine if they have insights that these women did not. My informants are also all from the baby boom generation. Women born after 1964 should be interviewed to discover any differences in their experiences and how they perceive these issues, due to changes in the workplace, generational differences, or merely differences in life-stage.

The voices of men are also missing from this work. I have alluded to the fact that the interventions to disrupt hegemonic masculinity will benefit men. Such interventions should not be designed without including the viewpoints of executive men. Several of the women suggested that I talk to their husbands, who had also chosen to “opt out.” Although the women recognized that gender-specific issues had impacted their careers and their decisions to leave, they also feel that workplaces are bad for all workers, not just women. Interviewing both men inside of corporations and men who have opted out would help to tell the rest of this story. Of those that opted out, some have chosen the stay-at-home husband role. This role is still considered very unusual and is generally

marginalized in our society. Interviewing men who have chosen this role would be a fascinating contrast to the women who felt they had no choice but to accept it.

## **Conclusions**

This dissertation deals with complex issues for which there are no easy solutions. The life stories of these women reveal both their struggles and success as members of the first generation of female executives. They describe a workplace that continues to be marked by hegemonic masculinity, where they were required to assimilate to a white male dominated culture. The women succeeded beyond their expectations, but something stopped them from continuing upward. A “glass ceiling” is perpetuated in U.S. businesses by this hegemonic masculinity and its interrelationship with both informal systems, like the “old boys network,” and sex-role stereotypes.

Rarely, if ever, are the actors in this drama aware of their parts. The elite white males in power are not sitting around a table deciding how to operate an exclusionary culture in their workplaces. The systematic issues illuminated here have built up over generations in which the men before them were busy in day-to-day struggles of running complex and competitive businesses. When they hire their fraternity brother’s son as their next senior executive, they are not doing it to thwart all women managers. They are being nice guys, helping out a friend and hiring someone they can trust. When they hang out together on the golf course, they are just having fun, even if they inadvertently make decisions there without the involvement of the women who are supposed to be on their “team.” They didn’t sneak off to the golf course to make decisions behind her back. They were just spending time with friends, enjoying a little time away from work, as

women do with their girlfriends. Indeed, the systems of power and privilege that perpetuate the glass ceiling are invisible to the men who create them and to a great extent, to the women whose careers are truncated because of them.

Diversity initiatives represent an opportunity to change the corporate culture that allows this glass ceiling. Although these initiatives are designed to address a more broadly defined diversity, they have the potential to disrupt stereotypes and they provide an entree to the workplace where such discussion can begin. Policies that undermine the corporations' right to the "ideal worker" can also help to disrupt the system of sex discrimination. But raising the topic of gender is difficult because it is "a system of meaning so pervasive and inescapable that it shapes our identity" (Williams 2000:198).

Gender is also constructed in the wider society and we carry our gender identities with us into the workplace. As women have moved into traditionally-male occupations, like corporate executive, they have struggled to find behaviors appropriate for success. If they model themselves on those who held the jobs before them, they have to give up something of themselves, move away from behaviors that are comfortable to them. Even if they agree to do this they risk being perceived as too much like the men, which may makes the men uncomfortable. This narrow band of appropriate behavior is difficult to find. And it's not fair, in any sense of the word. Williams (2000), in fact, argues that it represents illegal discrimination, requiring women to fulfill job requirements that were designed around men with stay-at-home wives, while also expecting them to fulfill care-taking responsibilities for their own husbands and families. But many women believe the stereotypes that females are better at care-taking roles. And men who attempt to fulfill those roles are marginalized, treated like women, "Mr. Moms."

Socialist feminist theory addresses these issues and provides an excellent framework for critiquing the stories that were revealed in this research. We can see the creation of gender and the systems of control and power that stand in the way of the women's success. But finding ways to intervene and disrupt it is very difficult. The feminist researchers of the Center for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons Graduate School of Management have tried to do this directly in consulting work. Legal feminists at the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California Hastings College of the Law are addressing it through their work in family responsibility discrimination law. But most women in business today would never identify themselves with these feminists who are trying to change the system to make it more equitable for them. Somehow feminism has become a dirty word. The failure of the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment is a symbol of the incompleteness of the women's movement. There is much work remaining to be done. The continuing applicability of the observations of Betty Friedan in the 1960s and Rosabeth Moss Kanter in the 1970s, discussed above, is evidence of this.

The women inside of organizations are making a difference just by their presence, by demonstrating their competence. But the stories revealed by the women in this study have shown us that this is not enough. Feminists on the outside must also continue the struggle; they can view the workplace objectively and raise issues that the women inside cannot. Working both within and outside of organizations is needed. Working together is the only way.

This study is entirely of white middle-class women working as executives in U.S. corporations in the 1980s and 1990s. It provides a window into the workplace as it was experienced by them, but cannot be generalized to other groups of women or other types

of workplaces. Since all of the women in this study are also “of a certain age” and all have chosen to leave their corporate jobs, the data have an obvious bias. None of this diminishes its value. The voices of these women are rarely heard. Their personal experiences both inform us and create a foundation on which we can build theory and develop interventions. They are the ones who tired of trying to assimilate, of trying to please leaders who they no longer respected. Yet they still want to work, they want to be productive and they enjoy the “free agent” roles they have carved out for themselves.

This is the bottom line for one of them:

Judy: So the reality is that I really think that if I had a daughter starting out the advice I would give her is to get a good education and find something that you have a passion about and figure out who is really good and do an internship or work for that person, then start your own business. That’s what I would say.

For this generation of executive women, leaving to find work of their own is often the best option for their own personal growth and well-being, but it is not the best thing for businesses. If corporations truly want to keep women, they have to change their cultures or the women will continue to leave, and advise their daughters to do the same.

But not everyone thinks that we can change the workplace:

Colleen: I don’t think you can fix corporate America. I think what we have to do is create a new business model of our own. We can’t tear down so much of that structure that has been built over so long and also so many attitudes and old mores that just won’t go away right now.

After so many years of fighting the fight only to be pushed out the door, the women have little hope for businesses as they exist today. And yet these women were hopeful for the future. Opportunities for women have improved dramatically since the passage of the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s and the women’s movement of the 1970s. The women in this study held executive positions that no woman before them had held.



Their success in those roles has made a difference, even though they chose to leave before they achieved all of which they were capable. And the women who continue to reach milestones today will push the glass ceiling upward and provide role models for the next generation.

But as long as the price for success includes assimilating to the “ideal worker,” they will be making a sacrifice that most of the women in this study did not wish to make. And no one should have to, male or female. Everyone should have the opportunity to have a complete life of her or his choosing, not just those who can find a spouse who will donate her (or his) career potential to “make” a home so that the worker can give all of his (or her) efforts to a corporation. In the battle over who gets to “have it all,” it is clear that the corporations are the only ones who are winning. This may be merely symptomatic of the current state of advanced capitalism, but it is the situation in which we find U.S. businesses today. As a pragmatic feminist and applied anthropologist, I have attempted to find opportunities to improve upon this situation, recognizing they are less than ideal.

Regarding whether real change is possible, Acker has said that it will most likely happen through “many small skirmishes, labor market changes, and slowly changing perceptions of the possible and acceptable” (Acker 2000:629). I agree. The labor market *is* changing and more women are there to demonstrate their competence. A younger generation is entering the workplace, many of whom were raised by working women; they have different perceptions. The “skirmishes” will include the discrimination lawsuits, the day-to-day struggles, and yes, the diversity programs.

Just when I was sure there was no happy ending for my dissertation, I met a woman who, at only forty-two, has achieved a higher level of success than any of the women in this study; she holds the CEO title. She told me she would not have been a good “trailblazer,” her word for the women who came before her; that she had risen “on their coattails.” What a wonderful thank-you to the women whose stories are presented here. Their lives, their careers, may only be “small skirmishes” in this struggle, but they have made a difference.

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## **Appendices**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Recruiting Script**

I am looking for women who have held, but chose to leave, executive level positions within corporations. They may not be working now, or they may have started their own businesses, gone into academia or nonprofit work, or just ended their career path and found other work.

Participation should not be too difficult. I will want to interview each woman four or five times over the course of the next few months. Each interview should last around an hour. My goal is to collect the stories of these women and analyze them for common themes and potential changes to the workplace that might have resulted in their continuing their career paths.

Why would someone want to participate? First, it should be fun and interesting. But I also believe that the women will help me to develop recommendations that may assist businesses to attract and retain women in their workplaces. I hope that this will increase opportunities for women to advance, and improve the conditions in which all women work.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
University of South Florida

### **Information for People Who Take Part in Research Studies**

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The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in a minimal risk research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, ask the person in charge of the study.

**Title of Study:** A Paradox of Diversity: Billions invested, but women still leave

**Principal Investigator:** Rebekah Heppner

**Study Location(s):** University of South Florida, College of Arts and Sciences

You are being asked to participate because you held an executive-level position within a corporation but chose to leave it.

### **General Information about the Research Study**

The purpose of this research study is to collect the stories of executive women who have chosen to leave their positions and analyze them for common themes and potential changes to the workplace that might have resulted in their continuing their career paths.

### **Plan of Study**

You will be interviewed in person and the interviews will be audio-taped. As many as five interview sessions of sixty to ninety minutes each may be needed. You will be asked to discuss your experiences in the workplace, the culture of the organizations in which you worked and your experience, if any, with diversity initiatives.

### **Payment for Participation**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

### **Benefits of Being a Part of this Research Study**

By taking part in this research study, you may aid in the development of recommendations that will help businesses to attract and retain women in their workplaces. This may increase opportunities for women to advance and improve the conditions in which they work.



### **Risks of Being a Part of this Research Study**

There are no known risks involved in being a part of this research study

### **Confidentiality of Your Records**

Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the USF Institutional Review Board, its staff and other individuals acting on behalf of USF may inspect the records from this research project.

The results of this study may be published. However, you will be given a fictitious name and you will be referred to only by that name in both the notes related to your interview and any reports or publications that reference your interview. The tapes of interviews and transcripts, as well as this informed consent form, will be kept at the home of the principal investigator.

### **Volunteering to Be Part of this Research Study**

Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to participate in this research study or to withdraw at any time.

### **Questions and Contacts**

- If you have any questions about this research study, contact the researcher, Rebekah Heppner at (813) 207-0639 or Susan Greenbaum (her faculty advisor) at (813) 974-2668.
- If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact the Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.

### **Consent to Take Part in This Research Study**

By signing this form I agree that:

- I have fully read this informed consent form describing this research project.
- I have had the opportunity to question one of the persons in charge of this research and have received satisfactory answers.

- I understand that I am being asked to participate in research. I understand the risks and benefits, and I freely give my consent to participate in the research project outlined in this form, under the conditions indicated in it.
- I have been given a signed copy of this informed consent form, which is mine to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

Date

### **Investigator Statement**

I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above research study. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the subject signing this consent form understands the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator  
Or authorized research  
investigator designated by  
the Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Investigator

Date

## APPENDIX C

### History and Trends in the Workplace Diversity Movement

**Rebekah Heppner**

**October 5, 2005**

In the 1960s laws were passed that prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race or sex. Training was done then about these laws, and some early forms of “diversity” training began to appear in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the beginning the “diversity movement” in business is generally attributed to some demographic research commission by the Department of Labor. The research resulted in a 1987 report titled “Workforce 2000.” The report had a catchy name and an amazing statistic: in the year 2000 only 15% of new hires will be white males.

That’s not exactly what it said, but that’s what most people heard (some say there was a typo in the executive summary that led them to this). It actually said that the **net additions** to the labor force would only comprise 15% white males. This is less dramatic but was still a surprising statistic to people in 1987. It spurred many companies to action; they didn’t want to be unable to hire and retain the workers of the future.

In addition, the Senate confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas in 1990 led to a dramatic increase in complaints of sexual harassment, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991 allowed for punitive damages in employment discrimination lawsuits. Lawyers were now much more interested in taking employment discrimination suits and the big settlements that seem routine today have become a serious financial threat to businesses.

Demographic changes in the United States are also beginning to appear more dramatically in the workplace. Although the predictions of Workforce 2000 were never realized, a new prediction is that there will be a white minority in the U.S. by 2050. Many business leaders realize that just putting this diverse group of people together will not result in an equitable and harmonious workplace.

Through my research, I identified three different approaches to diversity that I have labeled “paradigms.” They seem to have evolved from one to the other over time. That is not to say that the first one is completely gone today, or that no one used any of the third at the beginning, but their prevalence has generally changed based on experience gained over the years.

Paradigm One: The encounter group model

A phenomenon of the 1960s was known as encounter groups. These were not about diversity, they were a form of group therapy, a part of the pop psychology movement.

Historian Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn, who wrote one of the most critical books about the diversity movement, believes that because the civil rights movement occurred at the same time that these encounter groups were popular, there was a “fateful coinciding of events,” which resulted in using some of the methods of encounter groups in early diversity programs.

In business, this was called sensitivity training. The emphasis was on individuals revealing feelings of frustration and personal experiences with discrimination in a group setting with co-workers. Researchers have been debating this model for years and most consider it ineffective. Others believe it leads to (instead of preventing) litigation and heightens tensions in the workplace. At the very least, these methods need to be well facilitated. The problems that occurred were generally tied to unqualified facilitators; companies often allowed their front-line managers to lead the sessions.

#### Paradigm Two: Multiculturalism

This paradigm is often described as “celebrating differences,” and was in part a way to get away from the problems that were seen in the encounter group approach. Companies also began to believe they could increase profits by matching the diversity of their workforce with that of the customers.

Diversity expert Taylor Cox wrote extensively on what he terms the “plural organization” versus the “multicultural organization.” By plural he meant that there were men and women, African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and others in the workplace, but they were all required to assimilate to the same culture. By “multicultural” he meant companies that allow individuals to maintain their own culture and contribute to the success of the business by bringing their unique views to the workplace.

In this paradigm the definition of diversity also begins to broaden. Roosevelt Thomas, another scholar who has written extensively on diversity, suggested that the definition should include education, family background, as well as job function and personality differences. This was a big change from the original definition, which was basically the “protected classes” as defined by the law (primarily race and sex).

This paradigm also has its problems. Some of the training included “trait lists” for different ethnic groups. An example would be when a Puerto Rican woman joins a staff and her manager just wants to know how to treat Puerto Rican women, as if they were all the same. These methods can easily perpetuate stereotypes, often even informing people of some they don’t already hold.

The idea that you need to “match” your workforce with your customers or markets also tends to be extremely limiting. It often results in the clustering of women and minority workers in certain divisions where what is considered (by management) to be their

“unique” qualities can be put to use. These workers were not likely to get promoted from these divisions into positions of power in the organization.

One last issue is that some of the techniques were just a little too easy. For example, having each month dedicated to a specific group, like Women’s History Month. Although this is not necessarily a bad thing, leading diversity consultants have called it an activity trap or symbolic busywork. It allows management to say they have addressed employee diversity without doing the real work that is called for to create a more inclusive workplace.

### Paradigm 3: The Business Case for Diversity

One of the outcomes of the multiculturalism paradigm was the introduction of the idea that there is “value” in diversity. That resulted in the entire field turning to a more positive approach from the original negative, guilt based approaches, or one motivated by the fear of lawsuits. Even Taylor Cox did not intend multiculturalism to be limited to how you can match up employees with customers. He felt that diverse organizations are better at problem solving and more creative, leading to innovation because of the diversity of viewpoints present at the table.

This concept of valuing diversity has led into what is called the “business case for diversity.” The first reference that I found to the business case was in a 1997 article in an academic journal for business management. The authors of that article felt that business could grow through diversity and added that diversity programs themselves (addressing diversity, not just having a diverse employees) result in enhanced leadership and reduced turnover, in addition to a reduction in discrimination complaints. The word “global” also starts appearing in the business literature at this time. As business becomes increasing international, the need to build effective relationships with people from other cultures motivates companies to undertake diversity initiatives.

Academics have tried to “prove” the business case with numbers, but the results have been mixed. Isolating these benefits, or quantifying the benefit of lawsuits avoided, is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Consequently, business leaders are expected to consider this on faith, to believe it intuitively. Some researchers, however, have isolated the type of culture that must exist in an organization for it to realize the benefits of diversity. Harvard business school professor David Thomas led this research project. He describes the organizations that benefit from a diverse workplace as those that: “are not bureaucratic,” “are stimulating to the personal growth of employees,” “encourage openness,” and where “employees feel valued.” The primary requirement, though, is that the management believes in the benefits of diversity.

### Types of Training

The business case is certainly the paradigm that is the state of the art today, although elements of the first two paradigms are still in practice. Diversity initiatives today also

include more effective training and many other strategies that support the training. These include mentoring programs, networking groups, explicit review of policies and procedures to ensure inclusion and active recruitment of a diverse workforce. Training is still the primary method employed, however, and most practitioners classify diversity training programs in two types: awareness and skill building.

Awareness includes education on the laws and policies related to employment discrimination. It may also include information on the history and the impact of discrimination and the demographics to support it.

Skill building is more experiential learning, utilizing role plays and case studies to allow participants to practice applying what they have learned to potential issues in the workplace. Communication and conflict resolutions are also an important part of the skills that are taught.

All of the research and experts in the field have concluded that awareness training alone is not enough, that skill building is critical. What we see actually in place in most companies, however, is almost exclusively awareness. To train on skill building requires highly skilled facilitators who work with these issues on a regular basis. If it is handled poorly, we end right back in the encounter group paradigm, creating more problems than we prevent. This type of training also takes more time. The cost of using skilled facilitators as well as the cost of additional time away from work is the most likely reason that this type of training is not seen as often as more directive, awareness training.

### **About the Author**

Rebekah Heppner grew up on the south side of Chicago during the turbulent sixties. She received a bachelor's degree in accounting from Oklahoma State University and began her professional career in business with KPMG. She received her MBA from the University of Tampa and was an officer of Progressive Insurance Company in Austin, Texas. After her own decision to “opt-out” of the corporate world, she owned a staffing business in Tampa. She is a graduate of Leadership Tampa and Leadership Tampa Bay and serves on the boards of the Centre for Women and the Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts. She has been an adjunct faculty member of the University of South Florida and Schiller International University. She is currently a consultant with not-for-profit organizations. Rebekah hopes to continue to work to increase gender and racial equity in business and in her community for many years to come.