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# Transcending Towards Personal Freedom: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers

Ilena A. Lonetti

*University of St. Thomas, Minnesota*

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Transcending Towards Personal Freedom:  
Exploring the Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Ilena A. Lonetti

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2012

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

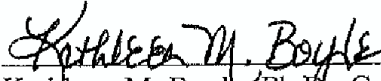
Transcending Towards Personal Freedom:  
Exploring the Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers

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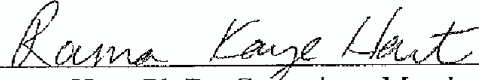
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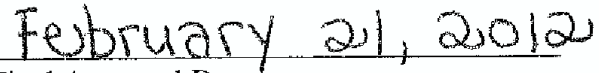
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Final Approval Date

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To the amazing women participating in this study, I extend my deepest gratitude and appreciation. By sharing your daily lives with honesty and humor, we witness contemporary life's challenging dynamics. Additionally, your work-life balance insights allow us to view life from different angles and refractions, leading to better ways of living and working.

Special thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Thomas L. Fish whose guidance and appreciation of the topic has been immensely helpful. Also thank you to my committee members, Dr. Kathleen Boyle and Dr. Rama Hart, for providing direction and thorough feedback.

## ABSTRACT

*“What are the lived experiences of professional working mothers?”* An integrated theoretical model provided an historical context and framework for discovering distinctions between social discourse and individual lifestyles. Professional working mothers participated in phenomenological research with an introductory telephone call and two in-person interviews. Through language and story, participants depicted what it means to be a professional working mother in contemporary, American society. Demographic characteristics included five female participants, who held a professional or executive level position. All participants earned a college degree and ranged in age from 30-65 with children living at home (ages ranged from 3-20). Additionally, four of the participants were married. Thematically, participants described their world in terms of employer and employee job expectations, an intertwining commitment to work and family, and living in alignment with one’s personal values when it comes to work-life balance. Mirroring the findings of similar studies, social conditioning, work culture, and technology heavily influenced their lived experiences as professional working mothers. Often prolonged work-life imbalances led to personal crises and fatigue; inspired to transcend old work-life paradigms, most women consciously created an integrated lifestyle, blending work and family to complement one another. Aligned with a global trend towards the integration of spiritual, social, and scientific/technological evolution, more research is required to (a) discern how self-identity and society co-create the lived experiences of professional working mothers; (b) research organizational development structures to support integrated lifestyles and, (c) evaluate the impact of ongoing work-life balance issues for future generations.

*Key words:* women, professional, professional working mothers, work-life balance, WLB, work-family conflict, WFC, parents, lived experience, phenomenology, diversity, spirituality, flexibility, benefits, FMLA

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My personal experience of being a working professional mother and trying to cope with the push and pull of family fueled my interest in this topic. Like many others, I eventually questioned the value of all-consuming workloads against my health and family (Stone, 2007). Recalling the early days of becoming salaried (when I did not have children), there was a verbal expectation that the position required at least 45-50 hours per week. When my boss sat me down with the promotion news and the ‘understanding’ of how many hours were required, I started arriving one hour early and leaving an hour later (a 7-4 shift).

Although in reality, the change from exempt to non-exempt status did not translate to a huge salary increase, this step towards opportunities for future advancement outweighed the deficit. Sadly, once I got on the train, I never got off. As a result, I invested a lot of time at work and school to keep ahead of the curve. This track has led to promotions and 55 to 60- hour work weeks which compelled people to ask, “How do you do it all?” Usually, I would respond flippantly with, “Sometimes better than others”; but on the inside, I knew that there have been serious tradeoffs along the way. In these moments, I felt most isolated from my family and society.

Despite layers of social conditioning (from family, work, school, media, etc.) to accept my role as a professional working mother, this paradox of consciously wanting a large family but not being able to spend time with them was always difficult to reconcile. The stress of trying to resolve the disparity between dreams and reality has been exceedingly hard. Over the years, there would be cycles between work, home, and school that would repeat to form the perfect internal storm. The pressure and stress of continuously working very long hours to deliver highly visible projects, missing a key family function, and having a moment to realize how much

I failed to notice even something as simple as my children's growth spurts, would trigger feelings of loss as well as anger and frustration. With each year, the intensity of these feelings strengthened until they could not be ignored.

My moment of truth came in 2007, when I could not remember the last time I had witnessed a sunrise, felt the grass beneath my feet, or watched TV with the kids without a computer or report on my lap. Once again, I found myself sitting in my home office one Sunday afternoon working on a report due Monday – and, missing yet another family event. After twenty years in executive level positions, I convinced myself that eventually it would slow down or that it would be all worth it in the end.

Reflecting on the previous six months, I had attempted to create a balanced workload by clearly telling my boss that enough was on my plate as I juggled our first enterprise employee survey; implementation of a new human resources system; negotiations of three new benefits contracts; an overhaul of the citywide training and development program along with the creation of two new programs (which I also taught); establishment of a department head orientation plan and performance management practice; all the while directing a staff of 33 employees. However, new enterprise projects were added to my “to do” list with the mantra “we had to do more with less.”

Overwhelmed, I closed my eyes and opened my mind to the work demands. In this moment, my heart broke because I loved my work but the price had become too high. With no end in sight, I lowered my forehead against the table feeling utterly defeated. When my family returned from the picnic, my husband and I talked about these seemingly impossible choices – leaving the workforce, finishing my education, and finding ways to make it all work

economically. Ultimately, our decision rested with the fact that this was not how we wanted to live as a family or a couple.

The next day I gave notice to my employer. Fortunately, within a few weeks I was offered a part-time senior consultant position in the private sector. The change gave rise to a different set of dynamics as most of my work could be completed from home. In addition, the tempo to my work has become very fluid as jobs ramped up and down. Freed from corporate hierarchy, I have been able to balance my schedule which has greatly reduced work-family conflict. Naturally, with all choices there were tradeoffs. In my case, I exchanged work-life balance today for part-time work with no health or retirement benefits.

Although some long-term implications result from making this choice, I have been fortunate that my husband carries these benefits. Recognizing the loss in my benefits has not been ideal financially, the alternative struggle to manage an executive level schedule and workload would have proven devastating for the family. The ultimate question centers around why I had to make this choice – do our executives always have to work Monday through Sunday, capturing only snippets of personal life? Is there a better way to develop organizational culture to move away from the give all or nothing to somewhere in between? How can leaders build an organization for people, for living?

### **Establishing a Warrant**

This study looks at the confluence between the private and public spheres of American professional working mothers who have predominately fought to balance full-time employment with home and family. Although the ongoing imbalance and growing encroachment of work in the personal lives is not a new struggle, very few workforce studies challenge organizations to change (Schein, 1985). With the majority of studies omitting any significant recommendations for organizational change, the natural understanding is that work-life balance is a personal

problem. Work-family conflict studies also demonstrate women's propensity to internalize the struggle, make personal compromises, rationalize the issue, and tough it out because it will be all worth it one day (Bennetts, 2007; Hochschild, 2003b). However, modern life challenges us to look for a collective response that more deeply resonates with each individual's need for balancing work and family, or personal endeavors, which creates a life that is wholly satisfying. In doing so, the issue does not become "purely personal problems nor inherent processes beyond our control, but arise instead from social structural arrangements" (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004, p.180).

When a collection of individuals live with less than a wholly balanced lifestyle, a set of societal implications is observed; in the case of professional working mothers and their families, studies have found varying degrees of diminished well-being (ABC News, 2008; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hill, 2005; Hochschild, 1997). However, this is no longer just a "woman's issue" (Hill, 2005; Roberts, 2005; Winslow, 2005). There is an emerging trend in the United States where the younger generation of working fathers is also beginning to feel the pinch of work-family conflict (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2011). Taking a closer look at the implications of not addressing work-family conflict issues requires listening to those who have been on the forefront of this struggle for answers – professional working mothers.

To understand the present, one must appreciate how the workforce has changed over the last century. Baxandall and Gordon (1976) recorded the conflict between having to feed and care for family against the exclusionary practices and cultural stigmas of married women in the workforce, as early as 1897. Despite social mores and bans on hiring married women for non-professional positions, the numbers began to grow in the 1920s due to the Great Depression and in 1930s with Roosevelt's New Deal (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976). Note that the majority of

these jobs were considered acceptable women's work (also known as 'pink collar' jobs). According to the Women's International Center, women continued to face barriers which "excluded [them] from the professions, except for writing and teaching" (Women's International Center, n.d., para.19).

Social upheavals continued to propel change within American society. Eventually employment bans were dropped in the 1940s to draw married women into production for World War II. "The war did not, however, make a lasting or profound difference in the public attitude toward employed women nor did it redefine sex roles" (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976, pp. 245-246). With the bar set, the expectation to be a wage-earner and caregiver rippled through society and a new phenomenon formed wherein many working mothers fought to balance full-time employment and the "second shift" at home (Hochschild, 2003b).

During this evolutionary pattern in society, more women also entered higher education. Particularly, after the 1960s women's rights movement, an increasing number of women attended college and entered fields (such as medicine, business, and law) that were dominated by men. Over the last fifty years, a large number of women navigated their way to top positions within organizations (Porter, 2006). *The Economist* (2009) recently reported that fifty-one percent of professional positions in America were held by women and indicated women's rise to the top came with a stiff price. In addition, the article stated that "The cost of motherhood is particularly steep for fast-track women...schedules are demanding. Future bosses are expected to have worked in several departments and countries. Professional-services firms have an up-or-out system which rewards the most dedicated with lucrative partnerships" (The Economist, 2009, p. 2).

For professional working mothers, which I define as those who hold an executive level position (director level or above), these work demands often translate into working away from home on an ongoing basis and sixty hours or more work weeks (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2008). Unfortunately, personal tradeoffs for managing the “competing devotions” of boardroom and household have left a number of women disillusioned, chronically fatigued, and either opting out of the workforce or taking on the more masculine work traits whereby they can “function like a man with a wife at home” (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 34). This phenomena begs the question – when attuning to the essence of this experience, does the “description [reawaken or show] us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10)?

### **Statement of the Problem**

To look at our world with an enlightened lens enables us to temporarily disconnect ourselves from the concept of work, our habits, and perceptions of normal. In the space created by our disconnection, we have the opportunity to contemplate how our lived experiences measure up to our values and ideals. We are at a time when many organizations and executives are working without a sustainable balance between work and family (Grzelakowski, 2005; Rudd & McKerny, 1986; Schein, 1985; Lockwood, 2003; Stone, 2007; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). When many people walk on egg shells about this issue, the time for a different perspective is needed to expand our understanding of the true impact of this lifestyle on ourselves as individuals, our families, and organizations as well as society at large.

Through the research of the demographic and economic evolution of the American workforce, professional working mothers present a distinctive vantage point in describing the modern workplace (Statham, Miller, & Mauksch, 1998). Although not an all-inclusive list, some of these factors include: changing gender roles in society around work and family in the last fifty

years; demanding workplace norms for professional employees; the hiring of more women in positions of power within an organization; and, an increasing public awareness that work-family conflict directly affects the health of working professionals as well as their families and organizations (ABC News, 2008; Duxbury & Higgins, 2004; Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2006; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Gandossy, Tucker, & Verna, 2006; Hill, 2005; Hochschild, 1997). Embedded in all these factors are the inherent roles that generate either a confluence or juxtaposition between work and family. When work and family are allies, the confluence can be named work-life balance. When in opposition, the juxtaposition can be named work-family conflict (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Carlson, Gyzwacz, & Zivnuska, 2009; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Cinamon, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005; Winslow, 2005).

### **Research Question**

When work-family conflict rises, work-life balance seems to downshift accordingly (Anderson et al., 2002; Carlson et al., 2009; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Cinamon, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005; Winslow, 2005). Studying these phenomena provide a way to appreciate how these concepts have shaped the American lifestyle. The interplay of work and family is most evident in the lives of professional working mothers; therefore, these women will likely possess a deeper understanding than most when it comes to the nature of work-family conflict and work-life balance.

Based on these facts, this dissertation research explicitly investigates, “What are the lived experiences of professional working mothers?” Acting as a point of departure in our conversation, subsequent questions unfold: What is the day-in-the-life of a professional working mother? Would professional working mothers articulate any work-family conflict or work-life balance issues? If so, what challenges or situations, would be raised? How have these challenges affected her personally and professionally? Would they advocate active roles in



changing or improving their workplace? If they have not experienced work-family conflict or work-life balance issues, how have they maintained a balanced lifestyle? What advice would these women give their children about handling work-life balance? Answers to these questions provide a unique perspective on present day professional working mother experiences. In addition to building a better understanding of the modern work environment, perhaps there is an opportunity to create new ways to look at the dynamics between working and family.

This study focuses on professional working mothers for four key reasons. One, women have a long history in forging social reforms and contributing to the improvement of human rights by continually challenging the traditional assumptions around gendered roles in the workplace, at home, and within the community (Hartman, 1999; Hochschild, 1997; Lerner, 1997; Raphael & Byron, 2006). Two, professional working mothers can help others understand the cultural and societal implications of having had to assimilate to an “all-or-nothing workplace” (Grzelakowski, 2005; Stone, 2007). Third, I trust that when women open up to their history, a new understanding of the issues awaken and begin to build compelling stories of how women and organizations adapt to the modern complexities of life that could enable more balanced lifestyles (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Lerner, 1997). Lastly, with over 50 percent of women in seats of organizational power, we are entering a new era where women’s knowledge of work, family, and organization can be used to benefit all parties (Rudd & McKerny, 1986; The Economist, 2009).

## **Definitions**

### **Work Family Conflict**

Before expounding on how professional working mothers perceive Work Family Conflict (WFC), one must first understand how existing cultural perspectives have shaped its meaning. WFC has become an accepted term in American social structure that defines how a person

experiences the tension between balancing work and family. At its broadest definition, WFC is devoid of the emotions that usually accompany it. Descriptions include “interrole conflict,” “the intersection of work and family role identities”; and, “time conflict, behavioral conflict, and emotional conflict between the respondent’s job and their family life” (Ahuja, Chudoba, Kacmar, McKnight, & George, 2007; Cinamon, 2006; Hill, Mead, Dean, Hafen, Gadd, Palmer, & Ferris, 2006; Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom, & D’Souza, 2006). Conceptually, WFC operates in both directions (Hill, et al., 2006); however, studies often concentrate on the spillage of work into home life (i.e., *The Time Divide* by Jacobs & Gerson, 2004).

In the late 1980s when the term was coined, WFC was spotlighted as a woman’s issue due to gender roles in society around work and family. Therefore, gendered responses became the norm where mothers were most likely to “make career trade-offs in pay or advancement, reduce their hours, or work part-time while fathers continue to invest in their careers.” (Strazdins, et al., 2006, p. 396).

With the passing of two decades, WFC is still characterized by its symptoms and it is expressed by child care issues, absenteeism and employee dissatisfaction (Ferrer & Gagne, 2009). Having narrowly defined WFC, when organizations develop “family friendly” interventions to offset these outcomes, only a small number of employees are positively impacted. The interventions do not address the larger, core issues of workplace culture and job structure (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Williams, 2000; Snir & Harpaz, 2009; Solomon, 1994). What type of culture, policies, and practices are needed to help “employees successfully balance multiple roles within one’s life” (Gaffey & Rottinghaus, 2009)?

## **Work-life Balance**

The term work-life balance (WLB) was coined in the late 1980's by the mainstream news and describes a basic need for equal time in the public and private spheres of one's life without interrole conflict. However, the definition of work-life balance is still evolving (Carlson, et al., 2009). In many ways, the term has been used in juxtaposition of work-family conflict to describe what we are striving to achieve. For example, when work-family conflicts impact quality of life (e.g., stability of the family, child welfare, employee health, etc.), a case can be made that work-life balance results in a more positive outlook on one's position and organizational commitment while decreasing the likelihood of turnover (Carlson, et al., 2009). Yet, the incentive to change from an organizational perspective must be significant because "just because you present this as the right thing to do; there has to be some perceived advantage to the company" (Belkin, 2000, p. 1).

## **Lived Experience**

When studying the reality of work-family conflict and work-life balance issues, phenomenology offers an awakening to "the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it (Van Manen, 1990). Through intentional relation, an individual provides a direct accounting of a phenomenon as it occurred (without alteration) and what it meant to him or her (Gadamer, 1977; Rohmann, 1999; Van Manen, 1990).

## **Professional**

For the purposes of the dissertation, the term professional is defined as someone performing "professional, scientific, and technical activities for others. These activities require a high degree of expertise and training" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). These highly skilled

employees are considered “talent-intensive workers” who have the ability to influence an organization’s performance and/or direction significantly (Gandossy et al., 2006). In my usage, professionals are defined at the executive level (director level or above) who work full-time in a variety of occupational fields such as business, education, law, medicine, government, etc.

### **Professional Working Mother**

I use the term “professional working mother” to describe an executive level employee who is a mother with children (ages 0-18) living at home. These full-time executives can be married or single; however, in all likelihood they do not have a full-time, at-home significant other who cares for them and their children (Hochschild, 2003a).

### **Study Significance**

Looking for an advantage in a time of economic downturns and facing a shortage of talent in the coming years (Dychtwald, et al., 2006), U.S. organizations actively compete for professional talent – people who drive future success. As American organizations continue to define the ideal worker as someone who is “always on,” a pattern emerges that yields a long-term shortfall in retaining high performing professional working mothers (Grzelakowski, 2005; Schein, 1985; Stone, 2007; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). By understanding the dissonance created by a culture with around-the-clock demands, a responsive company could strategically improve their organizational culture, performance and ability to manage executive talent (Dychtwald, et al., 2006; Gandossy et al., 2006; Karoly & Panis, 2004).

Unfortunately, when workforce studies examine organizations from the distance of numerical trends and theories, the impact of experiencing the imbalance (as it relates to well-being) is lost or can be easily distorted (Chapman, J. & De Keulenaer, 2009; Dychtwald, et al., 2006; Hudson Institute, 1999; Morales, 2009; Ray & Schmitt, 2007; Van Kaam, 1966). Further,

if organizations do not see the future through the personal vantage point of workers, an opportunity for meaningful change is missed (Dychtwald, et al., 2006; O'Toole, Lawler III & Meisinger, 2006). This study fills this gap by interviewing professional working mothers and reflecting upon their personal narratives individually as well as collectively. At both levels, issues of gender, position in the workplace, and family status are analyzed in relation to their work and family lives.

From a more macro level, this study also contributes to existing research by further investigating to what extent professional working mothers see work-life balance as an organization's responsibility to remedy. While a number of organizations have made inroads by establishing "family friendly" policies, from a cultural perspective employees are reluctant to make use of these policies (Blair-Loy, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Williams, 2000). This trend is also evidenced in *The Time Divide* written by Jacobs & Gerson, (2004) whereby "those who take advantage of family-support policies must bear the costs at work, and many understandably forgo such "opportunities" in favor of protecting their work and career prospects" (p. 180). For professional working mothers, there is the added stress of long-standing stereotypes that have shaped their work ethic and constrained their use of family-friendly policies to avoid being perceived as anything less than the ideal worker (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976).

Only a small percentage of work-life balance studies frame work-life balance as an organizational imperative and newer studies are calling for more research on the subject to understand "whether the ongoing calls to help workers balance their work and family lives are legitimate" (Carlson, et al., 2009). This study strives to broaden the dialogue to include professional working mothers who "are at high risk of being overworked, time-stretched, and

time-starved” (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004, p. 82). This approach of studying the issue from an individual’s standpoint is supported by the Sloan Work and Family Research Network (2004):

The work-family conflict literature has plateaued...Theoretical frameworks have focused on stressors in the environment and personal characteristics that produce chronic or ongoing work-family conflict. We need to supplement this research with studies of specific situations and the factors that influence decisions in these situations. Research should be focused more on individual situations and how people deal with them. (p. 2).

Furthermore, studies have not fully explored how unresolved work-family conflict will affect America’s future – especially the impact on the well-being of our workers and their families if work-life balance remains unchanged. Moreover, many studies research the impact that occurs when work and family intersect from a mixed gender approach (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Stone, 2007; Williams, 2000). Although some studies recognize the unique experiences of professional working mothers, they are often melded with their male counterparts (Ahuja, et al., 2007; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Gaffey & Rottinghaus, 2009; Hill, 2005; Hill, et al., 2006; Hochschild, 1997). Translating the results in this manner is potentially problematic when trying to isolate the women’s insights on the topic. “If one ignores “differences” one distorts reality. If one ignores the power relations built on differences one reinforces them in the interest of those holding power” (Lerner, 1997, p. 133). By isolating the voices of professional working mothers, their voices can be heard thereby providing the opportunity to draw out new understandings about their lived experiences (Greene, 1988).

### **Future Implications**

With each day the tension between work and family rises, affecting the health and well-being of employees and their families. The benefit of increased tension is an equal amount of focus on the issue. Through a conscious effort to disassemble accepted workplace patterns, there is an opportunity to question and unmask the very nature of how Americans have

institutionalized work and family. As Berger (1963) so aptly pointed out, each social situation is sustained by the fabric of meanings that are brought into it by the several participants. It is clear, of course that in a situation whose meaning is strongly established by tradition and common consent a single individual cannot accomplish very much by proffering a deviant definition. At the very least, however he can bring about his alienation from the situation (p. 126).

Although one cannot predict what is to come out of this research, we are emboldened to deepen our conversation of the issue and actively consider our role in constructing reality for ourselves and future generations.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

The introductory chapter set the dissertation context for American professional working mothers and their challenges balancing work and family. From this launching point, Chapter Two explores pertinent literature surrounding professional working mothers and the American workplace as well as societal trends in work-life balance and work-family conflict. The convergence in the research overwhelmingly demonstrates how professional working mothers are challenged to accept the inherent conflicts between work and family. Left unresolved, a rippling effect through society ensues and jeopardizes the well-being of individuals, families, and organizations. Although awareness of these issues began over twenty years ago, very few organizations are moving work-life balance initiatives from policy to a whole new level of cultural and structural change.

In Chapter Three, the methodology in terms of data gathering and analysis is outlined. In Chapter Four, data findings and analysis include individual and group composites of textural and structural descriptions as well as an overall synthesis of the findings. Additionally, Chapter Four includes a comparison between the findings and the literature review. Chapter 5 further distills the findings into significant themes and establishes connections to theory. Lastly, Chapter 6

summarizes the research, conclusions, phenomenological limitations, and future study considerations.

In summary, learning how professional working mothers define, explore, and reconcile work-life balance issues provides a unique portrayal of contemporary, American society. The significance of this study forms around the professional working mothers' concepts and experiences with work-life balance. Specifically, we witness how everyday norms potentially override one's personal values and undermine their job satisfaction. In turn, we are able to analyze the intersection between work and family through the identification of factors that reinforce and detract from a professional working mother's conception of her 'ideal work-life balance' versus her actual lived experience. Most significantly, several women express a connection between work-life balance and spiritual development leading to new vision of organizations based on love and joyful living.



## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Reviewing the literature on work-family conflict and work-life balance from the perspectives of professional working mothers proved to be challenging. First, research on the general topic of conflict between work and family began quite organically in the 1970s, evolving within multiple fields of study (Korabik, Lero, & Whitehead, 2008). Further, in America, research related to this topic has only indirectly addressed the workforce demographic changes in the last forty years (Winslow, 2005). Therefore, many of the studies covered in the following literature review include the perspectives of men and women from all job classifications. Nonetheless, the literature review provides a strong understanding of our starting point in terms of previous research on the topic and corresponding gaps that can be filled by future exploration. The following literature review covers the general topic of work and family which includes a brief historical look at the American workforce, professional working mothers, and the theoretical frameworks used to analyze research findings.

Current studies focused on work and family indicate American working professionals are often challenged to accept the inherent conflicts between work and family because it is common cultural expectation to do so (Blair-Loy, 2003; Joplin, Shaffer, Francisco, & Lau, 2003); or, that “doors will close” if they don’t fill cultural work expectations (Mason & Eckman, 2007); and, that the long-term benefits outweigh the demands of a professional position (Bennetts, 2007). However, some studies show that the societal implications have grown significantly in the last decade as more professional working mothers are struggling to carve out a sense of well-being for themselves and their families (Cooper, Fried, Shirom & Sparks, 1997; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Shepherd, 2006). As one woman proclaimed, “Perhaps time has been compressed as far as it will go...kids take time, and work takes time. The conflicts didn’t go

away” (Porter, 2006, p. 2). Although popular magazines, academic studies, and best sellers have demonstrated how society continually questions whether an individual has done enough to integrate their work and family lives, only a handful of American authors question the organization’s roles and responsibilities (Bennetts, 2007; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Stone, 2007). With women positioned to dominate the workforce coupled with the fact that “modern life in a global economy is simply more stressful for everyone but especially for women, who are working longer hours while playing quarterback at home,” the time is ripe to take an assessment from their perspective (Gibbs, 2009, p. 29).

Reflecting on the current state of work-life balance of professional working mothers yields a unique set of workplace perspectives (Statham, et al., 1998) that have been largely untapped. As part of the study, we learn if their lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990) reveal a set of “cultural separatism” (Lerner, 1997) experiences that equate to a sense of “otherness” and relationships that naturally formed to cope with workplace demands. Ultimately, the degree to which individual experiences reflect the collective understanding remains an unknown until gathered.

### **Historical Perspective of the American Workforce**

Historically, jobs have been structured without regard to family (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Williams, 2000). The type of work available shaped and reinforced this social expectation. For example, in the early twentieth century, America was primarily strength-based (i.e., farming and manufacturing jobs). However, as society witnessed the shift in our economy from agriculture and manufacturing to a services market, the nature of work changed dramatically (Hudson Institute, 1999). No longer physically limited by the types of jobs available, women sought higher levels of education and entered the workforce in record numbers (Hudson Institute, 1999; Lerner, 1997; Stone, 2007). With fewer families having the traditional work-family structure,

where the father works and mother stays at home, new challenges in balancing work and family have naturally developed. For the purposes of this study, the focus is mainly on the experiences of professional working mothers.

Looking at this issue from an individual perspective, professional working mothers found that they must fit an organizational mold where jobs and career advancement were constructed for men who were single or had someone to care for the family at home (Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Williams, 2000). For most at this executive level, the long work hours and travel are accepted as part of the package and come with the territory of having a salaried position. The working professional's lifestyle stems from a work environment that fosters a cultural expectation "in which workers succeed by arriving at the office before their boss, staying late, working weekends and staying in touch constantly" (Wolk, 2004, p. 1). Essentially, companies have cultivated a concept of an 'ideal worker' as someone who prioritizes work above all else (Gambles, Lewis & Rapaport, 2006; Stone, 2007).

Consequently, professionals with families often find themselves seeking a fictitious work-life balance. This is especially true for women professionals. In April, 2009 the Gallup Organization released a study entitled, *EU Work-Life Balance Tilts Against Women, Single Parents* wherein fifty-one percent of women found it "fairly difficult to very difficult" to combine work and family life. Regrettably, the Gallup Poll didn't conduct the same survey in the US – where employees work on average seven more hours per week and take less than two week's vacation per year (Chapman & De Keulenaer, 2009). Gibbs (2009) in a Time Magazine special report women corroborates this point.

If there is anything like consensus on an issue as basic as how we live our lives as men and women, as lovers, parents, partners, it's that getting the pieces of modern life to fit together is hard enough; something has to bend. As a point of comparison, equal numbers of men and women have reported frequent stress in daily life, and most agree

that government and businesses have failed to adjust to the changes in the family (Gibbs, 2009, p. 4).

Failure of government and business to step up is due in large part to the American culture that expects the employee to deal with these issues privately (Blair-Loy, 2003). When undermined by an organization's policies, practices or culture, an employer's ability to achieve a healthy, creative, and productive workforce is limited. By consistently making work a priority over family (or personal lives), America has witnessed higher instances of health issues related to stress, stroke, alcoholism, and abandonment of children (Wolk, 2004). Taking the long-view, companies not addressing these issues continue to experience increased workforce costs due to the after-effects of work-life imbalance (i.e., absenteeism, higher health care rates, regular turnover, etc.). Headlines like, *Work-related stress can kill, study finds* remain in our mainstream media (ABC News, 2008). America seems to be at a juncture in society where the 'one-size fits all' approach to work and family does not fit modern life.

### **Focusing on the Experiences of Professional Working Mothers**

When researching work and family from the professional working mother's perspective, there is an opportunity to consciously bring their experiences to light and the potential to apply that knowledge to address work-family conflict issues (Belenky, et al., 1997; Bloom, 1998; Gray, 1983). Often these women have navigated and excelled within traditional hierarchies of their organizations. These particular women are well-educated, hard-working, and leaders within their organizations.

In America, this group is salaried with unique issues related to work-family conflict (WFC), often facing a dilemma at some point in having to weigh 60-hour workweeks against promotional opportunities and family (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hochschild, 2003a; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Morales, 2009; Porter, 2006). In the very popular and well-respected Harvard Business

Review magazine, experts in the human resource field prescribed one of the following measures to remedy the conflict: (1) the executive must come up with a plan, (2) the executive must build more layers of support in her life, (3) the executive must develop a business case for a flexible schedule, and (4) the executive should better manage her child's expectations (Esarey & Haslberger, 2007). This portrays a larger societal expectation that the employee must resolve the conflict.

As a result, professional working mothers find themselves captive to two primary schemas – one is to work and the other is to family (Blair-Loy, 2003). At odds are the employer versus the family; the career versus the home; the kids versus the job, etc. With this “either or” type of scenario, there is little room for reconciliation of these two schemas which means one wins out. When professional working mothers continue to work through this conflict, many have their views shaped by their work culture. The result is an engrained understanding that leaves “employees unable to fulfill what they believe is the right thing to do for their families due to constraints imposed by employers” (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 178).

The power of organizational culture is evidenced further by the compelling phenomena that “the more attached we are to the world of work, the more its deadlines, its cycles, its pauses and interruptions shape our lives and the more family time is forced to accommodate to the pressures of work” (Hochschild, 1997, p. 45). When work replaces home life, families become more ‘taylorized’ as parents shuffle kids to before and after work care, return to school, and put off family traditions in exchange for work. Consequently, although these new routines skew toward work, they become a standard way of living and being out-of-balance feels normal. Many Americans are also more “resigned to and accepting of the inherent conflicts between work and family” (Joplin, et al., 2003).

The door now opens to understanding how an organization's social construction of the 'ideal employee' influences family dynamics and engenders work life balance complications as shown in the following example.

To maintain her managerial image, she arrived half an hour earlier than her staff in the morning and stayed half an hour later at night. When staff members stayed late, she bit her tongue and left first. Under the watchful eyes of conscientious coworkers and subordinates, her work hours steadily increased. As Nina recalled: I came back to work three days a week, then four days a week. But the job grew too rapidly. I was running – Go, go, go! I'd drop into bed at night and realize I'd been working for seventeen or eighteen hours a day....

All the top brass of Nina's computer company were workaholics, actually or virtually single. At first she tried to pretend to be as involved as they were. But one day, just as Nina was beginning to feel she couldn't pretend anymore, her boss burst into her office smiling broadly. "Congratulations! You've just been promoted!" Well-wishers crowded into her office to celebrate, and Nina felt pleased and flattered. But as she drove home that night, what would prove a lengthy depression was already taking hold. (Hochschild, 2003b, p. 85).

This scenario demonstrates how culture evolves into a practice whereby the "top brass" feel compelled to work extensive hours. Consequently, the culture and people within the organization, reinforce perceptions of what is a valued employee to the point where the individual pretends that living up to these expectations is not personally detrimental.

### **Professional Working Mothers Opting Out of the Corporate Workforce**

Literature shows that women have framed their choices and then exercised rather limited "either or" options when it comes to career and family (Stone, 2007; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). These options include withdrawal from the workforce, stepping back from having families, and/or downsizing their career goals. Because high-achieving women adapt to their work environment in the form of limited choices, the trade-offs rarely are equal. Therefore, the level of emotional dissonance of falling short of the corporate, executive ideal is felt deeply by individuals (Blair-Loy, 2003; Morris, 1997).

The construct supporting this common experience is that jobs and careers are patterned after the stereotypical male experience (Wharton, 2005). “Women in management are still expected to dress, think, and act like the men currently in leadership positions and to meet male norms of effectiveness... Thus women feel pressured to sacrifice authenticity and wholeness for success” (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002, pp. 189-190). Although this is an example of a cultural issue and the impact of job structures is acknowledged, the literature lacks any genuine challenge of this norm. Nor does the literature call for significant changes to the work environment.

In consequence to the lack of change on the part of the employer, many professional working mothers quit full-time employment (Bennetts, 2007; Blair-Loy, 2003; Stone, 2007; Williams, 2000). One researcher discovered that women electing this option climbed up the ladder of organizations and found themselves “stuck in an anachronistic time warp that ignores the reality of the lives... The exit of highly talented women are the miners’ canary – a frontline indication that something is seriously amiss in too many workplaces” (Stone, 2007, p. 19).

Logically, a major after-effect of highly-talented individuals “choosing” to leave an organization is a drain of institutional knowledge and negative impact to the bottom-line. In response, some organizations are making strides towards more flexible work environments with “on-ramp and off-ramp” career options or “more family supportive workplace policies” (Stone, 2007, p. 234). However, these efforts do not seriously address the issues of long workdays (Morales, 2009), limited vacations (Ray & Schmitt, 2007), or the direct and indirect penalties for choosing an alternative work arrangement in attempt to maintain a balanced life (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). In regard to the latter, many women professionals that choose to remain in the workforce are hindered by perceptions when accessing employer benefits. “One assistant professor mother said, “when it comes time for tenure they will just count my publications and

divide by the years – they won't care about the year when they are supposed to stop the clock... I just can't take that chance..." (Mason & Eckman, 2007, p. 63).

For those who continue full-time employment, workplace burnout is recognized as a major factor found in the opt-out phenomena (Mason & Eckman, 2007; Stone, 2007).

Professional working mothers often traverse the difficult terrain of managing a career while raising a family. Usually, these women pace their lives differently – and, not always to their personal needs (Hochschild, 2003b; Mason & Eckman, 2007) or their financial advantage (Bennetts, 2007). Even when electing 'schedule flexibility' to better the demands of work and family, employees may tend to also take on more work responsibilities, negating any personal benefit (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Kacmar, 2010). Consequently, a breakdown occurs in one or both spheres of life:

a focus on purely individual solutions not only siphons needed energy from the job of creating collective responses; it also runs the risk of heightening the difficulties people face by encouraging them to feel responsible for problems over which they actually have limited personal control (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004, p. 150).

While not addressing these issues collectively, statistics show that, "[executive] mothers experience burnout at a higher rate than other employees and they are more likely to leave the game earlier than men" (Mason & Eckman, 2007, p. 101). To understand the broader context in which people work, the scales must be set so that on one hand, women speak up within their organizations to "address [their] problems by letting them know, in no uncertain terms, what [their] needs are" (Bennetts, 2007, p. 301); and, organizations must take this information and reframe the issues of work-family conflict at a cultural level to successfully create work-life balance opportunities (Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Former Ford Foundation president Susan Berresford once said:



Your work and your other life are intertwined. There is no way you can separate them the way we pretend you can, so we have to start thinking about how you're going to be able to do both more easily and joyfully. That's going to require some reinvention (as cited in Hartford, 1993, p. 62).

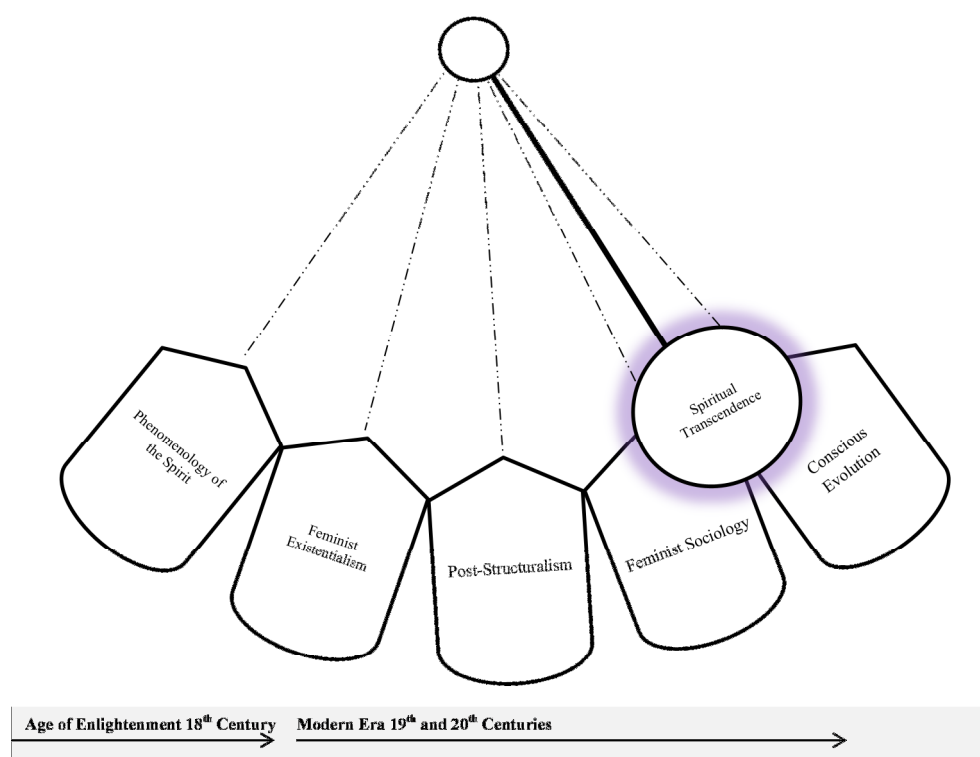
Some organizations are taking the plunge into adapting to the growing needs of all workers. For example, the "Sun Microsystems' iWork program offers employees across the globe a variety of choices for getting work done – in the office, at home, or at drop-in centers...The program enables them to be better able to accommodate their work/life needs and personal work styles" (Gandossy, et al., 2006, p. 83). In another example, when Deloitte & Touché found that women leaders "who left Deloitte were not seeking jobs elsewhere, but instead leaving the workforce," they responded by developing an initiative to promote work-life balance that almost eliminated the gap in turnover between women and men (Stone, 2007, p. 233). However, organizations adapting to the needs of professional working mothers through cultural change fall into small minority of total employers. Overall, modern research agrees that "improving our understanding of WFC and its consequences has the potential to benefit both organizations and employees" (Carr, Boyar, & Gregory, 2008, p. 257).

### **Historical Context of Theoretical Frameworks**

In a historical context, phenomenology consistently exposes the dialectic patterns between social structures and personal freedom. The works of Hegel (1807/1954) and de Beauvoir (1949/2009) set the frame of phenomenology in their exploration of the human experience. Each complements the other as an unfolding of discursive philosophy slowly moves to include female perspectives (Scott, 1988). Theories continuing to build on this foundation include post-structuralism, feminist sociology, and conscious evolution theories. Through language and form, theorists selected for analysis deepen the inquiry as to how work and gender

have become significant determinants in illustrating the conscious and unconscious shifts in society.

Inspired by Gadamer's (1977) concept of "horizontal structure," I developed Figure 1: Integrated Historical Context of Theoretical Frameworks to illustrate how the phenomenal nature of consciousness constructs personal identity and social interactions over time. Additionally, the diagram depicts how phenomenology intersects with the evolving dynamics of social power to form the stepping stones for spiritual transcendence across the theoretical frames.



*Figure 1: Integrated Historical Context of Theoretical Frameworks*

### **Phenomenology of the Spirit**

To demonstrate the philosophical heritage, sources of theoretical knowledge begin with the translated work of Hegel (1807/1954). Drawing on the works of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, Hegel (1807/1954) explored what it means to be a divine being having a human

experience while encouraging one to “make an earnest effort to understand the concrete as a means and ways of providence which are spread out openly before us as the phenomena of history” (p. 9). From this standpoint, an individual does not require an intermediary of any kind to interpret an experience because she actively seeks her own truth. Through this process of becoming, the external voices and rules fade; instead, we claim full ownership of our relationships with history, belief systems, values and attitudes to freely shape the interpretation of our worldly experiences. Hegel (1807/1954) labeled this internal conception as a “consciousness of freedom” which *is* to be attained as part of our life’s true purpose.

Embracing this philosophic ideal strengthens the basic understanding that our actions and underlying motivations must be interpreted as our definition of freedom. Hence, we attract the people and situations that support our definition of freedom --- manifesting our life experience in myriad of ways and means. Expressions of freedom are also reflections of our values and principles in action (Hegel 1807/1954). The strength of our will to act out our principles and purpose creates the level of activity needed to bring them into reality; many would call this free will. The decision to exercise or suppress our will depends on our social conditioning. At a deeper level, does our will serve our own ends or have we accepted becoming a means to another’s end?

People answer this question through their everyday choices; ultimately, everyone’s actions inspire society to either stay the same or adapt to the prevailing attitudes of the people in the form of a “shared consciousness” (Diesing, 1999). However, the most critical measure of free will is the level of estrangement it creates between our external reality and internal spirit. Hegel (1807/1954) spoke of “the world of spirit estranged from itself” (p. 433). Without time for regeneration and assessment, reconciliation of our internal and external worlds is postponed. In

other words, we live conceptually through societal ideals and values – wealth becomes an entity through the power and will of the people buying into its creation and maintenance.

For Hegel (1807/1954), seeking resolution to estrangement had the potential to lead an individual towards personal enlightenment. Once on this path, a person conceivably brings more of her true self into reality. Accordingly, one's true nature is anchored in the present and not pre-occupied with the past or future. Within this concept and overall work, Hegel (1807/1954) planted the seeds of existentialism.

### **Feminist Existentialism**

de Beauvoir (1949/2009) continued to build upon existentialist theory from a woman's perspective. Challenging male bias in theory and practice de Beauvoir (1949/2009) coined the term "*other*" to describe women's role in society. In doing so, she revealed the paternalistic hierarchies as artificially built and sustained by society. Partisan in nature, the consignment of women in the category of '*other*' creates opposition within society at individual, familial, and organizational levels. Therefore, the lived experience as '*other*' is uniquely situated and can only be explained by women.

I think certain women are still best suited to elucidate the situation of women...it is their situation that disposes them to seek the truth to a greater or lesser extent...we know the feminine world more intimately than men do because our roots are in it; we grasp more immediately what the fact of being female means for a human being, and we care more about knowing it. I said that there are more essential problems; but this one still has a certain importance from our point of view: How will the fact of being women have affected our lives? What precise opportunities have been given us, and which ones have been denied? What destiny awaits our younger sisters, and in which direction should we point them (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009 p. 15)?

As a point of departure from male philosophers, de Beauvoir (1949/2009) looked beyond the physical categorization of female. Instead, she affirms that "Nature does not define woman: it is she who defines herself by reclaiming nature for herself in her affectivity" (de Beauvoir,

1949/2009, p. 49). The redefinition of woman conceptually relinquishes the old world values and terms established by and for men. However, the complexity of ‘other’ requires deeper inquiry into how women search within themselves and define the values that ring true within a social structure of dominance and often opposing values.

For us woman is defined as a human being in search of values within a world of values, a world where it is indispensable to understand the economic and social structure; we will study her from an existential point of view, taking into account her total situation (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009, p. 61).

Properly situating women in a social context demands recognition of the socio-economic, biological, and psychological biases which exist. Without this juxtaposition and elucidation, women continue to sacrifice their authenticity and wholeness – “her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness” (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009, p. 17). This statement highlights how world views and individual sovereignty from just one perspective (male or female) creates imbalance and a ‘mediated experience’ of living (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009).

Through this mediation, men and women lose sight of their true identity; and, fear creeps in creating polarity. The times call compellingly for women to seek and stand in their own truth without the male filters that see her as ‘*other*.’ Since the publication of *The Second Sex* by de Beauvoir (1949/2009), it seems that women continue to try and assert a “status of autonomous individual and their feminine destiny” however, if men do not step up to “assume, without reserve, the situation being created” both sexes do not live freely (p. 274).

Husserl (1935/1965) showed how transcendental phenomenology aligns and extends the work of Hegel (1807/1954) and de Beauvoir (1949/2009) to investigate this dynamic. In *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, Husserl (1935/1965) examined how phenomenology separates itself from the science of psychology.

What phenomenology does is to analyze consciousness, where alone objectivity is absolute. Phenomenology, then, is a study of consciousness, but it is not a psychology, a notion impossible to grasp until one sees consciousness as not a physical something...

In other words, in describing experience we are forced to employ a set of concepts that are derived not from experience but from an essential analysis of the acts of consciousness. It is true, of course, that we must have experiences in order to have concepts, but the concepts are not justified by experience; their validity transcends experience (pp. 10-11).

Husserl (1935/1965) distinguished phenomenology as a qualitative and valid process to study lived experiences. Experiential analysis invites an interior journey of consciousness to which there is no right or wrong answer. To perceive, without judgment, requires recognition that consciousness concerns itself with the 'ideal being' rather than our 'existential being'; in this sense, we are asked to look past the experience to its essence to find 'objective validity' (Husserl, 1935/1965). Through this method of systematic inquiry, knowledge can be derived. Over time, it is possible to "look at the life of the spirit from a historical point of view and legitimately recognize in it a "structure of becoming" (Husserl, 1935/1965, p. 13).

Within this evolutionary state, philosophy and historical facts play key roles in spiritual development as Husserl (1935/1965) explained:

Philosophy serves to develop the person (or the community); its concern is not objective truth. Ultimately it is practically synonymous with "culture," whose goal is to give within the limits of a particular time and place as good an answer as possible to the problems of life. It is, then, a sort of "wisdom" or "science of living," and it calls itself a "philosophy" of the loftiest human values" (p. 14).

From this position, the value of a phenomenological study is in its ability to spark internal awareness of one's situation (Rohmann, 1999). Without any rules of engagement, our minds open to new ways of thinking and perceiving the world. Consequently, we speak our truth from the essence of "what is" (Husserl, 1935/1965).

## Post-structuralism

Building on the tradition of phenomenology, post-structuralism deconstructs experience through the social constructs of truth as evidenced in language, knowledge, and power. Through the cultural critiques of Foucault (1972-1977/1980), Derrida, (1967-1968/1973), and Deleuze (1968/1994), the concept of ‘otherness’ is placed in the context of social production and self-maintenance. Like a catch-all category, the convenience of ‘other’ as a category to which more groups are assigned benefits only a small minority of society. The growing number of categorizations magnifies the divisions within society and the duality within each one of us.

Foucault (1972-1977/1980) pinpointed the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as pivotal in the process of creating power at the expense of personal sovereignty.

the moment where it became understood that it was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place people under surveillance more than to subject them to some exemplary penalty. This moment in time corresponds to the formation, gradual in some respects and rapid in others, of a new mode of exercise of power in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. The eighteenth century invented, so to speak, a synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise *within* the social body, rather than *from above* it....The mythology of the sovereign was no longer possible once a certain kind of power was being exercised within the social body. The sovereign then became a fantastic personage, at once archaic and monstrous (pp. 38-39).

This passage encapsulates the very fiber of how power shifts from the internal self to the external master. Foucault (1972-1977/1980) also recognized that in yielding our rights to self-determination hundreds of years ago, the idea of reclaiming them has become frightening -- the nightmare of external punishment or being categorized as ‘other’ is augmented by our internalized fear of our selves. The import of this observation is incalculable as one considers that over the course of time and generations the internalization process of self-surveillance has

become naturalized and normal (Fillingham, 1993, Foucault, 1972-1977/1980). Mending this separation within self then requires acknowledgement of where we stand divided within our self, distanced from our true nature.

Foucault (1972-1977/1980) posited that an inextricable link between knowledge and power exists that can close this distance. Specifically, he stated, “It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Foucault 1972-1977/1980, p. 52). Although Foucault (1972-1977/1980) applied this concept to research, there is a resonance with consciously breaking down the assimilation process fostered by society. From the rubble arises an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges.”

By subjugated knowledges I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization...because only the historical contents allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematizing theory and which criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship - has been able to reveal.

On the other hand, I believe that by subjugated knowledges one should understand something else, something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. I also believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low ranking knowledges...that criticism performs its work (Foucault 1972-1977/1980, pp. 81-82).

Critiques of situated knowledges therefore must also include that which has been subjugated (Collins, 1990; Weeden, 1996). The study of discourse on work then must include how language, knowledge and power define and confine our world to prescribed roles and rules, creating a cultural imposition of acceptable behaviors.

Where Foucault (Fillingham, 1993) related these phenomena to the science of discipline and the power of normalization with detailed research within institutions, Derrida (1967-1968/1973) honed in on the phenomenological reduction in the more abstract form of dissecting



action and language. The work of these philosophers merge at the point of intention to using ‘self-reflexivity’ to understand the power and ethics within the social phenomena of resistance (Boyne, 2001).

Turning the focus on Derrida (1967-1968/1973) we are called to suspend the preconceptions of our world to create an objective view – or, rather ‘a scene, a theatre stage’ (p. 86). From this analogy, ‘our seat in the house’ is subject to the cultural reference points that we have collected and sustained. According to Derrida (1967-1968/1973), ‘self-presence’ or being present to one’s infinite self enabled a person to conceive what transpires behind the scenes in everyday life.

In this sense, within the metaphysics of presence, within philosophy as knowledge of the presence of the object, as the being-before-oneself of knowledge in consciousness, we believe, quite simply and literally, in absolute knowledge as the *closure* if not the end of history. And we believe *that such a closure has taken place*. The history of being as presence, as self-presence in absolute knowledge, as consciousness of self in the infinity of *parousia* – this history is closed. The history of presence is closed, for “history” has never meant anything but the presentation of being (*Gegenwartigung*) of Being, the production and recollection of beings in presence, as knowledge and mastery. Since absolute self-presences in con-sciousness is the infinite vocation of full presence, the achievement of absolute knowledge is the end of the infinite vocation of full presence, the achievement of absolute knowledge is the end of the infinite, which could only be the unity of the concept, logos, and consciousness in a voice without *difference*. *The history of metaphysics therefore can be expressed as the unfolding of the structure or schema of an absolute will-to-hear-oneself-speak* (p. 102).

The importance of this statement is in the contemplation of events by inwardly slowing to comprehend what is transpiring in our lives within the ‘living present’ (Derrida 1967-1968/1973). Through the use of signs and language we can dissect and recognize that which serves to improve or detract from our experience of life (Derrida, 1967-1968/1973). By allowing ourselves to hear our own thoughts, the opportunity to accept events and the lessons they bring enables closure and future growth.

So, the choice to look at our life from the front or the back seat of the theatre (or not at all) rests with personal identity and the amount of social mediation which exists. Also interested in the living present, Deleuze (1968/1994) theorized in *Difference and Repetition* that our habits play a key role in whether we even contemplate such an exercise.

The whole domain of behavior, the intertwining of artificial and natural signs, the intervention of instinct and learning, memory and intelligence, shows how the questions involved in contemplation are developed in the form of active problematic fields. To the first synthesis of time there corresponds a first question-problem complex as this appears in the living present (the urgency of life). This living present, and with it the world of organic and psychic life, rests upon habit...

These thousands of habits of which we are composed – these contractions, contemplations, pretensions, presumptions, satisfactions, fatigues; these variable presents – thus form the basic domain of passive syntheses (p. 78).

With this observation, Deleuze (1968/1994) portrayed how an individual creates daily routines that form and define her life. Within these daily routines, there may exist some level of contraction and fatigue which inspires contemplation. In other words, the motivation to address that which causes distress in our life or bury our heads in the sand depends on many internal and external variables. However, there is a point in time where the sand becomes suffocating as unresolved conflicts repeat until addressed. Deleuze (1968/1994) referred to this moment as the ‘definition of fatigue.’

Fatigue marks the point at which the soul can no longer contract what it contemplates, the moment at which contemplation and contraction come apart.

We are made up of fatigues as much as contemplations. That is why a phenomenon such as need can be understood in terms of ‘lack’, from the point of view of action and the active syntheses which it determines, but as an extreme ‘satiety’ or ‘fatigue’ from the point of view of the passive synthesis by which it is conditioned (p. 77).

Fatigue may inspire a person towards recognition of a situation; however, sometimes “Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of

a fundamental *encounter*.” The encounter acts a sign which initiates a domino effect and “moves the soul” towards making sense of a situation (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 139-140).

Engaging in the recognition of signs empowers dialectic learning. The signs as symptoms of the underlying problem along with their corresponding solutions come into view more clearly. More precisely, Deleuze (1968/1994) explained, “A problem does not exist apart from its solutions. Far from disappearing in this overlay, however, it insists and persists in these solutions” (p. 164). Within the dynamic of dialectal learning observation of the problem and solutions allows one to transcend every day events, to encounter new ways of knowing, and to choose the most optimal solution.

### **Feminist Sociology**

Within the modern era and alongside the development of post-structuralism, sociologists such as Smith (1987) and Wharton (2005) questioned, considered, and opened new forms of thought around the sociology of women and gender. The movement towards inclusiveness broadened discourse to include the inter-relationships of gender, sexual orientation, race ethnicity, and class. In this way, dominant social patterns are challenged consciously to close historical gaps in knowledge (Bryson, 1999; Collins, 1990; Lather, 1991; Scott, 1988). The sociology of women brings into focus implications of gender within everyday life.

Smith (1987) defined sociology as “a systematically developed consciousness of society and social relations” (p. 2). Pricking the social memory of what it means to be female within American society, feminist scholars continue the work of de Beauvoir (1949/2009) who saw the world run to serve man. In the theory of Relations of Ruling, Smith (1987) emphasized a world that is “manufactured” to influence our thoughts and how we perceive ourselves as members of society.

The ideological apparatuses are part of the larger relations of ruling in the society, the relations that put it together, coordinate its work, manage its economic processes, generally keep it running, and regulate and control it. The making and dissemination of the forms of thought we make use of to think about ourselves and our society are part of the relations of ruling and hence originate in positions of power. These positions of power are occupied by men almost exclusively, which means that our forms of thought put together a view of the world from a place women do not occupy (Smith, 1987, p. 19).

Still true today, male dominance in all material, global spheres of influence continue to remain intact. Women and men silently navigating through the subtext of male privilege read in between the lines to prosper without reprisal. For some, a sense of bifurcation at the level of consciousness arises.

This mode of action creates a bifurcation of consciousness, a bifurcation, of course, that is present for all those participating in this mode of action. It establishes two modes of knowing, experienced, and acting – one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and moves into, the other passing beyond it (Smith, 1987, p. 82).

Living in a world of norms and standards within this state of bifurcation neutralizes change efforts, “forming “our” culture are those of men in positions of dominance whose perspectives are built on the silence of women (and of others)” (Smith, 1987, p. 19). Unless individuals are pushed past their comfort zones or pain tolerances (mental, emotional, or physical) momentum for change cannot build. Rather than change the system, individuals work within it; although this implies a level of complicit agreement, it is more likely that survival instincts make silent capitulation a societal expectation. The disquieted undercurrents become more palpable and ignored at the same time.

In sociological critique, the practice of inquiry defines alternatives to which society can contemplate (Smith, 1987). Standpoint theory uniquely situates groups and individuals to avoid diluting or generalizing their lived experiences – especially against existing preconditions, presuppositions or bias. Moreover, standpoint analysis strives to render an understanding of

reality that includes culture, sub cultures, normative actions, social relations, motives, etc., (Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 1987; Williams, 2000).

The development of feminist method in sociology has to go beyond our interviewing practices and our research relationships to explore methods of thinking that will organize our inquiry and write our sociological texts so as to preserve the presence of actual subjects while exploring and explicating the relations in which our everyday worlds are embedded (Smith, 1987, p. 111).

Proceeding in this manner, sociologists “rethink the epistemology of sociology” to discover new worlds of experience and knowledge (Jaggar, 1983; Naples, 2003; Smith, 1987). To some degree this may have contributed to Wharton’s (2005) observation that in recent years sociology of women broadened to encompass gender. A more inclusive characterization, gender contains multiple layers of meaning; from the physical state of being to the social markers of race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class. Status characteristics theory is a technique that measures the demarcation of gendered interactions within organizations and institutions.

Gender in American society – and in most contemporary societies – is clearly a status characteristic. Men are generally regarded more positively than women. Once a characteristic like sex category has status value, it begins to shape expectations and form the basis for stereotypes.

Status characteristics theory was developed to explain goal-oriented interaction, such as occurs in workplaces, classrooms, or in any group oriented toward a collective end. In these kinds of settings the important expectations are those relating to performance. That is group members assess how competent each is and how much value to attach to each other’s contributions...These performance expectations tend to disadvantage those with lower status value (in the case of gender, women). Women are expected to be less competent than men and their contributions are expected to be less valuable (Wharton, 2005, p. 57).

Gendered trends are made visible through unwritten rules, standard operating procedures, boundaries, communication patterns, and belief systems (Wharton, 2005). In this way, work and family mirror each other in terms of gender expectations. With the onset of the industrial age, the division of labor took a more decisive turn and redefining male versus female roles in the

workplace. Work became a man's 'arena of competition' while the home was 'ascribed' to women (Wharton, 2005).

Despite the significant influx of women into the American workforce, the workplace as a whole has changed very little. This is due in large part to the nature of institutionalization and the difficulty in revolutionizing entrenched culture and values.

This long-term stability provides dominant groups with a strong vested interest in maintaining unequal arrangements. In addition, it has the effect of "stacking the deck" in such a way that subordinate groups feel reactively powerless to challenge their position. The dominant group's vested interest in perpetuating inequality, together with the subordinate group's lack of alternatives, shape the ways both groups make sense of their relationship (Wharton, 2005, p. 221).

Narrow perspectives shaping American society have begun to fray – especially with the current socio-economic conditions, redefinition of wealth, politics, and organizations. A broader outlook for the future requires a lot of creativity and the courageous pursuit of equality within all levels of society.

### **Conscious Evolution**

Throughout history, reaching higher levels of consciousness has been seen as the root of change and evolution. As the world grows more complex, lifestyles have become more externalized -- we have reached out to the stars, but we have yet to discover the full potential of the human spirit. The call for conscious evolution endures through the contemporary futurists and spiritualists. Hubbard (1998), Lombardo (2006) and Milanovich and McCune (1998) offered insights into the transformative process.

Similar to Derrida (1967-1968/1973), we are invited to "look at our past as a movie of creation...[to see] an evolutionary spiral unfolding" (Hubbard, 1998, p. 25). The evolutionary spiral is moving towards increasing levels of consciousness and cocreation as part of a new,

universal humanity. To welcome this new age, people will know themselves as active, co-creators aligned with their own higher consciousness.

As we gain deeper alignment with the patterns of creation, we sadly see a world that is out of alignment....Through conscious evolution we realize for the first time as a species, that it is our responsibility to proactively design social systems that are in alignment with the tendency in nature toward higher consciousnesses, greater freedom, and more synergistic order. With our increase in freedom because of our new powers comes a commensurate increase in responsibility for the use of those powers. We no longer accept our society and its ills as a given; we become proactive, social cocreators and the social potential movement awakens (Hubbard, 1998, p. 71).

Making the shift in consciousness is a choice to transcend individual ego and integrate our spiritual aspect to become “spirit-in-action” (Lombardo, 2006). Integrative theories look at life as becoming even more interconnected at all levels of existence which inspire and more meaningful endeavors unfold. For example, through spiral theory we see a more global view of society and our advances “characterized by a dominant “vMeme” ( a core value system) – a broad, deep, and encompassing pattern of thinking and values that structures and directs human behavior and the human mind at that level of existence” (Lombardo, 2006, p. 374). Along the spiral are stages of evolution, commencing with clans and tribes moving upwards toward authoritative, patriarchal, and individualistic groups that give way to egalitarian, ecological, and spiritualism. A person’s consciousness level drives their experiences of the world. Seen from an evolutionary perspective every person’s lived experience is unique, meaning individuals can progress or regress along the spectrum throughout their lifetime.

Milanovich and McCune (1998) enlightened the theories applied to the study through the application of Universal Laws which “teaches of the interconnectedness between humanity and the universe – the concept of Oneness” (p. xix). As spoken of by other theorists, the ongoing pull towards higher levels of consciousness is a natural progression of spirit – a natural progression towards seeing ourselves “greater than what we believe ourselves to be” (Milanovich

& McCune, 1998, p. 8). When many individuals shift their consciousness upward, they contribute to humanity's evolutionary leap forward.

Our task is to demonstrate the superiority of present-moment, life-centered awareness over awareness clouded by fear. We work to shift human interest gradually away from defensive, survival-oriented life-styles and toward the pursuit of excellence. We are only able to influence people in areas where their hearts are at least somewhat open and where a passionate interest is present.

We are not interested in changing minds. Minds have always followed the passions of the heart. We are interested in opening hearts (as cited in Milanovich & McCune, 1998, p. 127).

The language of change (such as 'a shift in consciousness') infers movement and energetic changes at the mental, emotional and physical levels. Energy as a frequency denotes its resonance with our universal spirit. Who we are at any present moment emits a frequency of vibration.

Perhaps the most difficult form of negativity to overcome is personal or group cynicism. Many individuals who have experienced multiple disappointments or failures begin to believe that nothing will work. The group mind then creates a vibrational frequency that draws to these individuals everything else that resides on that frequency. In order to solve their problems, the individuals must learn to open their minds and hearts and think from a place connected to a higher consciousness, for the solutions will be found only on the higher planes of existence. Through the Law of Vibration this mode of behavior always brings the answers we are seeking, for the higher frequencies contain greater knowledge and wisdom (Milanovich & McCune, 1998, p. 164).

In charge of our perceptions, values and intentions, we apply them to the world around us to create experiences that encourage more of the same or different scenarios (Milanovich & McCune, 1998; Vithoukias, 1980). Our experiences are projections of our spiritual connection to the Divine Creator; therefore, to overcome obstacles in life one must express higher levels of consciousness. Characteristic traits to disempower barriers include: aspirations toward a higher potential, charity, compassion, courage, dedication, faith, forgiveness, generosity, grace, honesty,



hope, joy, kindness, leadership, non-interference, patience, praise, responsibility, self-love, thankfulness, and unconditional love (Milanovich & McCune, 1998).

Nurturing these traits builds abundance into our lives. Exercising our will in this manner eliminates 'poverty consciousness' (Milanovich & McCune, 1998). Frequently the media projects images of scarcity and poverty which disseminates this reality as explained by the interchange between Albert Einstein and a reporter.

Einstein understood the concepts that are being discussed here and tried to tell us in a different way. Once a reporter asked him, "What is the most important question in the world?" He replied, "The most important question in this world is, do you want a peaceful, happy, abundant world in which to live, or do you want a foreboding, fearful, and scarce world?"

The reporter, slightly puzzled, asked, "Why is this the most important question in the world?"

Einstein replied, "Because whatever you choose, you will create" (Milanovich & McCune, 1998, pp. 302-303)

A purposeful life begins with taking responsibility and ownership of our life experiences.

Reaching higher levels of spirituality allows us to become masters of our lives.

Seize the moments of your life, even if your culture and your economies go through difficult times. Find the space within your self to detach and transcend what appears to be happening around you. Then you will, perhaps, have a most interesting experience (Carroll, L., Kryon, & Cori, P., 2009, p. 170).

### **Summary**

Analysis looked for emerging patterns within the literature to discover more about the relationships between self, family, work and society. Professional working mothers advance the intellectual inquiry of work-life balance and work-family conflict as applied to gender, family and social studies. Cultural influences at home and in the workplace blend to create ever-changing dynamics of accommodation. The cultural substructure shaping individual and family adjustments have included professional norms and the construction of jobs demanding 12 to 14

hour days. With very few organizations taking an active role in addressing these core issues, when work overstepped personal values too often professional working mothers chose different work arrangements. Without a collective response to the issues posed by outdated work models, the forecast for the well-being of professional working mothers, families and organizations diminishes.

In developing the theoretical framework, the phenomena of professional working mothers compelled a very broad historical view to capture underlying structural relationships, events, and behaviors. The complexity of this reality composes itself of several dichotomous relationships: social conditioning and consciousness of freedom; male dominance and women's role as the 'other' which form subjugated and situated knowledges; and, passive synthesis and co-creation of life. Using philosophical and social critiques within the theoretical framework presented, theorists communicate a higher purpose and our ability to heal these relationships through an upliftment of consciousness.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Based on the literature review, the analysis which best suited the topic was a combination of poststructuralist, feminist, and conscious evolution theories. Each provided a unique lens to delve into a complex, embedded, and socially constructed phenomenon, such as the basic issue of work-life balance. At a more concrete level, these theoretical platforms typified society's male and female constructs. When combined, these theories provided a powerful reflexive study of self and society that yielded a deeper understanding of the past, present and future professional working mother. Equally important was the recognition that the women's lived experiences ultimately drove which theories complemented data.

Poststructuralist theory unlocked the door to our past by analyzing the human experience in today's organizations which have been built for consistency and maintenance of the status quo as well as existing stereotypes. Scott (1988) explained that as feminists:

...we need a theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations – ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective – accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confining them (Scott, 1988, p. 33).

Post-structuralism became a foundational theory that enabled the exploration of the “criss-crossing threads of discursive practices” (Fraser & Nicholson, 1988, p. 375) and described the relationship between individuals and their organizations (both in language and experience). With post-structuralism came a predominately male view – “this is a consequence of the gender relations which have structured women's absence from the active production of most theory within a whole range of discourses over the last 300 years” (Weeden, 1996). When engaged,

poststructuralist theory utilized language to make meaning of the participants' world views, their roles in relation to work production and family life, and construction of the "collective identity" (Scott, 1988). Together, the concepts and language derived from analysis "set the stage for knowledge" (Lather, 1991). Interview data served to deconstruct, clarify and more deeply understand the current power relations between work-family conflict, work-life balance, and the conception of an "ideal employee" (Williams, 2000).

From the point at which post-structuralism created a broad understanding of work and family experience, feminist standpoint theory rendered a deeper analysis of the professional working mother's experiences. More specifically, feminist critique provided for the "potential disjuncture between experience and the forms in which experience is socially expressed" (Smith, 1987, p. 51). As the topic of work-life conflict and work-life balance have primarily focused on women and related family issues, the application of feminist theories enabled a rich discovery of the underlying patterns that emerged for these modern American professional working mothers.

First, feminist standpoint contrasted against post-structuralism analysis and formed a critical analysis which aided in locating gender asymmetry experienced by a diverse set of professional working mothers in the social construction of the workplace (Smith, 1987; Williams, 2000). This highly reflective approach also created a basis for a collective visualization and interpretation of embedded power relations. Recognized as a form of critical theory, feminist theory also facilitated the discovery of revelations of, and challenges to, existing belief systems (Bryson, 1999). A natural outcome became a set of "situated knowledges" (Naples, 2003) that yielded multiple standpoints based on the women's very personal journeys.

Furthermore, feminist standpoint theory promoted "a new conceptualization" of the interacting forces within their world (Naples, 2003, p. 21). My aim was to move toward a

positive, action-oriented “re-conceptualization of reality” (Jaggar, 1983; Naples, 2003) where women could articulate how best to organize and optimize the modern workplace. In turn, women had the opportunity to be independent change agents rather than from their historical relationship to men. Simply put, not only does women’s history matter (Lerner, 1997), it must be made “visible” to have the potential to shift outdated workplace paradigms (Naples, 2003). Once visible, the second interview engaged study participants in a conversation that expanded and deepened their personal narratives (Mohanty, 2003).

I examined all of the participants lived experiences (in their entirety) looking for trends that reflected the essence of what it means to be a working professional mother. By remaining open to the possibilities for themselves and their children, participants explored new ways of thinking about work and family. From this vantage point, I identified core themes to decipher how participants understood and perceived the nature of their realities, underlying assumptions, and belief systems.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research provided a window into worlds often excluded from the “mainstream” and enabled the identification of complex, social conflicts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 14). Because the study sought to understand the lived experiences of professional working mothers, the inductive nature of qualitative methods drew out personal explorations of modern life. Qualitative methods also encouraged a highly dialectical, conversation format of deeper inquiry at the intersection between individuals and organizations. The following section provides additional insights into the overall approach of the study, data collection and analytic processes, target audience, study limitations, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the study, participant constraints and risks, and generalization.

## **A Phenomenological Approach**

The research construct was based on transcendental phenomenology which “emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and proves a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge” (Husserl, 1935/1965, pp. 5-6). In other words, this methodology elicited participants’ lived experiences about life events and interactions between work and family. Study participants were asked to suspend personal judgments on the topic itself which allowed their stories to unfold. This approach gave the participants permission to be intentionally conscious of their lived experiences. Consciousness became an essential component to understanding the whole experience because it “contains sense-experiences, perception and understanding” (Friedrich, 1807/1954, p. 412). This stream of self-consciousness opened the door to knowing what it is like to be a working professional mother in modern society – “with all of its presuppositions and ways of thinking [that] come out of the culture we are trying to study” (Diesing, 1999, p. 10).

Furthermore, the individual interviews formed the phenomenological basis of shared meaning also known as “shared consciousness” (Diesing, 1999) about these women’s experiences of work-family conflict and work-life balance. The “goal is not really to reduce to the unity of a principle, but rather to disclose the whole wealth of the self-given phenomena in an unbiased way” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 146). Their collective experiences, including areas of convergence and divergence, gave rise to the contextual social conditions. In turn, the stage was set to develop a thinly sliced interpretation of their “life-world [and] contribute to the unfolding of this horizontal structure of consciousness” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 156).

Note that even though my personal work history is a catalyst for this study, my experiences were not included as a part of this study. My intent was to produce “a fresh

perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2006, p. 60). To this end, I bracketed my personal experiences in regard to the phenomenon separately. In this intuitive and reflective-meditative practice, I allowed my “preconceptions and prejudgments [to] enter consciousness and leave freely...until I feel an internal readiness to enter freshly, encounter the situation, issue, or person directly and receive whatever is offered” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89). Researchers have referred to this stage of the project as the *epoche* (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). By preparing for the interviews in this manner, I initiated a practice that facilitates “the actual and essence of things [to] be disclosed more fully” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90); thus, allowing me to capture the essence of participants’ realities and more accurately discover the social construction of their realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

The construction of reality commenced with the data collection instruments and process because they established a foundation for the “quality of interaction” (Berger, 1963). Based on Berger’s humanistic perspective, I developed the following goals for the in-depth interview data collection instrument and procedures: (1) look at the phenomena of work and family from a *new* vantage point, (2) posit questions based on research and prompt the participant to “look behind” her answers for deeper meaning, (3) allow the participant to select the location as it will influence the tone of dialogue, and (4) acknowledge that each participant brings a unique experience to the study. In this study, the individual and composite interviews evolved from “the reinterpretation of the past [and became] a part of a deliberate, fully conscious and intellectually integrated activity” (Berger, 1963). The University of St. Thomas Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the interview instruments and commencement of the study on November 12, 2010 (Appendix A).

From a practical perspective, data collection kicked off with a short telephone interview to determine eligibility in participating in the study based on demographic parameters. The telephone interview (Appendix B, Part I) primarily served to create an initial “portrait of the subject” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This also became an opportunity to convey the goals, parameters and process of the study to ensure each potential participant understood how the study would be conducted (e.g., the participants would be able to meet at any time with the researcher, including before or after work to ensure confidentiality). Two subsequent, semi-structured interviews were conducted, averaging 60 minutes each. Each interview was held in a neutral location of the subject’s choosing (e.g., coffee shop).

The first in-depth interview (Appendix B, Part II) focused on the professional working mother’s lived experiences as they pertained to the everyday occurrences of balancing work and family. The conversation was tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interview was made available for the participant to review with the option to edit.

A follow-up interview was scheduled for both participant and researcher to ask questions and clarify statements from the first in-depth interview. This second conversation was tape-recorded, transcribed and also made available for the participant to review with the option to edit.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study were kept confidential. I agreed that in any sort of report I publish, I would not include information that would make it possible to identify participants in any way. Specifically, no names were associated with direct quotes. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were identified by pseudonym only.



Interviews were digitally, audio recorded and transferred to tapes for transcription. I transcribed the recorded tapes. Only my research advisor who guided the study process/analysis, and I had access to records, tapes and transcripts. Research records, tapes, and transcripts were coded and kept in a locked file drawer in my home office.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. All participants signed a Consent Form (Appendix C). Participants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty (by phone or email); however, no participant decided to withdraw from the study. During the interview process, a participant was able to skip any question or stop the interview process at any time.

### **Interviews**

The initial conversation took place over the phone. I created a set of descriptive and reflective field notes that captured the tone and content of the conversation. This practice of developing field notes continued through subsequent interviews, including details about the physical setting and observations about the interviewee's behavior. These conversations also were audio taped to ensure completeness and accuracy of the data while also enabling dialogue "reconstruction" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

To keep the one-on-one interviews private and participation confidential, we met at an agreed upon location outside of the participant's organization (e.g., coffee house). First, the in-depth interview of approximately one hour (Appendix B, Part II) focused on the professional working mothers' lived experiences as they pertained to the everyday occurrence of balancing work and family. The interviews were conducted in a conversation format and explored questions to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences. "The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant view is (the emic

perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective)” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101).

A follow-up interview was scheduled for the purpose of clarifying any statements or questions that the participant or I might have had after the initial interview. Each participant received a transcript of the first conversation to review beforehand. Follow-up interviews were conducted at the participant’s convenience. The interviews were held in-person and at an agreed upon location outside her organization. The conversations also were tape-recorded and documented with a set of descriptive and reflective field notes.

With the exception of any follow-up interviews, the predetermined interview instruments (Appendix B) were tested before launching the research study (Maxwell, 2005). My dissertation chair and committee of advisors at the University of St. Thomas participated in reviewing and revising the interview instrument(s). Recommendations were incorporated into the instruments.

### **Data Analysis Procedures and Structural Synthesis**

As discussed earlier, I developed an epoche to become more conscious of my experiences, assumptions, and pre-conceived understanding of work-family conflict and work-life balance. Creating this state of conscious awareness of my own experience related to the process of phenomenological reduction (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In turn, I separated my experiences from that of the participants. Once completed, I prepared to analyze each interview using a 7-step analytical process: (1) horizontalization, (2) reduction and elimination, (3) clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, (4) final identification and validation of invariant constituents and themes, (5) constructing individual textural descriptions, (6) constructing individual structural descriptions, and (7) constructing a composite description (Moustakas, 1994). The following provides a brief description of each step.

Horizontalization entailed reviewing the transcripts and listing significant quotes which reflected each participant's experiences with work-family conflict and work-life balance. Using phenomenological data analysis as an inductive form of discovery revealed the rhythm of each professional working mother's lifestyle. Moreover, phenomenological data analysis provided a way to conceptualize the data into points of horizon – each point being equally valued to appreciate and understand the essence of the experience.

Reduction and elimination involved a review of the transcript to determine if the invariant constituents met two requirements. First, a determination was made as to whether each highlighted point was necessary and sufficiently expressed to understand a moment of the experience. Second, each experience had to be expressed in abstraction and labeled. At this point any vague or redundant invariant constituents were eliminated from further analysis.

From the remaining highlighted data, I developed “clusters of meaning” and themes. Data interpretation required “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them and searching for patterns” as they related to existing literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 147). Analysis employed substantive and theoretical categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 as cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 97) to allow for further synthesis of the interviews. During analysis I remained open to the need to “rearrange [the data] into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96).

Final identification and validation of invariant constituents and themes provided an opportunity to “check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). As part of this process, two criterion had to be answered affirmatively for each horizon point: (1) the statement was

explicitly expressed in the complete transcription, and (2) the statement was compatible if not explicitly expressed. Any statements not meeting these guidelines were removed from ongoing analysis.

Having documented the relevant invariant constituents and themes, I wrote a “textural” description of each participant’s experience. The description reflected the participant’s interactions with the issues of work-family conflict and work-life balance. The texture used the verbatim language used, the feelings emoted, and the thoughts provoked during the conversation. The textural descriptions did not recite the participants’ experiences. Instead, the descriptions strove to consciously imagine, elucidate, and illuminate the experiences from multiple points of reflection.

Once completed, I developed a “structural synthesis” of *how* the phenomenon was experienced, looking at all angles of expressed meaning as well as points of convergence and divergence (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This process, known as “imaginative variation,” assisted in bringing to light relevant aspects of the experiences to develop a composite description (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Distilling the experiences in such a manner boiled down the “essence” of what it means to be a professional working mother in American modern life.

To conclude the analysis stage, I created an abstract of the study and considered any possible limitations. Further, I compared and contrasted my findings to the literature review, noting areas of differentiation from existing research. Lastly, I reflected on ways in which future research projects could further expand upon this topic and the implications for social meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Target Audiences**

To ensure that the study would look at the issue from multiple perspectives, professional working mothers from different occupations participated in the study. All participants were adults, over the age of 21. The scope of the study was managed by engaging five participants who hold a professional or executive level position (director level or above). These women all earned college degrees in a particular field and ranged in age from 30-65. Additionally, four of the five participants were married, and all participants had children (ranging from 3-20) living with them.

The number of participants was limited to five for three key reasons: (1) the target demographic was quite narrow which reduced the risk of high variability from person to person (and lessens the need for a large sample); (2) as a qualitative study, it did not require statistical analysis and validation; and, (3) the number was manageable given one researcher and the expected timeline (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005).

All participants self-selected into the study as volunteers. The demographic was an elite group without a common affiliation thus “a list” of potential participants cannot be created. “Elite individuals are considered to be influential, prominent, and/or well-informed in an organization or community they are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 105). My intent was to create a “purposeful sampling” to reach a representative group of women who fit the study parameters (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). By using this outreach method, I studied the topic across multiple occupations that captured a range of variability in views and experiences from the target population, professional working mothers (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, as cited Maxwell in 2005).

To begin the process, I created a referral mechanism starting with my colleagues, family and friends to identify participants. I reached out by telephone to determine interest and eligibility for potential participants and minimize sample bias (Appendix B, Part I). The telephone interview (Appendix B, Part I) also furnished a basic profile of each participant so that the initial interview started at a deeper level. I asked interviewees for other potential participants who might fit the profile and who might be interested in the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to maintain confidentiality of all participants.

Once participants were identified, the study relied on two 60-minute, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were arranged with the participant and held at their choice of meeting location (Appendix B). With no specific hypotheses to be tested, the interviews generated a “rough definition and explanation” of work-life balance based on participant responses (Robinson, 1951 as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Overall, the study broadened our view of what it means to be a professional working mother and related issues of work-family conflict and work-life balance. If asked, “Why interview only professional working mothers and not fathers,” my response was simply -- men and women are perceived through their words and actions differently because of their gender which translates into very different organizational experiences (Hochschild, 2003b). Moreover, professional working mothers have had a longer history of having to balance work and family that enables a more comprehensive understanding of the issues.

### **Study Limitations**

In terms of study limitations, participants were at times unable to “name the obstacles” associated with work-family conflict and work-life balance because of how they have been “situated” in life (Greene, 1988). This seemed to be particularly difficult because as studies have

found organizational culture sets an overarching tone that creates behavioral adaptation. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (2003a) examined how organizations like a “farmer puts blinders on his workhorse to guide his vision forward, institutions manage[d] how we feel” (Hochschild, 2003a, p. 49). Hochschild called this “deep acting” whereby an employee consciously subverted her natural response to a situation and adjusted her feelings to align with organizational goals (Hochschild, 2003a). After an extended period of time, an employee can potentially become alienated from her true self. Therefore, reflecting on the transcripts to recognize the degree of “deep acting” that may be taking place in the lives of professional working mothers became a critical component of the analysis.

### **Participant Constraints and Risks**

Study constraints and risks were examined for the participants and the researcher. Beginning with participant constraints, it was necessary to clearly outline study parameters to ensure that we stay on topic. Another constraint was the participant’s ability to carve out one to two hours to participate in the study; therefore, interviews were scheduled for their convenience over a natural break period in the day or after work at the location of their choice.

The study posed no risk to participants because of the confidentiality measures integrated into the study: (1) all subjects were adults; (2) prior to the interview process, the subjects were informed of the confidentiality measures and knew that they could refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time; (3) at the conclusion of each interview, a debriefing took place with each interviewee; and, (4) transcribed interviews were available to each participant for review with the option to edit. Additionally, any results from the one-on-one interviews were aggregated in a summary format.

## **Generalization**

The primary intent of this dissertation was to study the natural phenomena of work-life balance of an elite group of participants working in a variety of industries. In turn, a holistic and highly contextual look was developed from which formed very high-level generalizations across the participants' experiences. As with qualitative studies, the process and data emerged rather than being "tightly prefigured" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Once the data was collected and coded for analysis, the study's results were summarized with a focus on identifying the current state of work-life balance experiences and trends. As this is a small sample group, generalizations were limited to illuminating and understanding the topic. Therefore, the study's transferability and generalizability were minimal.

## **Timetable**

The study's three-month interview timeline became another strategy to ensure that the gathered information reflected the same timeframe for all participants. In this way, the rendering of the current state depicted work and family accurately. Additionally, this strategy minimized changes to the workplace over an extended period of time that could affect the design of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

## **Summary**

Phenomenology provided a strong basis to investigate the lived experiences of professional working mothers. The study protocol outlined procedures for recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent and interviewing participants as well as data collection, recording, and transcription. Coding, analyzing, and thematizing the data followed phenomenological analysis and representation as outlined by Moustakas (1994). Data clustered consistently after five sets of interviews. Of the five participants, two represented the



information technology industry, two represented higher education, and one represented her own health and wellness business.

Recruitment began with a short phone interview to ensure eligibility and to create an initial participant profile. Study goals, process, and parameters were discussed during the initial telephone conversation. Two subsequent, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a neutral location of the participant's choosing. Prior to the second interview, each participant received a verbatim transcription of the first conversation. Only one participant provided written feedback and only one participant did not read the transcription prior to the second meeting. All five participants completed all phases of data collection.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES AND COMPARISON TO LITERATURE

### **Textural Descriptions**

#### **Individual Standpoints**

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers begins with individual participant profiles. Each brings a unique view cast from their past and present experiences of daily life. This section presents textural descriptions derived from interviews which traverse career and family paths; work life balance influences and adjustments; recommendations for organizational change; and, advice for their children. Each description is purposefully enriched with personal narratives to clearly portray a participant's experience in her own words. Individual narratives are sequenced in the order in which interviews took place. A group composite follows illustrating where participants' lives converge and diverge to more fully understand what it means to be a Professional Working Mother in contemporary American society.

**Jessie.** Jessie experiences living as a professional working mother with an exuberance and passion for life that is contagious. Her blue eyes sparkle as she explains how her mornings begin with preparing two small children Iris and Ella, (ages 3 and 5 respectively), for the day. Jessie and her husband are both in their late thirties working for the same international information technology (IT) firm. With two very busy schedules, an in-home caregiver helps her oldest child to and from school while caring for her youngest child during the day. By the time her husband heads out the back door to a corporate office, Jessie turns her attention to work.

I live in a two-story home. So, the upstairs is off limits from the kids. We have a gate that separates the two floors and I work upstairs from an office. I have a dedicated office. I have a dedicated line [with] a work office number.

The workday starts “pretty much from about seven-forty to five o’clock, every day.” As a Director of Sales, work days routinely fill with conference calls and computer work. “If my meeting schedule cooperates, I do sneak downstairs to have lunch with the babysitter, Crystal, and Iris....And, then [I] come back up.” At five o’clock every evening, the sitter leaves and Jessie starts dinner.

The family comes together around 5:45 p.m. for dinner which is usually the time her husband returns from work. After finishing dinner and cleaning the kitchen, each daughter may choose a family activity “...they can play a game or play with a toy or do a puzzle...and pretty much at 6:30 p.m. the TV goes on for a half an hour.” During the week, meal times and after-dinner play give the family about three hours a day together.

Once the kids are in bed, two to three nights a week Jessie resumes work for another two, three or four hours, depending on the workload. However, “during crunch time, it’s every night. Right?!” With this last emphatic statement, Jessie affirms the ‘on call’ job requirement and accepts working an average of 572 hours over the national stated norm of 2,080 hours. In this professional working mother’s experience, the conscious norm of day-to-day life revolves around the demands of work.

Despite the average twelve-hour work days (plus some weekend hours) for the last fourteen years, Jessie expresses a sense of loss in the unencumbered pursuit of her career when reflecting on life before and after children.

Sometimes I yearn for the day of being in my career and childless. Because from 1997 to 2005, I felt like my career was limitless. [If] they needed me to hop on a plane, I did it with gusto! I could travel. I could work all hours of the night. I rarely missed work. You know, I was available, and committed, and focused. One-hundred percent focused on work.

So, you know, I did have two years where I worked outside of the home and then had my daughter, my first child. And, that was just hard!...You're suddenly now, you're not only

managing, you know, you're giving yourself one-hundred percent to your job and you're trying to keep your own self afloat. But now you have another human being to worry about, you know. So, it's just a split focus. There's definitely times where, you know, the kids are fine and taken care of, and you can totally work. But it's always kind of in the background somehow there, always. I'd say that's the biggest change, a split focus that you can never - you're kind of managing multiple lives at the same time.

Adding to the split focus, are the demands when working for an international IT organization which requires a moment's notice flexibility. For example, should the sales team need to respond quickly for a client proposal, "[it's] all of a sudden and we're just working night and day. It's also difficult to work with people in the western time zone I'm finding because that two hours I need to have off from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m." Maintaining a time just for family conceptually matters to Jessie; however, it remains elusive in all practicality.

Jessie describes working from home as a "double-edged sword" with the ability to have lunch with Iris or hug Ella when she comes home from school. "You're going to get flexibility if you have a job that is not making widgets... Ideally, you can have flexibility and only work eight hours a day. But, I think that is not reality." Essentially, the belief system that one must be totally flexible to fulfill work demands is reinforced by a work culture whether it is healthy for employees or not.

From the children's perspective, Jessie believes that working from home "makes them just more comfortable to just know that I'm home even though I'm not with them. They would love it if I was home and with them. That would be their preference..." When asked her preference, she states:

My preference is to work at home, to be here. I have to say though from a work perspective, it's a whole different ball game when I'm traveling. It's just amazing to have that complete, complete disassociation from work, from life, from family, to be able to concentrate on work. Because even with, a whole day goes by, and I don't go - and there are certainly plenty of days where I don't get to go down stairs and say hi to them - so I'm all day in this office working, there's still something. I don't know if it's emotionally or - there's still something where you're just being physically here you feel, even if you're on

the call with people across country all day, you do kind a still have that presence. Whereas when traveling it's like I don't have to think about making lunches, about picking people up or missing something -- I'm just off duty!

Jessie traverses the country to pitch a product, provide services, or meet with a client whenever called to do so. Depending on the need, Jessie could be away from home one week out of the month or every week. The unpredictability of travel affects the household routine as well as Jessie's relationships to self, work, and family. Specifically, travel engages an internal dynamic that emotionally overrides her preference to work from home. In turn, Jessie becomes solely focused on the job at hand and work fills the void of family.

A reliable in-house sitter and family support system provide peace of mind that the girls are well-cared for during Jessie's work day. "[It] was really kind of just emotionally draining to not feel like my kids were getting the best care during the day. So my philosophy is just pay, pay, (laughter) just keep paying until you get someone good!" The next tier of support includes Jessie's in-laws who "only work three months of the year, so they can provide back up to the back up." At times, Jessie's sister and sister-in-law also "picks up a shift" *[sic]* now and then. "So we've surrounded ourselves with family [who] don't have kids so that they are able [to help out]. Especially when I travel, and you know everyone kind of pitches in which is great."

However, the logistical challenge of travel takes a toll on the family emotionally. The children adjust to mom leaving and Jessie's husband contends with caring for the children while working full time. From Jessie's perspective, "it's painful to see how it ripples through everyone." Nevertheless, when asked if the nature of travel stemmed from the job structure, she replies:

Problems aren't caused by just the travel - the nature of the job. I know I could push back on that with my employer. But I don't see myself being able to maintain the level of work I'm doing if I absolutely put my foot down and say I'll never travel.

In the sense that Jessie feels a responsibility to sustain the job in its current form, it suggests that there is a personal decision to not alter this aspect of her work. This choice could be due in large part to the acceptable amount of travel that has been required to date. Therefore, when asked to offer personal or organizational changes, Jessie focuses on the most pressing issue of regularly having to be available during family time.

I feel there is still expectation that I'm available for calls from 6:00 to 8:00 every night. *I'd like to take it to a whole different level of flexibility.* Where it's like tell me what to get done and don't care when I do it.

Previously, Jessie stated the evening hours were due to working with colleagues in a different time zone and unplanned projects. Moreover, colleagues and bosses without children also contribute to the late night hours because there is a “resentment or kind of just an expectation that you know, you need to be available during certain hours.” These competitive behaviors often drive a norm in her company to work evenings. In contrast, when working with moms and other primary caregivers Jessie feels freer to flex her work and accommodate family activities. Similar to travel, evening availability presents itself as part of the job structure as well as a personal, conscious choice.

I feel like when I want to draw a line in the sand, I have the freedom to do it. That being said, I often take calls after hours...personally I'm usually very upfront. That if you want to talk to me between 5:00-7:00 there will be kids in the background and Dora, [a popular children's television show], is going to be babysitting. And I prefer to talk to people after 7:00...But those 5:00 to 7:00 meetings are never something that is planned two weeks in advance.

With the line in the sand always shifting towards concession of evening calls the existing work culture regarding availability remains unchallenged. However, from Jessie's perspective, parents are not the only ones putting in long hours. Children go to before and after school care which makes for very long days.

So these tiny little five year olds are going to school from 7:30/7:45 to 2:45 and then they have to stay there 'til 6:00 or 7:00 before their parents can pick them up. Or, you can be like us that you have a babysitter that can pick them up at the bus stop and bring them home.

Jessie offers the possible solutions of hiring a retiree or paying a stay-at-home mom to babysit. “I personally feel strongly and [am] willing to pay for – to have childcare in my home. Just let them come home at the end of the day!” Although work culture induces much of Jessie’s frustration, only family adjustments (e.g., different babysitting arrangements) are suggested solutions to the long work days, which establish acceptance and compliance with the established work structure.

Only when asked to make any personal recommendations for change does Jessie suggest a work-arrangement that allows her to take summers off. “A part of me thinks it would be great if ...I could mentor someone during the year and let them fly solo in the summer. Maybe someone younger, without families...” This discussion causes Jessie to reflect on her maternity leaves and the impact to her workload during her absence, “I had been working to push all these things forward and transfer them to people and tell them what needed to be done and literally not one thing was done well while I was on maternity leave.” The demands of the job did not change during Jessie’s maternity leave. However, in the all or nothing scenario, the latter was acceptable during her time off compared to the normal 10-12 hour work days. With no middle ground between these two extremes, Jessie does not try to reconcile or question the gap in these realities.

Looking at the work world through the lens of advice for her children, Jessie responds thoughtfully on her past work experience. Her response centers on retaining power and control through personal awareness and choice because “the way companies are designed to produce and

work long hours...doesn't take the whole person into account." Therefore, at the top of Jessie's list is the advocacy for choosing a job with minimal travel and regular hours.

In addition, to finding the right job, Jessie recommends establishing a career before having children. "I certainly had a lot more choices and much more power when it came to having kids and coming back and making sure I retained my job - because I was established."

Ultimately, Jessie provides a family-first bottom line to all of her important life decisions.

I also think what's really important is that my personal stand is: to me, my family is the highest priority. All the time. In kind of my heart and my decisions, it's always the first priority. It doesn't mean that sometimes work, I'm spending more hours working. Right, but any decision to me is always - as much as I love my job and I love working - I'd drop it in a heartbeat if it was negatively impacting my family.

Six months after this interview, Jessie and I touched based when I left full-time employment to complete my doctoral dissertation. We talked about my reasons for leaving (12-14 hour work days, travel, and no time for family or my dissertation). A couple weeks later, I received the following email from Jessie.

So I find myself thinking about you a lot and wondering how you are. How are you? Our last conversation was indeed pivotal in my life and June 10 I hang up the towel. I haven't told them yet so shhhh. It was funny. I got a call yesterday from [Jerry] about 'a new opportunity' and that opportunity was to capture the MO Tax proposal on top of my regular job. I think I laughed right into the phone!

Anyway, I'm on my fourth week of travel to Ohio and in total it will make six. This has been a gift in a way because it has confirmed to me 100 percent that I don't want this in my life.

So my plan is to take the summer off and then really build my life so I'm off June, July and August every year. I'm going to work as an independent consultant I think doing corporate training for [Business Name], helping my friend start her speech therapy business, and then subbing to do proposal work for [Current Employer] (if they'll have me). It feels right to me and the right balance.

Upon tendering her resignation, Jessie's boss immediately offers her paid summers off without hesitation. Happily, she accepts the offer and looks forward to twelve weeks off with



her family. Two weeks shy of the 12 week goal, Jessie's employer asks her to assist on a multitude of time-sensitive proposals.

Key terms and definitions.

Exploring the topic of work-life balance requires an understanding of how each participant defines key terms that shape their experience. As with all participants, Jessie follows the direction to disregard any formal definitions and just speak from her heart.

1. Well-being is "the lack of anything terribly wrong."
2. Work-life balance "relates to having the power to manage your work and your life. It's not necessarily a percentage like 50 percent of my life I work and 50 percent I'm not working."
3. Work life means "Being in an environment where people value my contribution and other contributions and in this context recognizing that you're getting the whole person as an employee; not some artificial part that doesn't eat, sleep, or breath."
4. Family life as a definition initially stumps Jessie, "I feel like family life, you can't shut it off. Oh my God, I don't know how to define family life...we are all existing individually and together whether we are together or apart at different points in the day."
5. A boss is "someone who I'm accountable to...a collaborator, but also someone who has a vision.
6. A coworker is "someone that I work with to establish some goal that we're usually working together toward...[a] collaborator.

7. Boundaries “are limits that you set to define something; but, ultimately, the whole thing about boundaries is they’re only as effective as people respect them and how much you can push back on them. Social covenants.”
8. Commitment “means what you agree to do and your willingness to see it through.”
9. Current ratios of work-life balance are “I think its 60 percent work. I think it’s like 30 percent family. I’ll give my husband a generous 5 percent and I’ll give my own self 15 percent.” Upon adding up the numbers, we reach 110 percent. Jessie then reduces work to 55 percent and her own time to 10 percent. In a 24-hour period, assuming 7.0 hours of sleep, work hours at the 60 percent hit close to home, equating to approximately 10 hours. Family time is about 5 hours while time for herself and husband rounds to 2.5 hours.
10. Ideal ratios of work-life balance are “for argument maybe a 50 percent work; 30 percent family; 10 percent individual; 10 percent husband.” In a 24-hour period, assuming 7.0 hours for sleep, this leaves 8.5 hours for work, 1.7 hours for self, 1.7 hours with her husband and 5.1 hours with her family.

Jessie’s realistic interpretations reveal a down-to-earth view of life and for the most part reflect societies’ current views of boss, coworker, boundaries and commitment. However, there are departures from the norm that are worth noting. For example, the definition of well-being exemplifies a breach from the term’s original meaning of good health, happiness and prosperity to the extreme of hoping nothing bad is happening. The clarity of work life also contrasts to the ambiguity of family life which may mirror society’s overall struggle to define what it means to live fully in modern society. To overcome this challenge, Jessie provides a definition of work-life balance that suggests engaging one’s own power to discern what is most important in life and

to manage time accordingly. So, it is not surprising that once aware of work negatively impacting her quality of life, Jessie finds a way to her ideal of working nine months out of the year with summers off.

**Angie.** Angie expresses her life as a professional working mother with an easy-going steadfastness that resonates in her contemplation of work and family. Reflecting on the past twenty-two years, Angie explains that her career started as a receptionist at age twenty and she has worked her way up to a director's position within the same organization. Now in her early forties with cross-county responsibilities, Angie manages the delivery of services for information technology (IT) engagements (e.g., help desk, software development, and other IT services). "I oversee directly Wisconsin and Oregon. And, then I'm also responsible peripherally for Florida and Alaska, and...Puerto Rico, kind of (chuckle). So, I'm responsible for that and then also for some business development related to IT as well." Softened by laughter, Angie recognizes the ambiguity woven into her job which results in every day being different and regular travel to client sites.

When not traveling, Angie works from home with a typical wake-up call at 6:30 a.m., giving her husband, Mitch, and sons, Mike and Matt, (ages 17 and 4) time to prepare for the day. Note that Angie's oldest son Adam (age 21) lives at a college campus during the school year. Most of the morning activity centers on getting the boys off to school or daycare. Both Angie and her husband work for the same IT company which requires some morning navigation of schedules to make sure family members get to work and school on time. Work dictates the rhythm of the house and its members.

So, depending on phone calls, sometimes we'll do an early morning phone call for work and then run him off to school or take him there first...usually everybody is to where they need to be by about 8:30 a.m. or so. And then put in a full day of work and day care closes at 6:00 p.m.

[At this point, the day is a little half way over for Angie.]

I'll usually try to hold 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to be kind of family time so that we can get dinner on the table and baths and that type of thing. And then sometimes, depending on my schedule, I may do some evening conference calls because I do have a client on the west coast. So, sometimes I need to do end of day type things with them. And, if not, then I try to do family time in the evening. ...at about 8:30 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. the little one is down and the older one is doing homework or something. So typically between 9:00 p.m. & 10:00 p.m. / 9:00 p.m. & 11:00 p.m., depending on how tired I am, I might do emails and few other things. And then usually by 10:30 p.m. or 11:00 p.m. I'm trying to head upstairs and I'm somebody that can't just fall asleep right away, so I have to - - unwind a little bit. Whether it's a little TV, reading or something. But, typically sleep hopefully by 11:30 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.

While the days working from home average 11 to 12 hours, travel increases the workday to 14 or 15 hour days. "If I'm in Oregon, for example, I'll try to be at the office by 7:00 p.m. And then I typically work till 7:00 or 8:00 o'clock at night...back to the hotel...I typically put in another hour or two." Traveling at least two weeks out of every month, Angie finds a pocket of time to connect with family, "I'll try to stop and take a phone call at home and check in on husband and children and see how everybody is doing -- usually around dinner time because I know they'll be [there]." The struggle to control the amount of work edging into family time is evidenced in Angie's repeated use of the word 'try' as she describes a typical week.

I usually travel Tuesday through Friday. Then I get home late Friday afternoons. Then I try to take the rest of Friday afternoon off so then I can spend a little time with them and then over the weekend as well. If I'm traveling, I try not to work too much on the weekends, because my time at home is short as it is. But, it doesn't always work out that way. So it just kind of depends on what's going on (if it's a proposal or something). And, sometimes you don't get to pick how you want to spend your free time but if it's just a regular week I guess I have a little more control over that.

Work consistently overshadows family life which creates habits and a daily routine for family members. When the number of hours worked are stated per day, Angie accepts this as a norm. However, when expressed as giving her employer a minimum of six extra months of work every year, Angie pauses the conversation to consider this fact.

So, you're actually awake (not working time) has gotten whittled down to like four hours a day... I mean it's about an hour and a half in the morning as we're all getting up and getting out of the house and doing whatever. Then, it's the evening after dinner basically. And, not even all of that, only a couple of hours.

Acknowledging how she spends her time, sparks recollection of a recent comment from her father. He said, "Angie, when you're 65 – when you're my age, you're not going to wish you worked more. You're really not." (Angie chuckles) And, I'm like, "Yea, I know".... So, it's funny. Oh, well." With an air of acceptance, Angie confirms that direct reports have wondered how she manages with their comments like, "I don't know how you do it." However, no one asks why Angie puts in so many hours, "the people I work with, that know, that are in a position to do something probably know, haven't." Therefore, the responsibility for the workload, hours spent working, and drawing boundaries falls to Angie.

In exploring the drivers as to why so much time is spent working or why she is compelled to make up a doctor visit, Angie is stymied. "So, even though you only work six, you still feel like you need to make up those two even though you already got it covered from the day before...I don't know [why we do it]...I absolutely do it." As we dig into the topic, Angie acknowledges that even today she does not feel well which led to cancelling client calls for the day. Rather than resting, she catches up on email and paperwork, ignoring her illness.

The earth would not have stopped spinning just because I said, "I'm having a sick day" (chuckle). But, for me it's about the consequence...It's either I spend weekend doing it or I'm that much further behind on Monday. And, I travel on Monday afternoon; so, I know that my time next week is going to be tough because I'll be on a client site...I'd rather just get it done today; just because then I don't have to either spend my weekend time with the family doing it or just being really, really taxed next week.

Without prompting, Angie also shares her observation that weekend work has become a performance expectation with the advent of enabling technology (i.e., Blackberries). Where weekends seemed 'protected and safe for everybody', Angie recalls a shift to '24x7' availability

about two years ago. Saturdays and Sundays are now a time to squeeze in completing status reports, returning messages before Monday morning, and meeting proposal deadlines -- despite putting in 10, 12, and 14 hour weekdays. Unsure of the source motivating this evolution in work, Angie sighs heavily and speculates from a personal perspective that the core issue may be the ability to draw boundaries.

...some people are better at drawing their boundaries than others are. And, I'm trying to observe that and see if they are treated differently. Because I think the fear is always that you'll be treated differently. But, I don't really know that's the reality or if we've just convinced ourselves that's the reality. And, if we all just did a better job of drawing those boundaries, wouldn't we all just be in a better place?

Questioning her reality allows Angie to consider how social conditioning shapes her experience and the importance she places on being placed in a "works hard category."

Trepidation sustains the work cycle. "I do think there's a fear that some people have...that when times get tough ...somehow that work ethic cushions you at least to a certain extent." The strain of current economic times reinforces the work pattern further as Angie explains, "I think if [there is] a cut tomorrow...they would try to keep certain people; but at a certain level, there comes a time where they have to go to a depth that no one is protected." Looking over the course of her career, Angie quietly responds to the question if the time spent on the job has been worth it.

I don't think so. I don't think so. And, I don't know if I would have answered that way ten years ago because I was in the middle of it with really young kids and lots of things. You know, [a] different place in my career. And, now it is like, "I don't know." It's a lot of years given up with children and things. You know? I don't know if it's worth it. But, at the same time, I'm able to provide a great house and so, it's hard to say because had I not, would certain things not have happened? You don't know. So, I guess I don't spend a lot of time wondering that because it is -- I am where I am; but, at the same time it does help me figure out decisions for going forward I think -- about how much I'm willing to do, and I find myself being less willing to do that. And, maybe that's just about getting older too (laughter)... [and] more tired (laughter)!

Angie's view of professional working mother through the dynamic of time yields an attitude of inquiry and nascent willingness for altering her day-to-day reality. Yet, Angie

suggests that circumstances may be immutable in her comment, “I am where I am.” Squelching a willingness to change inherently complements the nature of her job.

Also supporting her current job structure is the perception that the flexibility to work from home is seen as a one-way benefit that reduces her commute and enables more time at home. With this lens, Angie activates a perception of debt that engages a concept of having to keep a ‘bank account of good will’ just in case time off is needed in the future. With the bank account growing, long hours and availability become habitual.

I think the rigidity of saying, “You have to work these 12 hours.” Folks just wouldn’t be able to do it. Then, I think you’d find yourself in some ways more firm about things. So, I sometimes wonder if flexibility isn’t a bad thing. Only because it – you know, sometimes we then allow it to creep more in to our lives whereas if you know we need you to work this; you can simply say, “No, I can’t.” But because you can do it at midnight or at whatever – you know, they don’t just say, “No.” So you end up taking that on. You know what I mean? I think we don’t force a situation where we have to choose; because when it’s flexible we just make it work. But, I think we sometimes make it work to our disadvantage because our sleep suffers or our family suffers or we just personally suffer somehow.

Lastly, Angie points to travel as another facet of how “time is always leveraged.” In travel-mode, work fills the gap of family and traps Angie in a daily routine.

I don’t have a family opportunity so I don’t mind working until 8:00 p.m. at night because what else am I going to do but go to the hotel? But, when I’m home and I’d like to turn it off at six-thirty or even seven and I find myself going to 9:00 p.m. because of the time difference which is annoying.

Illness and major milestones like a birth or death in the family influence Angie’s ability to juggle the regular demands of work. In these instances, Angie and her husband consult each other on how to reorganize their days “...it’s pretty stressful, because then you feel like you’re inconveniencing other people or not meeting the expectations of your employer which is not something you want to do either.” Most significant is the infrequency of these events as opposed to the total number of hours spent working.

Angie's level of commitment to work makes family time a cherished commodity. Between work and family, Angie has very little time for outside interests and friends. "We don't do as much outside. Like with friends as much - or at least I find myself not doing it... We give ourselves at least one day where we're all together not doing something... it doesn't always work out..." Angie recognizes that the ongoing struggle to retain family time is sometimes self-imposed, "I'm not very good at saying 'no' about things (laughter)."

Underlying Angie's decisions to say 'yes' or 'no' revolves around financial security and the flexibility to work from home which engender the belief that she has "a little bit more control over [her] career" than she did as a receptionist. Since overall family security outweighs the effects of day-to-day work life, Angie considers the extra hours as a way to compensate for any unforeseen family emergency.

I put as much in and deposit as much good will about those types of things into my account so that when I need to withdraw from it, you know, they feel like I've made the contribution... I think if they see you more as a '8 to 5' [*sic*]... when unusual circumstances come up it's a little harder for them to respond in a way that you want.

Despite having earned sick leave and vacation time that could be used for the rare family emergency, Angie creates an additional mental concept of imaginary time credits. Conceptually, the additional 'credit' provides a feeling of safety and helps to alleviate concern for any future debt. In turn, a norm is created wherein Angie expresses an expectation that the minimum acceptable work day is nine hours.

Consequently, Angie's primary challenge as a professional working mother is "just the hours." Angie's voice softens as she explains that the issue lies with, "Trying to find enough hours to where you feel like you're not short changing one or the other... Mostly it just boils down to time (chuckle). Not enough of it in the day, to be everywhere with everybody." Angie provides two root causes from the perspectives of work and family. First, there is the issue of



poor business planning which causes extra work in the long run, “sometimes [we] tend to operate in crisis mode a little too often and [there’s] not enough [time to] sit down and plan out what needs to happen.” The second issue is one of perception that parents have to prove their commitment on the job more so than those without children.

I'd say sometimes when you have children that there's a perception that you may not be as able to work the hours and all of that. But I think that's usually over compensated just by showing folks your just as committed as anyone else to it. I think sometimes if something happened where you had to stop doing something because of a family situation that can cause people to wonder about that... part of that is I work with a lot of people that have children as well - so we're all kind of juggling those things. But I think sometimes there's that concern.

Closing the office door, putting away the computer, or turning off the phone at the end of the day is difficult. At closer examination, Angie affirms the unwritten rule, “It’s really just that work needs to get done. If you can get that done in 40 hours - great. If it takes you 60 or 80 hours – you know, whatever it takes. You try to get it done.” Over time, a sense of normalcy sinks in and questioning the daily routine sparks an unresolved internal dialogue, “...sometimes I think we're [our] own worst enemy when it comes to that. Because you just start, “Oh, I should just do this, because” and, it's like, “No, just put it away, turn it off.” Ultimately, when your office is in the home or jacket pocket and work spans across multiple time zones, the organization essentially fosters unbalanced work-family lifestyles.

Taking these job elements into consideration, Angie recommends setting reasonable client expectations for consultants. For example, telling clients upfront that “...we’re on site Monday through Thursday. Folks are not on site on Fridays...Because if you don’t set it up at the time of the contract is drawn up, then there is an expectation that folks are there.”

Coming in a close second, Angie also suggests more generous maternity and paternity leaves. “I kind of get the sense that with FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act). It’s like, “Well,

we have to because it is required (chuckle); but we're not necessarily going to hold your position." For Angie, job security and control over her career are essential factors in deciding to use federally mandated leave time. In addition, family support also plays a key role in leave decisions, "I have a bigger support system with Mitch and Adam and Mike able to help with Matt - that is, you know, four of us raising this baby not just two of us anymore and that makes a difference."

From this personal vantage point, Angie compares her experience to her Canadian counterparts in the same organization, "...if you look at your other countries, they are a lot more generous with family leave than... I think we do it based on the country where you are working – they have different benefits." The idea of expanding and developing uniform policies borders on fantasy as Angie leaves this recommendation with laughter and a wishful attitude that "some things could be done better" despite the cultural differences between countries.

Along these lines of taking leave, Angie cites a need for organizations to reconfigure job requirements and plan for an employee's vacation time. "I think we're hard-pressed to take the vacation we have --- If I was taking all four weeks that would be one thing; but, I think I'm barely taking two..." Although Angie recognizes a need to firmly exercise her rights for vacation, it's difficult to manage because, "it's just inevitably when you are ready to take it, then something on the project crops up and you can't."

Considering whether this is a perceived or real 'can't', Angie believes that it can be both depending on the situation. "Sometimes it's not worth being gone to have to come back and deal with it when I get back." The 'it' can range from emails or voice mails or crisis that may crop up. As a result, work trails along on vacation, as Angie explains "[when] I'm going to take a week off but I'll do a couple hours of work every day so that when I come back I don't have this

mountain of work that didn't go away while I was gone (laughter).” The idea of ‘playing catch up’ after vacation leads Angie to account for a full week of vacation while short-shrifting her time with family.

Just as a ‘perceived can’t’ prevents Angie enjoying time off work, Angie acknowledges that sometimes there are very real deadlines that crop up or there is simply “too much going on.” Whatever Angie’s reason for not taking advantage of leave, there seems to be a fundamental reluctance to setting more firm boundaries. Self-authorization is inhibited by Angie’s conviction that, “some working mothers feel like because sometimes they have to ask for the relief to go do these other things that they don’t feel that can draw as hard a line.” Contemplating if this is only a working mother’s issue, Angie continues to say, “And, I think that our men feel the same way too – that struggle – that a consulting career is a demanding career regardless of whether your married and have children or not.”

On the topic of how to choose a career, Angie advises her children to understand their company and personal needs so that boundaries can be established. By knowing these boundaries, she explains, “...sometimes that’s the struggle, knowing whether you can set those boundaries or not.” From this vantage point, Angie suggests that it is equally important to understand the how and when to set boundaries with an employer.

Having to travel regularly for her job, Angie also cautiously recommends “taking advantage of technology when you can but not letting it become a substitute for you being there – and, you really being there.” Past experience resonates in this advice as the family copes with her frequent absences from home.

Angie shares a point of crisis a couple years ago triggered by her children asking why she works so much. Her children at the time were ages 2, 15, and 19. She recounts gathering the

family together and explaining the demands of her career and family finances. Once the family was in agreement, Angie attempted a career change. Initially, she tendered her resignation and the company countered with a part-time position. Before taking the part-time hours, the family discussed the change.

As it turned out, managing part-time hours is just as difficult as a full-time job. “I don’t feel like I really worked all that much part time...if you went back and looked at my timesheets I probably worked forty hours most weeks. But it allowed me not to have to work the 60 hours...” Exasperated, Angie recalls returning to full-time consulting while admitting that with both work experiences, “There’s like this no man’s land in the middle there that you’re not really getting paid for the hours that you work.” Ultimately, Amy’s choice of words and experiences highlight a value system leveraged by the organization which sets an expectation to maximize profit through working hours.

Key terms and definitions.

Before ending the interview, we take a heart-centered approach to key definitions. Angie disregards any formal definitions and speaks thoughtfully and honestly based on her life experiences.

1. Well-being is “being in a healthy place, not just physically, but mentally and a sense of harmony in all the pieces of your life.”

2. Work-life balance “is the tug of war that every working mother has to deal with!”

From Angie’s experience, “you try to find -- to give each of those things what they need from you at the right level, at the right time. And, it’s not always even and it’s not always fair.” When asked to consider balance for herself rather than what others need from her, Angie exclaims, “it’s interesting that I even chose those words then because ... it tells you how it feels sometimes in terms of being torn – right?” Upon reconsideration, Angie states, “...it’s always about making sure that I’m not letting the family down, not letting work down, but then somehow not letting yourself down gets lost in there a little bit sometimes (laughter).”

3. Work life means “occasional travel...maybe, more intense but shorter days.

Europeans get it right in some ways...I get the sense that work gets filled in around the family more than family gets filled in around work (laughter).” In contrast, Angie believes that in the United States this would be reversed to be considered an ‘A’ player.

4. Family life is summed up in one word by Angie, “overscheduled.”

5. A boss is “...someone that’s a mentor and a teacher and even a friend in addition to being the corporate definition of a boss.”

6. A coworker is a “peer and friend and colleague.” For Angie, as one rises in the corporate ranks, the definition also includes competitor. “I think sometimes there’s a lot of perceived competition or concern about competition that I wish didn’t exist...looking out for yourself kind of mentality as opposed to group goals.”
7. Boundaries boil down to choices and consequences, “...it’s just that line in the sand that you kind of have to draw sometimes (soft chuckle) about what you can do, or what you are willing to do, or able to do, at any point in time.” For Angie the line in the sand shifts regularly depending on the day, “it’s a blurry line at best.”
8. Commitment “How much of myself that I’m willing to give to something.”
9. Current ratios of work-life balance “feels like 60 percent work, 30 percent family, and 10 percent me.” Assuming a 24-hour period and 5 hours of sleep this equates to working almost twelve hours a day, spending time with family almost six hours a day and having approximately two hours for her. In this case, work time is understated given earlier remarks on how time with family is closer to four hours a day.
10. Ideal ratios of work-life balance are not as easy to identify because of the volatile nature of work demands. First, Angie states that an even split between work and family life would be beneficial. On second thought, Angie explains, “I wouldn’t even mind less – [of the remaining time] I would be fine with 20 percent me and 45 percent family because to me, I’m not me without them anyways.”

Angie’s definition of well-being sets a bar of wholeness for daily living that supports a physical, mental, and emotional balance which creates a sense of harmony. From this vantage point, coherence between all facets of life seems elusive in contrast to Angie’s honest, and to some extent frustrated, definitions of work and family life. For instance, there seems to be a

disconnect between an “A” player who fits work around family and having a family life defined as “overscheduled” when only one day of the week is dedicated to family. Having a job with adjustable boundaries, time commitments, and frequent travel may contribute to choices and consequences which do not nurture attainment of Angie’s ideal work-life balance ratios.

**Hope.** Having worked at the extreme edge of time physically, emotionally, and mentally away from family, Hope now experiences life with a firm commitment to a balanced lifestyle. Married for 28 years, Hope is in her early fifties with two daughters, ages 16 and 20. Her husband’s full-time work is based in another state; therefore, he alternates traveling and working from a home office. In addition, Hope’s sister requires caretaking and lives with family. With a full-house, the average workday begins with an early morning wakeup call so that Hope arrives at work by seven o’clock in the evening. Typically, Hope leaves the office by 5:00 p.m. and returns home by 6:00 p.m., depending on the commute. The remainder of the evening consists of dinner, family activities, and personal pursuits. Arriving to a point where work shuts-off when the office door closes springs from a very personal journey of awareness and self-realization.

To honor Hope’s journey, it is imperative to fully understand how an extended bell curve of work formed over time. Specifically, Hope keenly remembers the rise of expectations with promotions from manager and later assistant dean for operations and finance to chief operating officer (COO) of a big ten university. The leap to assistant dean required a consistent “but doable” 60-hour work week while the COO position demanded 70 to 90-hour work weeks over a three-year period. At the apex of stress and fatigue, divine guidance inspires Hope to apply for a director’s position with the same organization where she now enjoys work life balance with an average 50-hour work week. Hope’s story stands in the nexus of the past and present, centering on her intention to live each day joyfully and fulfilled.

Looking back to the position of assistant dean, Hope recalls finding the right daycare being the biggest challenge at this time. Her children were ages 4 years old and 19 months old. Without any family members nearby when the children were sick, it was tough to manage both work and family needs. Overall, however the family adjusted around Hope's sixty-hour work weeks. Hope cites flexibility as a key aspect in staying productive and managing her life because it allowed her to take two mornings a week for her passion, horse-back riding. She explains, "...I was doing something that truly gave me energy...I gave more to my family (more generously, more emotionally, and those kind of things)...And, if my needs were controlled then that's when I really got more done." This private time became a solitary, positive outlet and essentially a reward for the long hours. Both work and family reaped the reward as well, "my productivity was able to pick up and in actuality I was working less hours because I was doing something that truly gave me energy. And, [my husband]...noticed that I could actually do more at home...."

Able to successfully manage her time and energy, Hope relays how she was offered a prestigious job for another big ten university by a former colleague who held a dean's position. The job, chief operating officer (COO), would require resettling the family to a new state and working for the dean. Weighing the benefits of the salary increase and career opportunity, Hope and her husband decide to accept the offer. Hope's voice simmers with a sense of disquiet as she states, "I thought I knew her; and, I knew how she would work. And, that she would afford me the same kinds of flexibility and would have reasonable expectations based on how I performed in [my current position]."

Disillusionment came swiftly as Hope finds herself spending almost eight months without her family. From a family perspective, Hope emotionally remembers speaking with her



family every night and visiting once or twice a month, “There was no work life balance at that point; and I was working 70 to 80 hours a week, including looking for houses for us...”

By July 2007, the family moves to their new home while Hope works at the office, at home, and even on her vacation days. “The expectation became greater and greater that I would always have to work 70 hours a week. And, without the help I was promised; but, it was not in my contract because I trusted her.” Hope’s voice trembles when reliving the stress and a sense of self-reproach creeps in for not having foreseen these issues. Through the words of her daughters, Hope tearfully acknowledges the toll separation took on her and the family, “You know Mom; we have been here over a year. We moved here for your job we realize; but, we never see you.” And, I said, “You know, I’m really sorry.” Although torn, Hope recalls remaining committed to her job working “12 to 14 hour-days, seven days a week” because the family had ‘just’ moved to a new state and stability in the family finances was vital.

With a magnified amount of stress and fatigue at emotional and physical levels, Hope recounts how she took her first family vacation in two years only to return to a very upset dean. During Hope’s absence a serious operational problem develops that turns her relationship with the dean “really bad.” The dean refuses to articulate the issue and Hope internalizes the disharmony, continuing to work at a frenetic pace of 90 hours a week.

Recognizing that this lifestyle was unsustainable, Hope’s voice catches as she recounts how a spiritual compact disc, *Zero Limits* by Joe Vitale, literally saved her life. Listening to the audio book on the drive to and from work for six months, Hope experiences her world more objectively.

I started being able to cope with my stress at work let alone the stress at home. And, I started actually trying to work at home instead of going into work on the weekends. So, at least I could be present in my house and I could spend a couple hours every day with my children and my husband.

With a broader perspective, Hope begins to reach out to others for help, including a representative in the Human Resources department whose “role is to advise and counsel and to be a confidant to those that are struggling.” In response to Hope’s concerns about the work environment, he points out patterns of behavior as an objective observer.

He said, “I’m going to give you insight about your boss that you do not realize. You’re not accepting yourself. So, I’m going to be point blank with you. I’m going to give you an insight about yourself. And, so, realize that I mean both in as a positive of a manner as I can. But, first you are the most Pollyanna like person I’ve ever met. You believe that if you work hard enough and that if you try hard enough (voice catches in throat) that all of this will better.” (tears)

And, I said, “Well, I lived through this with other difficult bosses and that’s what I did to make it better! (catch in the voice) I worked harder. Tried harder. I did better – whatever that better is!”

He said, “What you are not recognizing is that she doesn’t understand what better is. She changes the game to keep you off kilter so you keep working hard. She purposely likes to put people in pain. This is where she gets her joy.”

I sat there. I immediately stopped sobbing because I had been crying for like an hour (laughter) with this (laughter) poor man (laughter)! I had never done that before! Truly! I felt bad for him (laughter) and I said, “I’m normally I’m not like this.”

He said, “You are at your wits end.”

And, I said, “Yes, I am.”

And, he says, “So, Hope no matter how hard you work. No matter how loyal you are to this person. No matter how much she says she trusts you, she is always going to cause you pain so that you work harder. So that you eventually destroy your personal life; that’s what she is trying to do to you.”

Like a tea kettle letting off steam, this new awareness enables Hope to look at her situation from a different framework and feel stronger emotionally. Specifically, she actively seeks alternative ways to balancing work and family. At this point, work levels off to seventy and eighty hours a week.

However, with every cycle until a person can fully recognize the drivers of any issue, the pressure continues to rebuild until it can be resolved. After her first two-week vacation in two years, Hope again returns to a very angry boss. To compensate, Hope puts in three marathon days to catch up at the end of which she checks the clock – its seven o'clock in the evening and she just put in a 13-hour day with no break from her desk. She remembers saying to herself, “Well, I gotta go home. I can’t do one more thing. I’m so tired.” With no one else around, Hope hears a response to this statement.

And, it was like this voice [in my ear], “You’re tired. Yes. Your third day back from vacation and you’re as tired as you were when you left. You might not be able to do one more thing for the school; but, you can do one thing for yourself and actually look at the job line...” I was inspired to look at the University job line...and, so the fifth line down on this job line was the job that I currently have. It was like it was bolded and in 3-D. It was the only one that I saw.

Life lessons about work, money, and family drew together in that one moment and allow Hope to envision a different path. And, she knows instinctively that if she applies for the position, that it would be offered. Indeed, that is exactly what happened over the course of a few weeks. During the interview process, Hope clearly articulates the criticality of work life balance and that on average, she is only willing to work 50 hours a week. During the interview, Hope relates a portion of the conversation.

I know it feels like I’m beating you over the head with a two-by-four; but, you have no idea. When I say to you that I’m working 70-80 hours each and every week, I am working 70-80 hours each and every week. I work seven days a week. If I take this kind of pay cut. I cannot be expected to work lots of hours even to get up to speed. And, he said, “I understand. We believe here truly in a work life balance.”

Assured that the expectation is clearly understood, the next hurdle facing Hope is how to broach the job change with her husband because of the substantial pay cut and demotion. With honesty and clarity, Hope acknowledges being divinely guided to apply for the position because of the depth of pain she is experiencing in her current job.

I can tell you that if I don't take this job either our family is not going to survive. Or, I'm literally not going to physically survive this...I'm making the annual compensation of \$160,000. We're thinking of going to \$90,000 – It's a \$70,000 pay cut. I understand that and that is terrifying. But, I can honestly tell you for the first time in my life I'm not worried about it not working out.

Hope provides a spreadsheet with the family finances and after a couple nerve-wracking days of silent contemplation her husband agrees, "I'm willing to make the leap of faith with you as you've been describing it to me... I'm anxious. I'm worried about it; but, I'm going to try to not be worried about it. But, if you could get just a little more money that would make me feel better."

Eventually, Hope obtains the job at an agreeable salary and most importantly she attains her goal of work-life balance. "I have a sane boss that doesn't keep changing his mind. Doesn't set unrealistic expectations [*sic*]." Over the course of the last two years, Hope continues to enjoy a balanced lifestyle. Should Hope work more than the expected hours, her boss reminds her, "Hope, if you're hours are outside of mine, which they are, you are working too much." By listening to her inner guidance, Hope finds herself in a job that is challenging and personally satisfying while giving her time to enjoy life.

Having worked in an environment with unrealistic expectations which created dysfunction at mental, physical and emotional levels, Hope recommends that organizations value a "person's life in the context with how it affects, in a positive way, how it affects work; and, how if you have employees that love what they do; that have that balance outside work, then they will be more productive in the long run for you." Hope ticks off the facts that organizations would also incur less medical benefits and reduce turnover. The advice ends on a note of admonition, "And, when you have someone at [that] high level [who] is dysfunctional, make them accountable and get them out."

Hope also discusses the need to implement a standard 40-hour work week for all employees, including salaried employees. She explains, "...the organization should be structured in such a way and things should be efficient enough within that organization that 40 hours should be plenty of time to get the work that is needed done." Hope continues to explain that if employees are spending more than 40 hours a week then the job should be reevaluated and the employee counseled to determine if assistance is needed. When asked to consider if employees would start 'hiding' hours, she responds that a healthy organization is required to make this a reality, "...everyone in the organization has to be emotionally and physically stable...Then, they can fully present their issues with performance with the employee in a caring manner as opposed to punitive."

Curiously, Hope does not believe that a 40-hour work week is possible at present. Shaking her head, she states that 50 to 55 hours are the norm in her organization. Over a typical 52-work week, Hope gives the organization an extra 520 hours based on a 40-hour work week. The indirect compensation for this time equates to time off without recording it as vacation hours.

I don't do it frequently my boss is OK with that so last summer I took a couple of afternoons of during the week to go to a [pro-ball] game with my husband. I did not take vacation. I did not make up that time. And so I did not meet my 50 hours that week; but, everybody was ok with that.

The flat-out, matter-of-fact statement carries a tone of acceptance in working ten or more hours a day. Yielding to the norm may be a natural consequence of working at the extreme of 70-90 hours for the previous three years. The fact that Hope only noted taking a couple of days off does not nearly compensate her for all the time given to the organization annually. Further, Hope does not articulate or seem to recognize the apparent inequity.

Hope more freely gives advice to her children taken from her own life lessons. Without hesitation, Hope states, “Oh, I’ve already given that to them. Find something that you passionately love to do and it won’t be like work...Listen to your heart. Try to find where you’re being guided to do; and, do that.” In follow up to this statement, Hope is asked to consider how organizations and culture can affect a person’s work experience and drive one’s ability to balance work and family.

If you truly follow your heart, you’re not going to be working a lot of hours...Because when you follow your heart you are being divinely guided to do this and divinity does not want any of us to struggle and to be out of balance. We cause our own self to be out of balance by not listening well enough – not being able to listen, whatever. So, if we all follow what we’re supposed to do in life, we would have this in balance most of the time...My entire adult life has been some type of struggle because I have forced things to work. Lots of energy to make things work. And, so as soon as I started letting go of that forcing, my life became a lot more balanced.

Hope concludes that “Work life balance is not just about spending time with your family. Truly. It’s also spending for your self - doing something that will re-energize you...It’s not work home – its work life.” Aligning to this ideal requires a deep, ongoing commitment to personal values and a clear understanding of one’s life goals.

*Key terms and definitions.*

In the following heart-inspired definitions, Hope responds firmly and from a nexus of having seen and experienced the worst as well as the best of workplaces. Hope is also a highly spiritual individual which allows her to share a new vision of work-life balance that is loving, cooperative, and designed to benefit the individual as well as the organization.

1. Well-being means “living from your heart...give [people] the support and love they need and... [they] are willing to accept...in turn that only feeds you and gives you energy both physically, emotionally and mentally.”

2. Work-life balance to Hope is best defined by what it is not, “It is not having to work a lot of hours on a consistent basis [and] being able to when you leave work actually leave it at work and not think about it all night or all weekend long...”
3. Work life ideally is a place where, “everyone would come to work with the best of intentions for what is good for the organization knowing that what is good for the whole will also benefit them individually...a joyous place to come to work.”
4. Family life includes being able to spend quality time with your family doing activities individually and together. Ensuring when children need you that you are available for them. Having time to spend with your spouse and children individually and as a group; so, you as whole group spend time together.”
5. A boss is someone who, “...saw the world from a spiritual and heartfelt place; someone that can be completely honest and not cruel; someone that can communicate in a clear concise unobtrusive manner; [and], someone that loves...every employee in the organization as well as him/herself.”
6. A coworker is a “collaborator...[someone] willing to bring their gifts and talents as an individual to benefit whatever the work is...someone that actually enjoys coming to work, loves what they do, and loves being around everyone that is at work.”
7. Boundaries for Hope would change if the workplace also changes to be a heart-centered community. In this sense boundaries become flexible because “when [work] is a community, then at times it will involve your family, involve potentially your personal time, activities...in that environment, that ideal environment, they also are your good friends potentially and not just people that you work with.”

8. Commitment is where the employee “gives a 100 percent every day...the employer appreciates the skills and the work...the employee will give extra effort as needed. You, the employer, recognize the extra effort and do not take advantage of the need for extra effort.”
9. Current ratios of work-life balance total 42 percent work and 33 percent personal/family time. Assuming a 24-hour period, hours spent working rounds to ten and personal family time is about eight hours, leaving six hours for sleep.
10. Ideal ratios of work-life balance are 40 percent work and 35 percent personal/family time.

Hope’s heart-centered worldview redefines commonly accepted definitions of work and family. Cooperation and community form a work/family environment that enables personal and collective growth. In this scenario, boundaries blur while a loving commitment to both work and family are held firm. Hope’s experience is unique in that her current work environment comes very close to the heart-centered terms and their meanings.

**Joy.** Joy retrospectively expresses her career and lived experiences through the multiple frames of a non-profit agency, a public relations agency, and a higher education institution. Within each of these sectors, Joy has specialized in communications. During this time, she married and gave birth to two boys who are teenagers today. In her mid-forties, Joy skillfully manages time as a partnership between work, family and herself.

A typical work day generally begins with Joy’s husband handling ‘the morning breakfast routine’ while she heads to the gym for a morning workout. By 8:00 a.m. Joy is at the office for a nine-hour shift that allows her to return home by 5:30 p.m. Excluding international trips, Joy



provides her employer with over 240 extra hours a year. When asked if this is an acceptable job arrangement, she replies:

Yea, I mean that doesn't seem to be OK (laughter). I mean although you know like I said I have a job that I love. I have a team that I love. And I (pause) and the flexibility you can't really put a dollar figure on it. You know I mean you know I had a couple long days in DC this week and came to work from the airport yesterday, worked for a bit, went to lunch, and was off for the afternoon, you know. So, yea...the tradeoffs made it worth it I think.

For the most part, Joy tries to leave work at the office. After having earned a Master's degree in 2009, Joy tries to maintain a pledge not to bring work home on a routine basis. When exceptions to this personal promise come up, Joy confirms, "...obviously I still do when it's required; but, I try to make a habit of not doing that." After a short pause, Joy also observes that technology routinely intervenes, making it difficult to shut off work completely.

It's so funny to see how technology has sort of seeped into our lives. You know, both of my kids have laptops. I have a laptop. My husband has a [laptop]. I mean there are times when we are all sitting around the living room together and we all have our computers on our laps...I'm still really connected to work even when I'm at home with emailing and stuff like that.

On a positive note, technology also plays a key role in family communications when Joy travels internationally (approximately six to eight weeks a year). "They're old enough where they're emailing and we can text and all that kind of stuff... So, I think we are able to still keep the lines of communications open even if I'm on the road." Whether working on the road or in the office, Joy emphasizes her husband's role in helping to make the family run smoothly. Both Joy and her husband enjoy careers that are challenging and which do not necessarily start and stop with the click of time clock. Therefore, each pinch hits for the other as needed. They also consciously set aside times with the children that integrate their lives as a family. For example, Joy's husband fixes the boys a hot breakfast most mornings and Joy leaves work early for ball games or arrives to work later in the morning if there are other important school activities.

Ultimately for Joy, work-life balance in the context of raising a family, gives rise to an understanding that

each stage of raising kids has its own unique stressors and challenges. And, sort of trying not to let that interfere with your day can be challenging at times. And vice versa, I mean I don't want to bring my work stresses home to my family...There's just so much – because everything is twenty four hours! (laughter) Everything seeps into everything else and I don't think it's fair to either thing to allow that to happen.

Switching gears, Joy compares the very different worlds of a non-profit, for-profit, and higher education. Citing colleagues and job flexibility as the largest contributors to achieving work life balance, Joy also alludes to the combination of the work environment and time demands as factors in perceiving work-life balance.

**Non-Profit Experience:** When I was at Planned Parenthood (early nineties and late eighties) they had a thirty-five hour work week and that was like lights on at 8:30 a.m. (not a minute before) and lights off at 4:30 p.m. And, you know, if you were there you had to you know (laughter) figure out how to get the lights back (laughter). My work experiences since then have been more 24x7...

**For-Profit and Higher Education Experiences:** It was a total grind working at the PR agency and I didn't feel a lot of fondness for the people that I worked for just because there was that demand to be there all the time. And, here even though there's the expectation for a similar amount of work and productivity that flexibility that I have now is – I mean it just makes all the difference. You know, in terms of my commitment to my job, my feelings about my superiors and the leadership at the university and things like that. So, but again, I think my husband's work schedule affords me a lot of – a lot of that balance that I'm able to have.

Joy describes a time when the PR agency provided a natural confluence of imbalance between work and family. In the midst of juggling the exhilaration of highly creative work against having to meet a certain 'bill-ability target', Joy loses her sense of work-life balance. Her voice reflects the strain in recollection of "the pressure to produce, to work long hours, to generate new business...So, the hours got really long. Had a really long commute and that's where I really started to feel the stress of being a working parent." She describes a point of crises leading to a pivotal career change.

I distinctly remember an incident or an occasion where I was rushing to leave work to go pick up my kids from their after school program. I know there was not a prayer in the world that I was going to make it there on time. But, it's just one of those things where I'm standing there pushing the button on the elevator repeatedly (laughter) you know, out of frustration because I was in such a hurry.

And, I thought to my[self] (slight pause) – and, prior to my kids being school-aged we had nannies that lived with us, which was great because that gave us a lot of flexibility in terms of working and things like that. But, by the time they were in school, we didn't have that anymore. So, they were in an afterschool program. And, so you know, the six o'clock deadline was pretty firm. And, so I thought to myself as I was pushing that elevator button repeatedly, "We need to get another nanny."

And, then just as I was driving home, I thought that's the last thing we need. You know, I just need to get another job, a different job. And, so that's what I did. I started looking for a job that was closer to home; a little more flexible; not quite so demanding in terms of time; and, I came to work at the university. And that's where I found much, much more balance and flexibility than I had at the agency. So, that's where I am now.

Finding a job that affords Joy the flexibility to participate in her children's school or sporting events is essential to her sense of wellness. Joy also comments that in the early years of her children's development childcare (e.g., after-school programs) played an important role in work life balance. During the summer, college students would be hired to help take care of the boys. Trusting the people who cared for the children increased Joy's experience of work-life balance. In a nut shell, Joy believes that, "Our child care arrangements have helped with the sanity and with the balance." Although the boys are older and child care is much less of an issue there is still a need for ongoing support and peace of mind when Joy travels. Specifically, Joy appreciates knowing that her three sisters live locally and can help in a pinch.

Looking at her career path, Joy feels very grateful for her journey, even when the change affected family finances. Matter-of-factly, Joy explains how moving from the PR agency to higher education resulted in a 20 percent pay cut for the same number of hours. The tradeoff of pay for flexibility is a benefit – "the sense of well-being and the sense of balance is a reward that you really can't quantify." In taking the step towards the university, Joy's goal remains the

same, “becoming more sane and having better work-life balance.” Her voice lifts a little bit, showing the surprise in how the university has afforded more professional opportunities than at the PR agency. With the conviction of having made the right decision for her and her family, Joy happily concludes, “I’m convinced that a lot of that has to do with being more committed to this place because they are - they seem to be more committed to me and my success.”

Joy’s awareness of the challenges in balancing work and family has led her to supervise staff that reflects her values. “I give them as much flexibility as they need to do what they need to do too because I know how important it is.” With a strong belief in walking her talk, Joy confirms that supervision requires her to be present which provides stability for the staff. However, it does add to the long hours or less flexibility in working remotely from home. “...I’m under some pressure to set a good example for [my direct reports and] even the people under them who are young twenty-somethings [who] don’t have kids...You know, there first and leave last.”

Intrinsic in this last statement is Joy’s work ethic and personal values that drive her work-life balance decisions. This constancy carries over to how Joy sets personal priorities and develops a flexible work environment for her staff. Underlying these values is trust – in herself, co-workers and superiors. Joy believes that these values are essential factors in changing American society.

I think women put a lot of pressure on themselves to sort of do it all and I think it is probably important to set priorities. And, you know, some of those in my life have been family meals. A priority hasn’t been physical activity; but, some women, for them, that’s what they need to keep sane and survive. So, you know, setting priorities that are – that lead to your own mental well-being and physical well-being as well as your family is important. And, I think women are much more willing to sacrifice their own well-being for everything else and they probably should pay more attention to their own well-being...I think it is important to give the working parents that work for me the flexibility that I enjoy.

And, so I think trusting [engenders] the same kind of commitment that I feel to my superiors to produce because they're being given that flexibility. So, I think much more flexibility needs to happen in the workplace. You know with the appropriate boundaries and you know I can see how that can be abused which it hasn't been in my case."

Joy's advice for her children boils down to being fulfilled and happy individuals. "I think it is really to do what is right for you. And, for some people that means not having a family and really focusing on your career. And, to do what is right for you in terms of what makes you happy, not what everybody else expects of you." Should her boys decide to work and have a family, Joy shares these thoughts, "I've learned through all of this balancing act is the most important thing is the family [*sic*]. And, so any sort of path you can set yourself on to enable that, you know whether it is early in your career or as you start having children, it's going to be important for everybody's wellbeing (your kids, your home, everything like that)."

*Key terms and definitions.*

Joy's optimism and transitional journey between three very different organizations inspires her heart-felt definitions of a balanced lifestyle. For Joy, a theme of community and natural co-existence between work and family reshapes the two into one, interconnected reality.

1. Well-being includes "minimal stress, optimal physical health...fulfilling family and profession relationships."
2. Work-life balance is a complementary existence between work and family.
3. Work life is defined through employee engagement which exists with collegial respect and friendships.
4. Family life recognizes the need to share household responsibilities and allowing each parent time to take care of themselves. Joy speaks to the issue of traditional roles and a need to break out of "societal expectations and...share all those responsibilities across the family [for] the better."

5. A boss is more “collegial” and not as authoritative or hierarchical as in the past.
6. A coworker is a colleague which is “equalizing and more inclusive” than the term coworker which seems too “industrial.”
7. Boundaries for Joy have limited the success of organizations. Rather, she advocates a “breaking down of boundaries [which has] been a secret to really excellent work, relationships and high productivity!”
8. Commitment is defined through success on the job. For Joy, “the way that commitment looks every day is that I work really hard.”
9. Current ratios of work-life balance were difficult to pinpoint; however, the categories of work, family, friends, and a sliver for self would be the components.
10. Ideal ratios of work-life balance supports equal attention to work, family, friends, and self.

Moving away from established organizations and engrained definitions, Joy’s definitions reflect a free-spirit approach to work. Similar to Hope and Lilly, Joy believes in melding and blending of work and family. By understanding an individual’s passions and contributions to the organization in concurrence with their personal life, there is an opportunity to build a stronger support system to lead a healthier lifestyle.

**Lilly.** With a zest for life, Lilly experiences living as a professional working mother joyfully and from a position of spiritual centeredness. At age 64, Lilly owns her own business and is divorced with an 18 year old son. When reflecting on her arrival to this point in her career, Lilly speaks of a time when “women were just teacher or nurses.” Since these were the only options, she recalls electing to be a teacher at which point she learned that “that there’s loads of different possible things I could do...” After one year teaching, Lilly’s desire for a more

personally satisfying job began a search for alternative career opportunities. With a bachelor's degree, Lilly speaks with surprise and gratitude about how quickly she found a job in the corporate sector with the Pillsbury Company.

As Lilly looks back on her 28 year business career, she fondly remembers Pillsbury as the place that sparked her passion for marketing. Reflective of the times, Pillsbury invested in their employees' development, "They really trained me and sent me back to school...I worked for Pillsbury for about seven years and got to be a head of that marketing services department." As with many good employees, Lilly was recruited within the same industry multiple times which led to growing her own departments and experimenting with new ideas.

A pioneer, Lilly treaded new ground as a woman in executive levels of management. This translated into workdays that began around 8:00 AM and lasted "until the job gets done (laughter) and it's not unusual to bring stuff home...Your job really is your life...it kind of gets woven in with your family and it's not like...you leave and it's done." Lilly's voice trails a bit and upon further inquiry as to how work follows one home, she responds cheerfully.

I would come home...I'd say 5:30 p.m. maybe. And sometimes it was later just because we had meetings that were later so you had to, you know. But, typically it was more like that and then I would spend that time you know at dinner and just spend time with [my son]. And, weekends I tried to really spend time with him, take him to parks and you know we tried to make up time since you're not there every day during the day you know. I didn't feel guilty about it because I knew for myself that just staying home all day, the whole week, would be -- is not what I wanted really.

Lilly's outgoing nature and fulfillment in her work is mirrored in her last comment. With a strong sense of self, Lilly easily accepts the demands of the job with the understanding that work often dictates life's priorities in order to survive and to live. "You have to have this done and you have to go out of town...That would often have to take priority over anything that was happening at home...I didn't feel we had choices. I guess a person did if they didn't want to

have a job (laughter)!” Lilly also describes the personal adjustments when working at an executive level in terms of time with family and childcare.

I was willing to do whatever I had to do to get the job done. And I did a lot of travel. And, that’s the time I had [my son]...but I was willing to juggle things around it... I tried to bring [my son] to a center but ...it wasn’t personal care. So, I ended up hiring a (nanny)... someone who came in every day. And it was a woman who was like a grandma...So, in that sense I was much more fortunate than a lot of women. You know a lot of women could not, didn’t have that option. And, so that is the other thing that gave some peace of mind so that when I traveled and of course my husband was home at night but when I traveled I was comfortable during the day [knowing] he was being taken care of and that was really important to me otherwise I would’ve quit for sure.

The years spent in co-creating and orchestrating projects, uplifts Lilly’s voice in recollection as she states, “I had a lot of independence and they were trusting... it was a wonderful feeling... you were part of it and you owned it almost even though you didn’t.” However, as the industry grew “the whole culture changed; they brought in new people cause things were getting bigger...so it was taking on the flavor, more and more [like] bigger organizations where quite often you don’t have the same ownership feeling.”

In Lilly’s experience, this feeling of ownership has been replaced by rules, regulations and surveillance tactics to make sure “everybody tows the line.” From Lilly’s perspective, people bring a positive or neutral charge to the workplace that affects work life balance. “I do know one thing about organizations, there’s a lot of politics (laugh)...I started finding out it’s not so much the place, it’s the person who’s in charge that makes the difference in an environment.” This fundamental change in the work culture initiated job transitions to other organizations with none deeply tapping into her experience or passion.

Sometimes it takes an outside observer or confidant to nudge a person in a different direction. For Lilly, this moment came when a colleague commented “You gotta leave. You’re wasting your energy here.” Taking the first step in imagining a different career, Lilly considers



what professional options would bring her internal peace, satisfaction and financial security. In allowing personal values to drive her next move, Lilly realizes that during her career an avocation towards wellness had always been present, “you know how your mind opens up to new possibilities when you’re looking (laughter)? Otherwise, you may not see.”

Synchronistically, while Lilly ponders how to combine her passion for wellness and marketing, she is introduced to a Japanese company which offers innovative, energy-based products. Realizing that the products enhance people’s daily life without requiring them to change their habits is a marketing boon, Lilly exclaims, “Wow! This is something that I could probably make money on!”

With her job criteria met (passion, financial security, and ownership), Lilly takes all of her experience and energy into developing her own wellness business. Lilly explains the impact of the career change to family life in terms of flex time. “My son was getting [older]...I’d have more time with him...which was a key thing...and, when they had school activities like going out for the day and they needed cars and all that...I took part in that.”

Today, Lilly still works in the wellness industry, scheduling work to fit her life. “The flexibility of it and the excitement of having something again that I was passionate about, it kind of reminded me when I was back in Land ‘O Lakes starting up a new division. It just – there was an excitement there that surpassed – you know, you kind of learn that juggling isn’t no big deal because it just is because you are passionate about it!”

Consistently, Lilly discusses passion for one’s work as a spiritual process. Therefore, when asked to give any recommendations for change, Lilly first contemplates changing a corporate environment through self-discovery.

My life attitudes changed so much over time with my experiences. And, I remember how important the work was – I mean it was really important because that’s where the

livelihood came from and you knew you had a set of expectations – sort of like it’s pounded into us that that’s an important thing in our life, you know. And, so you follow that even though sometimes you’re following it rotely maybe...there are a bunch of belief systems in our society that are kind of the groundwork for where you start from. You may be more independent in some ways; but, still that was a big part that I look back and think now I don’t know if I could have dedicated the same way based on what I know now and what I consider important...

If given the chance to throw away all those belief systems that she grew up with and design an organization that balances work and family in healthy ways, Lilly would first instill a sense of individual ownership.

I can’t express how important that is because that will change everything. Because I know when I felt that way with certain – I would have done anything. I mean, but I still loved my family and all that stuff. But, I would have found ways to balance those things out. Whereas, if you have kind of negative attitude – frankly, I think – I think more than half of the organizations maybe – 70 to 80 percent (chuckle) have people who just - they can hardly wait to get home! So, they’re pulling their hours because they have to. They have no ownership in it. Their happiness level is at zero.

At the core of matter is one’s affinity towards their job. If an employee is unfulfilled, then Lilly believes, “that influences all the things we’ve talked about in a very negative way. It puts more emotional stress on you. Therefore, it affects your home life, your work life; it affects everything [around] you personally.” Lilly stresses hiring with established parameters and clear expectations as well as training to develop personal ownership and job satisfaction.

...if they’re happy you have to do less and less. And, as a result, you’re emotional baggage becomes less. Because I think - I don’t think you get tired as much from the work because if you love it you don’t necessarily get tired. You can probably work 10 to 12 hours a day. But, it’s that emotional stuff...that can exhaust you very easily. So, if you...can work in all these areas to limit that emotional baggage and be at peace internally.

Placing the right candidate is just as important as addressing situations where there are imperfect job fits. If there is a job incompatibility, Lilly suggests turning within at a personal level. “I’m very, very convinced that your environment outside of you doesn’t have to affect you if you’re whole inside...[and], the more you can sweep away the judgment because everybody is

a little bit different than you...[it] creates a more respectful environment.” Once a person stands objectively within their situation, it is easier to recognize the layered structures of existence that create our day.

...the things that we do within an organization [are] based on a very entrenched belief system and we don't question those beliefs. So, it's the basic foundation of that system and it is just there and we don't even know it's there. It's just so much of a habit – it's sort of like putting your foot – your right foot in first in your pant leg, you know. It's sort of just like automatic and you don't question it. And, when you don't question it, there's no way to change it.

Equally important, Lilly trusts that “nothing is perfect.” With this knowledge, Lilly looks at the big picture to make sure time is well-spent balancing work, family and self. She emphasizes that relationships with self and children requires “making sure that you're not only taking time for yourself but you take time for your children and where you're not thinking about work...just relaxing and being in the moment.”

Lilly models the lifestyle that she advises and wishes for her son. In addition to guiding him to seek a career that he is passionate about, Lilly shares how her attitude towards blending work and family translates into everyday life.

I've given him the balance of the two and showed the importance of family and the importance of people, and the importance [of] relationships and how important those are within that total environment...So, I never sorted things – this is my work life. Cut it off. This is my home life...You do have to, to some extent, because you want to spend time with your family; but, it wasn't a clear cut designation – like, you know, I worked for five hours and I never think about my work anymore. But, I also wasn't the type to spend a lot of time worrying about stuff. I know that some people have trouble sleeping (their mind is going 'bzzzzz' with work) you know? I didn't have that.”

To stay centered amidst a very challenging work environment, Lilly recommends meditation. “I meditated every day and I think some of those things really helped me control the mind chatter that can drive people crazy.” Lilly also cites the importance of working with other mothers.

I also had quite a number of women in my department that had several little kids. You know, had babies and so I was able to relate to that – tried to cut slack you know, about things had to be done then because I knew they were people who cared about what they were doing and so having that kind of support was really important. I just realized how important it was for myself. So, having more women in that environment has been I would think helpful too.

This recollection taken from her past makes Lilly consider the importance of making a livelihood while navigating societal belief systems around gender, especially working mothers. Specifically, rules are put in place that may be ego-politically based which builds competition and a ‘survivor’ mentality. In the 1960’s when women were breaking new ground at the executive level there seemed to be an acceptance of these job structures.

During the follow-up interview, Lilly talks about how to bring about positive change to society’s “hierarchy of beliefs” through compassion, trust, and non-judgment.

...I don’t have any illusions that you would change that like that (snap of the fingers). But, I think that you can change it by just the energy you bring to it. I really do and some of the things that happened – well, all the things that happen that people get involved in they are really lessons for them I think. I think you can use life like as lessons to work toward love. You know. And, if you do that, you are growing in that direction because everything - I don’t think it’s any particular type of thing that is better or not as good than another. It’s what you bring to it as well – of yourself.

Lilly’s passionate response reflects a core belief that change always begins with the person observing what is not working well and believing “that everybody at the core is a loving human being...a loving child of God.” Valuing others empowers Lilly to “act from that place [within oneself]. [Because] the only thing you can do is work on your own personal reactions...and stay at peace yourself.”

*Key terms and definitions.*

In the following heart-inspired definitions, Lilly continues to focus her responses from a deep understanding that wellness springs from her core value and belief system. Hence, Lilly defines many of the terms from a spiritual and holistic perspective.

1. Well-being reflects Lilly's number one core value of internal peace. She explains, "I think the goal is that if you have internal peace, it means that there is love and passion and you know, self well-being. And, it has to come from the heart."
2. Work-life balance is a 'blending' of one's world "so they can stay within peace and stay consistent with themselves."
3. Work life mirrors one's "Passion...Coming from the heart (pause) it is sort of a joy of working with people and creating something together."
4. Family life is "Love, gentleness, laughter, and a general caring for each other. Respect for each other. (pause) Sharing of the little joys in life."
5. A boss is "...trusting, encouraging, respectful, from that delegating with belief in the person's ability and goodness. (pause) It would be called servant leadership."
6. A coworker is a "Team, respect, caring, sharing ideas, thoughts, human being."
7. Boundaries means to "Focus on the positive. Come from a place of passion and love and not judgment."
8. Commitment is to, "Act, believe and think in concert. Make [sure] those are consistent with one another. (pause) Stay true to your word and beliefs..."
9. Current ratios of work-life balance is an equal split between work, family and self.
10. Ideal ratios of work-life balance are reflected in Lilly's current work-life balance ratios.

### **Group Composite**

The professional working mothers participating in this study embody five decades of workforce experience while nurturing two cultural generations in American society. All exhibit strength, independence, and a deeply loving family-orientation which becomes foundational in

their commitment to work. When a passionate work ethic combines with a demanding executive career, the work days often average eleven hours with approximately four hours with family and up to two hours for oneself (excluding sleep).

Although averages portray a typical day, the many factors that play into whether an 11-hour day turns into 9 or 14 are often lost. Family activities or illness, which are atypical, usually account for reducing work hours to a 9-hour shift. However, more often than not, the workdays are extended due to cross-county virtual teams which translate into early morning as well as late evening calls; business travel; unplanned or time-consuming cyclical projects (e.g., budget preparation); and, a general expectation to be available whenever needed. Hence, the compulsory nature of these expectations amongst all employees sustains lengthy work hours. These structural and cultural routines develop ongoing expectations that create challenges in balancing work and family.

Flexibility in working from home further entrenches open-ended availability because the office is always within reach as is the Blackberry. Without a sustained and dedicated time for self or family, work unconsciously seeps and melds into the weekends. Vacations can also be difficult to arrange and honor given work schedules. Despite working extensive hours each week, even taking a sick day or time off for an appointment can be tough to take without worry or being compelled to 'make up' the time. Consistently yielding more time to work strengthens the physical, mental, and emotional ties to the organization thereby reinforcing work as a priority over a healthy lifestyle that allows for rest and rejuvenation.

When work life dominates mind, body, and spirit over long periods of time, these professional working mothers acknowledge that individual and family well-being imbalances arise. Left unattended, these imbalances tend to ebb and flow until individual and/or family

adjustments cannot support job requirements. Usually experienced as a point of personal crisis, these professional working mothers more readily step out of the day-to-day work mode and take stock of their career and lifestyle. Space created for reflection manifests a broader perspective to envision a different way of being present in their lives. Awake to new opportunities, many participants have been inspired to build a better work-life balance by seeking new jobs or work arrangements.

Successful work-life balance transitions are largely contingent on each person's ability to see their work and family from an integrated perspective. Ideally, boundaries can blur as long as current work demands do not overshadow spending time with family and enjoying individual pursuits. To achieve this goal, several participants recommend increasing employee lifestyle flexibility and commitment to their employer as a way to expanding productivity. However, this is not a unanimous viewpoint as two participants reason that flexibility can be a "double-edged sword" with the capacity to over-engage employees' time. Without any easy answer to form the perfect union between work and family, the solution rests with each individual to follow their heart when it comes to defining and attaining a work-life balance that fits their situation.

At the core, each participant points to a need for living in alignment with one's personal truths of what is right for one's self and family. In essence, we create our world to match our perceived and real needs. In those times when we lose sight of what we value most, our world may seem chaotic and lop-sided. Embracing these times with loving compassion for ourselves and the situation enables us to look at our world differently. Although not necessarily easy or painless, we can start to question why we do the things we do. In turn, our personal understanding of ourselves potentially grows and responds differently under the stresses that life presents while striving towards our ideal of work-life balance.

### **Structural Description**

In the exploration of structure for the participants, it is critical to view the phenomena from several vantage points. Where textural descriptions detail “what” the participants experienced as professional working mothers, the structural descriptions reflect “how” the experience happened. For the purposes of this study, analysis encompasses the expressed physical, mental, and emotional structures which inspire career and family decisions. Individually and collectively, these elements construct a multi-faceted understanding of the context in which professional working mothers live.

At the physical level of location, these women blend work and family in three key ways and in varying amounts determined by their belief systems, values, and organizational mandates. First, all women remain connected technologically to their work during and after normal business hours. Second, although the extent of time fluctuates by participant, they all work from home. Third, all regularly travel as part of their job responsibilities. No longer is work limited to an office or window of time.

Today, professional working mothers are tapped into work at a moment’s notice. The tradeoff presents itself as flexibility to work from home and to take time off without recording it as vacation; however, more often than not, the amount of time working never offsets personal time taken for family emergencies or activities. It seems that the ideal of having flexibility to foster more balance in one’s life also breeds an acceptance of working more than eight hours a day. Further, working after normal business hours becomes habitual unless a concerted effort is made to restrict work from extending into family time.

While describing their daily lives, the collective habits and culture of an organization clearly play a role in how professional working mothers experience their location. Cited as key influencers to work life balance are proper planning; virtual team meetings across multiple time



zones; and, team members who do not have children expect '24 x 7' availability. Usually, personal adjustments are made to support the team needs at the expense of personal time or additional day care options. Participants acknowledge the less than ideal situations that arise and a desire for more reasonable (e.g., 40-50 hour) work weeks; however, most did not articulate alternatives to the current norms due to their level of commitment to work.

Supporting these behaviors are mental models which play a key role in influencing these professional working mothers' perception of work, job requirements, and performance expectations. Each woman holds a unique understanding based on the culmination of her life experiences and chosen career path. Nevertheless, when comparing the spectrum of participant narratives several experiences cluster around similar challenges.

Foremost, all women believe that at the executive level, the job responsibilities make a 40-hour work week unrealistic. Although workload, technology, and travel contribute to exceeding the stated full-time national average, the attitude of "I'll do whatever it takes to get the job done" reinforces the long hours. Moreover, this mindset results in not being fully compensated for their time and being compelled to work while on vacation. Acceptance of this work-life trend stems from a general belief that there are no other viable options – speaking up would be akin to the canary in the coal mine and may cost them positional status or their career.

Each participant also believes in putting family first. An executive level position assures the possibilities of excellent daycare options, college education for their children, and comfortable middle-class home lives. In exchange for the American dream are boundaries that often blur. A paradox sometimes forms wherein the 'family first' construct comes at a price of having work overrunning family and individual restorative time. Also, family remains on the

women's background radar which can create a split focus while working. Any ongoing imbalance can lead to a point of crisis and assessing one's lifestyle.

The participants' narratives also serve as a reminder that everyone faces their location uniquely; meaning, no one else can truly know what it means to walk in their shoes. All express a passion and commitment to work. All convey a major event that causes a shift in their lifestyle. Throughout the participant accounts, the observer only witnesses a partial translation of the professional working mother's experiences. Therefore, when a crisis occurs, it is not a relative, peer, boss, or human resources representative who comes to the aid of the individual. It is the individual making the time and space to reflect on what is meaningful in her life which triggers any substantive change in lifestyle.

Also when viewing location within the spectrum of participant lifestyles, each woman's belief systems, personal values, and routines interact to define how a work day unfolds. Mental models begin to differ between participants, starting with the amount of control one has to establish work life balance. The gauge begins with Angie who struggles most to fit everything and everyone into her day to Hope who holds herself as well as her organization accountable for maintaining work life balance or Lilly who freely blends work and family. Joy and Jessie fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum, flexibly managing work and family as they see fit. Essentially, the mental model of power or control over one's day plus the exercise of that power and control allows the participants to experience life on the gamut of weariness to joy.

For those who spend most days with passion or joy, a meditative space anchors their level of satisfaction with life. This includes time for oneself and outside interests. Established as a part of a balanced lifestyle, participants expressing these values seem to sustain an outlook of abundance and the flexibility to meet the day-to-day needs of work, self, and family. In contrast,

when steeped in the day without personal perspective or power to set boundaries, a more fear-based emotion of scarcity is expressed. Examples include the need to bank time or knowing there is not enough time with family or feeling there is too much work for one day – all of which create blind spots to any other living options. While in this frame of mind, reconciling work and family issues becomes extremely difficult.

Lilly and Joy describe the need for individual ownership as a way to resolve these issues. Others describe having some type of ‘line in the sand’ that keeps concerns from becoming crises. No matter the term, all women agree that it is up to the individual to examine their level of satisfaction with life and ensure that it fits them personally and professionally. Better Family Medical Leave Act support that reflects the spirit of the law, more pay, fewer hours, or vacation policies will not substantively help someone who doesn’t deeply understand what they want out of their life or who is not passionate about their job. For the more narrowly that individuals look at their options, the less likely circumstances will change. The new charge is to open up and develop an integrated, balanced lifestyle that evolves as a person and their family matures. As many of the participants suggest, one must question whether cultural norms serve to bring joy and peace into one’s life. If not, take a leap of faith. Ask for the seemingly impossible and see what happens.

### **Textural and Structural Synthesis**

The five professional working mothers represent an evolutionary process of thought and belief systems spanning over sixty years of American society. Since the time women were consigned to being teachers, nurses or homemakers, great strides have been made to open doors for women to hold leadership positions within society. However, the undercurrents of societal values and cultural norms around what it means to be an exemplary employee have been slower to change while the pressures for profit and working time have increased.

For many, the result is long work days, including blended work and family time during the evenings and weekends. During these extended hours, spouses and childcare providers afford peace of mind that their children are well-cared for and safe. Although the participants agree this is less than ideal, accepting ‘what is’ in the context of supporting one’s family becomes essential in reconciling the impact of current job structures on family life. However without passion for one’s career and compromise on the part of the organization to support work-life balance, job dissatisfaction arises.

How one decides to handle the situation at this juncture seems to correlate to the participants’ age, experience, self-worth, as well as a willingness to question their acceptance of the status quo. Seen as a time to turn inside, many participants explore how a job or career becomes ill-fitting. Emerging from reflection, participants discover new possibilities that engage their passions and deliver a better work-life balance for their everyday life.

Note the term *better* work-life balance – not *ideal* work-life balance. Living in today’s workforce standards, forty-hour work weeks are non-existent at the executive level. Transitioning to this ideal requires collective will-power to redefine existing performance expectations. Work-life from a heart-centered position includes recognizing “the whole person” and characterizing excellence through productivity and output rather than hours of availability. Allowing for a “blending of one’s world” that honors time for oneself and family, an organization can foster a co-creative, joy-filled community. Therefore, it is the community who rewrites the “social covenants” and enables this model of work-life balance to blossom.

On the journey to reaching this new paradigm, these women continue to be leaders in their workplace and community. To a large extent, all seem to recognize that society conceptually defines work and family in opposition to each other. Rather than put the task to

society or their existing community to resolve, each takes ownership for realizing their ideal work-life balance. The hope is that over time, the duality established between work and family diminishes to a point where change to a more collaborative, complementary model can evolve.

## **Literature Review Comparison and Contrastment**

### **Introduction**

Study participants' lifestyles depict an evolving work-life balance trend from an opposing, separatist issue (work versus family) to an intertwining and soulful imperative (work and family). Specifically, the personal journeys exemplify how executive-level responsibilities press into one's life from all angles and planes of existence – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. To better understand these dynamics within the participants' lived experiences, the women's career choices, daily routines, recommendations for change, and advice for their children will be compared and contrasted against the literature review.

### **Examining Lived Experiences – Work Versus Family**

For the professional working mothers participating in this study, daily life fills with routines and relationships which construct the framework of their lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). As a result, everyone uniquely encounters work and family amidst ever-changing shifts in perceptions of work-life balance, organizational changes, and family events. Whether one perceives balance or conflict depends on current work-family pressures and mental models as well as the quality of their relationships. When in balance, work and family fit into the women's expectations; in turn, they feel more energetic, peaceful, joyful and productive. When out of balance, feelings of tiredness and dis-ease filter into their world, waking them up to the discrepancy between their expectations and life experiences. At this point, study participants

begin a process of deconstructing their experiences and evaluating their lifestyle that may lead to change (Gadamer, 1977; Rohmann, 1999; Van Manen, 1990).

Upon initial interviews with the women, all express varying degrees of satisfaction which related to their current career status and family life. When stepping back to look at their lives, several participants acknowledge that conflict manifests itself in similar ways to past studies. First, at one or more points in their careers, all participants experience work seeping into their home lives, creating long hours, family tension, and individual stress (Ahuja, et al., 2007; Esarey & Haslberger, 2007; Hill, et al., 2006; Hochschild, 1997). Second, almost all of the participants express an inability or reticence in using earned benefits due to workloads, unwritten organizational rules, and personal belief systems (Blair-Loy, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Joplin, et al., 2003; Snir & Harpaz, 2009; Williams, 2000). Third, establishing boundaries for family time coupled with being a working mom sometimes leads to the perception that she is not an 'A' team player and future career opportunities may be hampered (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976; Bennetts, 2007; Mason & Eckman, 2007).

Confronting these situations triggers several types of coping mechanisms ranging from rationalizing the situation (i.e., "it is what it is" mentality) or powering through the work and seeking outside assistance to support family needs, to setting a new direction in work or family (Gray, 1983). Most notably, almost all participants choose to affirm their passions and priorities in a manner that brings work and family into better alignment; although this approach was not found in the literature review, it brings a new way of dealing with contemporary life (Belenky, et al., 1997; Lerner, 1997).

Although the ideal alignment between work and personal life is unanimously an even split of time, almost all of the participants agree that this not a realistic expectation. As Blair-

Loy (2003) and Morris (1997) cited, the trade-offs between employer and employee are rarely fair or equal. To offset the inequity, participants try to focus their attention and energy to be in the present moment whether that is working or spending time with family. In addition, many elect to create soft boundaries to allow for times when they need to work more or take personal time. Electing this mindset somewhat neutralizes the aspect of conflict between work and family. In effect, it allows the women to accept organizational norms while exercising some measure of positional power. By not “proffering a deviant definition” (Berger, 1963), these women recognize the difficulty in changing their work culture and attaining the desired forty-hour work week.

From this standpoint, something has to give on the home front. For study participants who are married, traditional home roles have changed significantly (Hartman, 1999; Hochschild, 1997; Korabik, et al., 2008; Lerner, 1997; Raphael & Byron, 2006). Husbands work full-time and also play a more active role in taking care of the children and home during periods of travel. When needed, participants engage home-service providers for household chores and family members pitch in to help care for children as needed (Esarey & Haslberger, 2007). With more gender neutral roles and more help at home, less stress is placed on the women to sustain a “second shift” with household duties (Gibbs, 2009; Hochschild, 2003b; Porter, 2006). For several women, the extra time is used to spend with family or outside interests, which is a trend not found in the literature review.

However, the participants working in the information technology field express an unexpected twist in that alleviating household tasks only makes more time for every-day work responsibilities. This finding is supported by Wolk (2004) who found that work culture expectations dictate work environment norms, including long hours, working weekends, and

staying in constant contact with one's work-life (Morales, 2009; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Ray & Schmitt, 2007). The tendency to prioritize work over family time is linked to perceptions of necessity and the ideal worker who is 'always on' (Gambles, et al., 2006; Stone, 2007).

Essentially, these women are experiencing work-life patterned after single men or women and married persons with someone who cares for the family full-time (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2008; Williams, 2000).

To some degree, all of the study participants recognize this phenomenon in their lifestyle. Further, each acknowledges the preference of working with other mothers who understand the need for family time. The ensuing cultural separatism (Lerner, 1997) expresses itself as a sense of "otherness" that yields several outcomes. At the personal level, participants create concepts like that of a 'bank account' and 'flexible living' to self-authorize taking time off without pay or using personal leave benefits (Esarey & Haslberger, 2007; Morales, 2009; Ray & Schmitt, 2007; Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2008). When either of these options repeatedly falls short of being present for one's self or a family member, the ensuing dissonance can yield a painful ripple effect throughout the household that is difficult to reconcile, especially when it comes to children (Strazdins, et al., 2006).

Although no one can really replace a mother's presence in the household, husbands, nannies, and family members round out the children's care network. This finding coincides with a Harvard Business Review article which concludes that women executives engage many layers of support to maintain work and family (Esarey & Haslberger, 2007). Note that unlike the literature review findings, almost all participants have elected in-house care rather than a more 'taylorized' shuffle with pre- and post-school programs (Hochschild, 1997). Even though



children's schedules form around work demands, this adaptation fills the working mothers' desire to provide a familiar, nurturing environment.

In this situation, work fills around family, especially while traveling or at the office. Individuals naturally form relationships with colleagues, creating a work family that in effect reframes the workplace where it's conducive to spend more time in that sphere of life. Aspects of this sentiment are reflected in the phrases – “we're all in this together” and “the work just needs to get done.” In combination, these statements create an expectation that family values also apply to work which expands and reinforces the mental model that family first equates to getting the work done, no matter what it takes. For participants, this ideal produces team loyalty, organizational commitment, and ownership of work products.

When in balance, the upshots are feelings of happiness and joy with their work and organizations. Being able to bend work hours enables women to attend a child's event or make time for an individual's interest. Therefore, all of the participants cite flexibility (ability to work from home or flex hours) as a key ingredient to success and productivity – up to a point.

There seems to be a line that moves along the scale of joyful to burdensome when flexibility continually expects employees to go the extra mile without a finish line (Williams, 2000). Poor planning, under-staffing, ambiguous job descriptions, normalized routines, and undercurrents of fear for family security perpetuate this spectrum of the cultural experience. Preservation of this work model results in personal and familial adjustments that reinforce organizational interests (Lerner, 1997) and fundamentally skew life towards work (Chapman & De Keulenaer, 2009; Joplin, et al., 2003).

Many participants accept this work-life standard with a deep commitment to their careers and financial security. The latter turns the belief that employees are unable “to do the right thing

for their families due to constraints imposed by employers” to a way in which the women support the well-being of the family (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 178). Options seem to be more limited in this framework and dictate a pace of life that does not always meet personal needs (Hochschild, 2003b; Mason & Eckman, 2007). However, when a prolonged imbalance exists between work and family, women in this study have taken the initiative to resolve the conflict by reducing hours, downsizing salaries, changing career goals, or becoming an entrepreneur while husbands maintain their careers (Stone, 2007; Strazdins, et al., 2006).

### **Deconstructing Lived Experiences – Work and Family**

Consistent with history, when challenged to find new ways of being and doing that support a happier, overall lifestyle participants seek a change (Blair-Loy, 2003; Lerner, 1997). The type and amount of change varies by an individual’s redefinition of assumptions as to how best meet their individual and familial needs. The level of success in sustaining the change also hinges on the individual and/or corporate commitment to the work arrangement.

Situated closer to the norm of literature review, Angie struggles to create a sense of well-being for herself and family (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Shepherd, 2006) and recalls shifting her position to part-time with minimal success. Instead of working 60 hours a week, she works forty; however, she is only paid for her agreed upon part-time hours. Being a billable consultant means that the company is paid for her 40 hours worked, however she receives no direct compensation for her time. After a year, Angie resigns to the fact that she should at least be paid for 40 hours and returns to her full-time position (Williams, 2000). Essentially, the organization structures a penalty for those electing a part-time position (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004).

Angie and Jessie share a similar history having joined an information technology firm right after completing their education. Both began their careers with entry-level jobs and worked their way to director level positions. For Jessie, working full-time from home with limited travel supports her desired lifestyle. The long days are a tradeoff for a job she loves doing and being able to spend more time with her family over breakfast, lunch and in the evening. However, when travel ratchets up to every week, she examines her employment options. Like many other professional working mothers, she decides to resign (Bennetts, 2007; Blair-Loy, 2003; Stone, 2007; Williams, 2000).

Contrasting to the findings in the literature review where women opt out of the workforce, Jessie's plan is to be self-employed. Accordingly, Jessie envisions a new way of meeting her own ideal of a balance lifestyle. However, not wanting to lose Jessie's expertise, her employer adapts and offers summers off with pay and benefits. Although the level of commitment to the full 12 week sways with the workload and the summer is cut short by two weeks, her employer displays a willingness to create a more flexible work environment (Stone, 2007).

Having worked in the advertising sector for many years, Joy relates to the competitive nature of for-profit organizations. In her experience, being a billable consultant means working extensive hours within a fast-paced, exciting work environment and yet it often ignores the need for a personal life. For Joy, relationships are a key contributor to one's overall work satisfaction; and, in this environment competition overrules teamwork. Rather than sacrifice authenticity (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002) and her concept of work-life balance, Joy opts for employment in higher education. Although Joy works the same number of hours for less pay, she is much happier. Enjoying more control over her schedule, Joy flexes time for work, herself, and family

(Carlson et al., 2010). Moreover, Joy fosters collegial relationships at all levels of the organization, adding another compelling and positive aspect to her job.

Joy's enjoyment of work flows over to her family life. Her husband and teenage sons are advocates for what brings fulfillment to her life which allows Joy to move more freely between both spheres. Joy also recognizes the level of trust with her colleagues as an essential component to managing workloads and hours at the office. Although work issues sometime spill over to home life (Hill, et al., 2006), Joy consciously strives to keep work and family from regularly interfering with one another. Where Blair-Loy (2003) found only "either work or family" scenarios, Joy harmonizes both to create a balanced lifestyle.

Working for higher education throughout her work history, Hope's career path also reflects the importance of finding the right work environment with values that mirror her desire for balanced living. The recurring themes for both Joy's and Hope's journeys include respect, flexibility, and trust that results in a mutually beneficial relationship between work and family. They also both choose work-life balance over a bigger paycheck.

Their stories diverge however as Hope's career track parallels the literature review whereby ongoing and excessive workplace expectations drive decreased health and wellness (ABC News, 2008; Dychtwald, et al., 2006; Duxbury & Higgins, 2004; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Gandossy, et al., 2006; Hill, 2005; Hochschild, 1997). No amount of job success or work-life adjustments on Hope's part made a lasting impact when the organization turns a blind eye to a hostile workplace environment. Not uncommon to many professional working mothers, the only alternative is for Hope to deal with the issue privately (Blair-Loy, 2003, Morris, 1997).

What the literature does not reveal is how a person responds at this moment. Inspiration combines with the realization that life is about learning lessons – in this case, Hope rediscovers a

spiritual commitment to core values around work, money, family and self. Where Hope once is resigned to work-family conflicts (Joplin, et al., 2003), she finds a job within a different division that values her contributions, supports an individual and group sense of well-being, and meets her definition of work-life balance.

With the most workforce tenure of the group, Lilly's career starts with the rise of women executives and intersects with other participants' experiences in terms of corporate culture. Through the aspect of time, Lilly witnesses a change in organizational values from a sense of ownership and trust to one of surveillance and rules. Similar to other participants' experiences, Lilly acknowledges that leadership sets the tone for an organization and one person cannot change a whole corporate culture. Furthermore, all participants have accepted that executive positions dictate priorities when it comes to time for oneself and family.

All that said, and as expressed by several participants, Lilly takes exception to external boundaries and defining her time in a bifurcated manner. Diverging from the literature review is the discussion of her deep, spiritual commitment to self-fulfillment with articulated values of internal peace, passion, love, and non-judgment. Where Lilly's story takes the next step forward from other study participants is in her movement away from organizations to own her business. In doing so, Lilly blends and shapes her world so work and family complement rather than compete with one another. Whether this can be achieved at a larger organizational level must be open to discussion.

To conceive a new way of living, society must examine the legitimacy of long held belief systems, perceptions, and traditional assumptions about what it means to earn a living (Bloom, 1998). Significant change will require some workplace reinvention (Hartman, 1999). A collective reconception focuses on how to live joyously as individuals and as a community and

to reframe our work culture accordingly. For Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) this equated to setting clear work-life priorities, supporting the whole person through the integration of work and family, and developing an entrepreneurial spirit that invites ongoing assessment of work-life arrangements.

To support the conceived ideals, the process must include redefining of work and family roles as well as expectations to support new ways of being (Hartman, 1999; Hochschild, 1997; Lerner, 1997; Raphael & Byron, 2006). By opening the conversation, we breathe new life into how we view our daily lives with the ability to observe where changes can manifest well-being; and, any change (big or small) informs the next level of individual and societal transformation.

### **Future Outlooks and Recommendations for Change**

Whether looking back or looking ahead, every participant takes responsibility for finding the right balance between work and family (Bennetts, 2007). Self-determination, independence, and maturity open new avenues within one's personal life and career that lead to setting one's priorities, learning one's passion, and finding work-life fulfillment (Grzelakowski, 2005).

Organizations also have the opportunity to ignite new possibilities by supporting employee well-being in several fundamental ways.

1. First, establish trust with clear, reasonable job expectations for employees and clients this includes honoring the 40-hour work week for executives. As Jessie concludes, employers must recognize that "you're getting the whole person as an employee; not some artificial part that doesn't eat, sleep, or breathe" (Dychtwald, et al., 2006; O'Toole et al., 2006; Vithoukias, 1980). Also set clear contractual boundaries to account for employees who travel to the client site, permitting more personal time.

2. Second, allow for autonomy and flexibility in terms of where, when, and how a job is to be completed (Ahuja, et al., 2007; Carlson, et al., 2010); Carlson, & Kacmar, 2000). However, do not take ongoing advantage of flexibility to mean ‘24 x 7’ availability. In contrast to the women’s experiences, several studies describe flexible work plans in terms of compressed work weeks, part time, and telecommuting (Carlson, & Kacmar, 2000; Hill, et al., 2006; Williams 2000). For part-time work, Williams (2000) cautions organizations to pay for all hours worked which is dissimilar to Angie’s experience. Possibly hitting closer to home for Angie and Jessie is the finding by Carlson, & Kacmar (2000), “that flexible schedules are not a panacea, they have the potential to increase problems because employees may take on even more responsibilities” (p. 348). Whether this is imposed by personal belief systems or organizational is not found in the literature.
3. Third, engage employees in the use of Family Medical Leave Act and other benefits with the spirit and function for which they were intended (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004); otherwise, culturally using these benefits and “family friendly” policies will continue to be underutilized (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976; Blair-Loy, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Williams, 2000). In addition to underutilization, participants generally agree that FMLA and other paid leave benefits should be increased to elevate the level of well-being in America (The Economist, 2009).
4. Fourth, engage employees in understanding how their life fits within the context of work and vice versa (Carlson, et al., 2009). Characterized in this manner, Gandossy, et al., (2006) found employees will be most productive if there is a good job fit and time for a balanced life. The nuanced evolution we see in the participant findings

encompasses a deeper level of spirituality that fosters well-being for people and organizations.

With a broader view of culture than found in the literature review, participants call for organizational changes that result in less hierarchy and flatter organizations as well as less competition and more collaboration. Combined with the earlier recommendations, participants believe employee commitment, empowerment, and productivity would increase. Further the potential for passionate and joyful living without work and family boundaries may become possible.

### **Advice for Children**

Advising our children opens the discussion without restriction to the ideals and values that the professional working mothers hold most dear. For all of the women, family comes first with personal fulfillment and a passion for living one's life to the fullest. Success in life means that their children (regardless of whether they are girls or boys) have found jobs that they love to do for an employer who takes into account the entire person -- body, mind, emotions and spirit (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Should children opt for careers, these mothers also advise ways to retain one's personal power. For some women, personal power equates to establishing a career before children. For others, it is staying centered and whole by regularly processing life experiences through meditation, a personal pastime, and/or time with friends. Also when it comes to family, participants advocate taking the time to be really present when spending time with family. Specifically several recommend, turning off technology during family time and leveraging it to stay in touch when traveling (Ahuja, et al., 2007).



On a final note, there is no single formula for success; one must always engage their heart to understand the values which drive career choice and set boundaries between work and family. If a time comes when a job becomes ill-fitting, do not try to rationalize what is happening or “sacrifice authenticity and wholeness for success” (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). Look behind the issue and discover a solution that returns one back to a state of equilibrium and joy.

### **Summary**

Examining the day-in-the-life of a working professional mother confirms many work-family studies presented over the last twenty years. Participants find that the continuum between work-life balance and work-family conflict sways based on the intersection of organizational culture, job structure, and their personal outlook on the best way to blend work and family (Freidman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Snir & Harpaz, 2009; Williams, 2000).

Politics, competition, and compensation also influence participant responses to workplace demands (Gaffey & Rottinghaus, 2009) and use of family friendly policies (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976; Blair-Loy, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Williams, 2000). Most frequently, the pendulum swings to conflict when work continually mandates long hours and the workplace environment is detrimental to financial (Bennetts, 2007), physical, mental or spiritual well-being (Hochschild, 2003a; Mason & Eckman, 2007).

Organizational drivers of extended work hours include workloads, unmanaged expectations, poor planning, understaffing and work culture. Personal drivers involve belief systems around what makes an ideal employee and a team player as well as anxiety over personal and professional security (Hochschild, 1997; Shepherd, 2006; Wolk, 2004). As reported by Galinsky, et al., (2011), Roberts (2005), and The Sloan Work and Family Research Network (2008), there is agreement that men are also feeling the pinch of too many work hours.

For the most part, these women accept the longer hours along with the associated conflicts between work and family as part of the executive position (Joplin, et al., 2003). Up to a point, schedule flexibility provides some control and personal power to mitigate work-family conflict (Carlson et al., 2009). When flexibility significantly and negatively impacts employee health or family life, work-to-family conflict rises sharply. In a larger context and similar to the research of Anderson et al., (2002), Carlson & Kacmar (2000), Cinamon (2006), Winslow (2005), and Voydanoff (2005), this study confirms that with the rise of work-family conflict, work-life balance decreases.

Participants attempt to resolve long-term work-family conflict through career trade-offs and reduction in pay or hours (Strazdins, et al., 2006). Therefore, the literature review finding that women most likely change their current employment arrangements holds true (Mason & Eckman, 2007; Stone, 2007). As a result, four out of five participants, have succeeded in their effort to pursue a more balanced life style by knowing exactly what they want from their careers (Bennetts, 2007), and redefining career goals to fit their passions and support their desired lifestyles (Grzelakowski, 2005; Schein, 1985; Stone, 2007).

From an organizational standpoint, companies engaging in discussions about work-family conflict and creating flexible work environments discover the benefits of executive retention and more productive work environments (Carr, et al., 2008; Williams, 2000). Although not discussed in the literature review, participants learned that flexible work arrangements must be fully defined and require a strong commitment for both parties.

For many organizations, the whole proposition of flexible work arrangements seems too overwhelming from an administrative perspective (Williams, 2000). This conclusion alludes to one of the participants' core issues as to why organizations fail to adapt – the many written and

unwritten rules which prescribe acceptable job arrangements, work habits, and performance expectations -- especially those patterned after a masculine work model (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2008; Williams, 2000).

Participants accustomed to billable hours also reveal how organizations take advantage of executive time to increase profitability at the expense of their well-being (Morris, 1997). Fortunately, the literature review indicates that when leadership courageously steps up to challenge traditional assumptions and rules, organizations have found ways to modernize and harmonize work-life (Belkin, 2003).

This finding leads us to question why more individuals and organizations have not followed the same path of transformation. Superficially, one may answer that the financial times dictate cost-cutting measures and longer hours (Wolk, 2004). Closer to the truth may be the way in which organizational culture creates systems of advantage and assimilation that tie employees to work. Over time, employees' experiences within the same dynamic develop a shared history and collective consciousness that can be difficult to release or re-imagine. Lerner (1997) pointed to this living history as a source of “memory and personal identity” (and in this case a group identity). Berger (1963) provided perspective to this phenomenon in that individual and group identities are socially bestowed and sustained; he also cautioned that an evolutionary social process is needed to avert sudden or drastic transformation which can cause withdrawal from change.

One way to navigate this type of change is through honoring the past and present while acknowledging new ways to co-create contemporary workplaces. As Leopold Van Ranke stated, “Necessity inheres in all that has already been formed and that cannot be undone, which is the

basis for all new, merging activity. What developed in the past constitutes the connection with what is emerging in the present” (Lerner, 1997).

Envisioning a new future using what already works as a foundation and understanding how pioneering organizations successfully change social constructs within the workplace can continue the course towards social change. However, without significant, structural redesign to address work-life balance issues, overall change will be incremental. By incorporating the participant experiences, another panorama of possibilities open to innovatively blend work and family through the transformational light of joyful living and organizational well-being (Belenky et al., 1997; Hartman, 1999).

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

### **Introduction**

Thematically the lived experiences of professional working mothers embolden and enliven the work of philosophers from across the ages to present-day sociologists and activists who strive to decipher our world through intellectual inquiry and dialogue. The common threads of what it means to live freely, to grow spiritually, and to evolve consciously urge us to pause and assess our everyday life as individuals and as a collective humanity. Philosophers Hegel (1807/1954) and de Beauvoir (1949/2009) provide a foundation for analysis that leads to several post-structuralists of our time: Foucault (1972-1977/1980), Deleuze (1968/1994), and Derrida (1967-1968/1973). These three philosophers enable the further exploration of societal constructions of power, freedom, and transcendence. From this launch point, feminist scholars Smith (1987), Naples (2003), and Wharton (2005) extend the inquiry to include a feminine perspective. In bringing forward philosophical and sociological connections through time, an expansiveness and continuity of thought is furthered by present-day experiences of professional working mothers. Within this embrace of our past and present, abstraction fades and reveals a new challenge for a collective forward-looking response based in wellness and holistic, joyful living.

### **Sources of Knowledge**

The intrinsic value of phenomenology is to encapsulate aspects of our world for introspection. Phenomenological narratives inspire readers to appreciate how relationships with self and the world blend to shape their lives. When reading the stories, our imagination wanders and our consciousness considers the parallel and opposing factors influencing the social construction of professional working mothers. From this perspective, I am compelled to wonder how my life mirrors the everyday world of the working professional mother and to reflect on

what aspects provoke agreement, contention, and action. Within this dialogical process, insights are localized to my education, perceptions, and life experiences. More important than the correlation of my standpoint to the study, the imperative is to place each woman's experience in the broader historical context and in doing so widening the horizon of what it means to be a professional working mother and illustrating evolutionary patterns.

*The Philosophy of Hegel* (1807/1954), engaged phenomenal knowledge to study how daily experiences intertwine with the essence of individual destiny and the development of ethical communities. For Hegel (1807/1954), spirit directed the relationship of these elements to create a dialectic component which enable consciousness to experience reality as a "process of becoming" (Friedrich, 1807/1954). From this vantage, all manifestations become expressions of spirit for the purpose of spiritual growth. In turn, "history reveals the gradual unfolding of the truth, that in it the dialectic of the spirit is explicitly working out its themes" (Friedrich, 1807/1954, p. xxx). Upon this premise, Hegel (1807/1954) allowed for transformation through the combination of pure spirit and thought (logic); both of which are uniquely situated and lived by each individual. The level of congruency between spirit and thought measures the degree in which an individual feels self-alienation or the absolute freedom of enlightenment.

Historically for women, the distance needed to transfigure feelings of alienation to enlightenment are much greater than for men. de Beauvoir (1949/2009) explained:

History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy's earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other. This condition served male's economic interests; but it also suited their ontological and moral ambitions (p. 159).

The oppressive power of 'otherness' is in its transparency of norms and expectations that create mental models from early childhood, masking talents, and blindfolding one's true nature

behind societal expectations. As such, it is not surprising that de Beauvoir (1949/2009) observed women learning to see the world “through the eyes of men” and “dream through men’s dreams.” Through the externalization of self, women combat a natural inclination to turn in, listen and discover their true reality without all the noise, hustle, and demands for their attention. However, society can no longer sustain such narrow interpretations of self, created by the overemphasis and suppression of gender and difference.

To clarify, both men and women suffer from identifying gender in the duality of male versus female, mind versus heart, strong versus weak, positive versus negative, aggression versus suppression. Female, weak, negative, and suppression is a false belief system creating inequality where none should exist. Male, strong, positive, and aggression is an illusion of superiority. Now is the time to recognize how all living things are created through the balanced union of female and male aspects.

both masculine and feminine energies are essential – the masculine energy directs itself to the feminine energy, thereby initiating the creative...For centuries on Earth, the feminine principle has been thwarted, making it difficult for either men or women to exert the full human potential. Cultures, societies, individuals, sexes, and institutions all have participated in suppressing the feminine principle. As a result, creation has been stifled and destruction looms at every turn. The aggression from the masculine principle has thrown all things out of balance leaving the world to wander aimlessly until the power can be restored (Milanovich & McCune, 1998, p. 245).

Without internal balance, men and women become foreign to themselves; thereby destroying the natural flow of life and becoming the *Other* within their own consciousness. From a woman’s perspective, Lerner (1997) found that this thought form induces women “to take a position, to assert or deny, who one is” (p. 3). Typifying this aspect of the phenomena within the study is the ‘split focus’ experienced by Jessie or the overall difficulty in establishing acceptable work and family boundaries. Although outside of the study’s scope, it is reasonable to assume that men also experience disassociation in different and just as meaningful ways.

Raising the philosophic inquiry another notch, de Beauvoir (1949/2009) came to the conclusion that humanity has created a “historical reality” of *Other* where once it did not exist. To conceive how current society has created this categorization, one must first accept the existence of *Other* along with the responsibilities, conveniences, and consequences of dualistic thinking, hierarchies of inequality, and oppressive expressions of power over feminine aspects of our world, in particular women and nature (Fillingham, 1993). This line of thought also leads to our consideration of why humanity maintains this reality and who ultimately benefits from observed power structures.

### **Expressions of Power**

Foucault (1972-1977/1980), Deleuze (1968/1994), and Derrida (1967-1968/1973), cultural critics of the structuralist and post-structuralist era, contribute to the analysis through their examination of the social movements. Most specifically, the interaction of three key expressions of power – language, knowledge of truth and gender inform the development of “otherness” and associated dichotomous social constructs that shape modern society (i.e., abundance or scarcity; peace or war; and, freedom or enslavement).

Foucault’s study of human sciences casts a look back through history to examine the construction of truth using discursive resources. Unlike Hegel (1807/1954), who observed the state of democracy as “not patriarchal” and not resting on the people’s “uneducated confidence,” Foucault discerned a world where the combination of knowledge, power, and physical force created institutions to enforce acceptable behavior and minutely control life (Fillingham, 1993; Friedrich, 1807/1954).

Pivotal to how we view our world today, Foucault identified the evolution of minority groups through categorization and the formation of institutions (Fillingham, 1993). Men in positions of power establish the roles, rules, and consequences for those unfortunately labeled as



sick, poor, or woman. Where people once looked within themselves for truth and self-authorization, they now seek outside themselves for answers and approval.

After centuries of moving in this direction, modern day systems of power envelope citizenry further into hierarchies and surveillance until laws and social insecurities are unconsciously internalized within everyday life. The most striking examples from the study include: Jessie “sneaking” downstairs to have lunch with the babysitter and her daughter; Angie developing a mental model of good will and time credits to increase feelings of job and family security; Hope believing that loyalty and working harder (when she is working 70-90 hours a week already) will improve an unhealthy work environment; or, Lilly indignantly exclaiming that the organization is establishing new rules and “watch[ing] people come up the elevator.” Where Foucault observed the “systematic use of power and authority” within the prison state evolve to the “careful control of every aspect of a life representing a more complete exercise of power,” we now see the extension of this mindset to society overall (Fillingham, 1993, p. 115).

When participating in this dynamic, spirit estranges from itself. The world grows chaotic and fatigued to a point where riots, demonstrations, and dissension around injustice grow louder every day (Deleuze, 1968/1994). Through the movement of language and action between the people and the state, a pattern of contraction and expansion of thought and public displays make visible the positions of privilege, power and control that regulate society. Once awareness of an issue penetrates daily life, it repeats itself until passivity and ignorance are no longer viable options. Deleuze (1968/1994) explained this phenomenon:

Fatigue marks the point at which the soul can no longer contract what it contemplates, the moment at which contemplation and contraction come apart. We are made up of fatigues as such as of contemplations. That is why a phenomenon such as need can be understood in terms of ‘lack’, from the point of view of action and the active synthesis which it determines, but as an extreme ‘satiety or ‘fatigue’ from the point of view of the passive synthesis by which it is condition. More precisely, need marks the limits of the variable

present. The present extends between two eruptions of need, and coincides with the duration of a contemplation. The repetition of need, and of everything which depends upon it, expresses the time which belongs to the synthesis of time, the intratemporal character of that synthesis (p. 77).

Essentially a microcosm of this same cycle plays out in the lives of professional working mothers. More specifically, each participant experiences a time of personal and career growth along with family and work life grounded in ‘acceptable’ norms. That is, until reaching the executive level where the lack of time and/or trust eventually coalesce into a level of frustration that “forces us to think” beyond all “common sense” (Deleuze, 1968/1994). In these transcendental moments, senses heighten and the ability to fully apprehend the situation with clarity and without social constraints is realized. No matter how small or large the moment, the angst “moves the soul, ‘perplexes’ it – in other words, forces it to pose a problem: as though it were a problem” (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 140).

Reflected in the stories of these women are such instances that magnify an issue to a point where without any doubt the women are in *the present moment*. Whether Joy anxiously pushes the elevator button knowing that she will be late picking up her children; or, Hope’s exhaustion after three days back from vacation; or, Lilly’s indignation over business becoming more important than the people; or, Jessie’s laughter at being asked to take on yet another project while traveling over consecutive weeks; or, Angie’s quiet wonder at whether the time working has been worth the effort -- it is in these present moments that we actively engage the issue in search of clarity and discernment.

Within these moments of truth, the intensity and extensity lifts us out of the everyday mind-centered habits and we question the routines that structure our daily lives. Deleuze (1968/1994) described the process as an “interrogative formula [that] has as least one advantage: at the same time as it invites us to consider the corresponding proposition as a response, it opens

up a new path for us” (p. 157). However, before arriving at a solution, the truth and fiction as well as the cause and effect of a problem must be fully understood. At the point of fully defining the problem, Deleuze (1968/1994) believed that the exact solution appears because “a problem does not exist, apart from its solution” (p. 163). Milanovich and McCune (1998) shed light on why it may be difficult to see problems as they are or seek solutions:

The mind controls how one feels, what one believes, and how one behaves. It is a powerful tool – and God’s gift to humanity. But the mind can be too clever sometimes, especially if it becomes disconnected from the heart. Too much analysis or reason sway one from seeing the higher truths. When this occurs, the individual becomes attached to the letter of the law and not to the spirit of it (pp. 224-225).

In the lives of these professional working mothers, we learn how organizational consumption of time engrains rules and routines that siphon time and energy from one’s sense of well-being until one day it is difficult to define clearly what an ideal life would look like. This is most evidenced in some participants difficulty in defining terms of well-being, work-life balance, and family life whereas work related terms are clear, concise, and somewhat consistent. Again, we must consider whether this dichotomy is a result of a gendered existence which favors the world of logic, rationality, and man-made ideals.

The leap is a short one to see how a work or family issue can be suppressed at an emotional, physical and/or mental level to remain in full service to an organization. The potentiality and associated fear of “being treated differently” then leaves an individual at a loss to hear, see, and feel their truth in a situation. In turn, key factors that contribute to the degradation of an ideal are not fully identified; in essence, we lose the ability to recognize or to fully represent the problem. Additionally, it is easier to under-estimate and super-charge the negative possibilities making it almost impossible to act according to one’s true nature. The

most notable study example of this dynamic is in the overwhelming agreement that organizations expect one to work 40 to 50 percent of one's total day, plus weekends.

At the edges of language we perceive how this one belief system creates an underlying strain between work and family (Derrida, 1967-1968/1973). For instance, the participants' use of the words 'try' and 'control' are used in describing, down-playing, or under-estimating effects of work-life imbalance. Two examples include Hope finding that "if my needs were controlled" she could cope with work demands or Jessie describing the difficulty as a parent when "you're trying to keep your own self afloat. But now you have another human being to worry about." In addition, all of the women use humor and laughter to diffuse the tension and conflict around seemingly irreconcilable differences. Lilly seems to sum up the experiencing neatly when stating "that [work] would often have to take priority over anything that was happening at home...I didn't feel we had choices. I guess a person did if they didn't want to have a job (laughter)!"

The most palpable moments of the women's journeys through unreasonable work expectations draw our attention and compassion to the irony of wanting to put family first and not having enough time for family. Or, working almost unceasingly for an employer who is considered family-friendly but not receiving any help to alleviate the work-overload; not being able to take a vacation without being technologically tethered to work; and, not being fully compensated for the hours worked. Even more alarming is the fact that no one with the authority to make a change reaches out or attempts to correct the injustice of these situations; consequently, the paradox must act as a match of frustration to carry a person toward the disconnect between their real and ideal work-life balance lifestyle; therefore, the person and not the organization is forced to look at the issue (Deleuze, 1968/1994).

The challenge then is to assess the issue(s) without distortion by allowing the “critique of the negative [against] the basis of the ideal” (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 203). Otherwise, the true issues are negated and the problem remains unresolved or becomes binary (i.e., male/female, fine/not fine, real/unreal). At this zero point of neutrality or stalemate, it is easy to oversimplify and obscure the depth and breadth of the problem. As a result myths develop, including societal problems are too big to change; organizational problems are really my issue; or, problems do not even exist. A quandary in being able to identify or adhere to one’s personal ideal arises.

Time spent working compared to the participants’ ideal definitions of work-life balance ratios may best exemplify this issue. With the exception of Lilly, who regulates her own schedule, the other participants work a range of twelve to fifty percent more hours than the national salaried job standard of 2,080 hours per year. Stated factors contributing to the excess hours for these professional working mothers include: job structure and team expectations, status of motherhood, financial security, virtual teaming across multiple time zones, workload, technology, and travel. Only Angie wonders aloud if flexibility and the inability to set firm boundaries are additional factors preventing work life balance. No one questions the lack of additional compensation.

The phenomenological perspective of Derrida (1967-1968/1973) based on Husserl’s essays reiterates the effect that once entrenched in a situation, a person either acquires a “blindness to the authentic mode of ideality” or we just do not consciously recognize our own “ultimate form of ideality” (p. 6). For many professional working mothers, the root of the conflict seems to rest at the crux of living in a male-centric society which has created job structures biased towards men (Wharton, 2005). Furthermore, these job structures have remained intact with the added features of flexibility and technology which only serve to

lengthen the work week. In the absence of knowing our own ideal, routines develop repetition and a mindset of conformity, thereby sustaining norms to form an externalized “ideality” (Derrida, 1967-1968/1973). As a result, sixty-plus hour work weeks become “doable” but we exist in a less humane world.

The fact that executives work sixty-plus hour work weeks is not new nor is it easy to fathom *why* it has become conventional. Within the professional working mother phenomena exists a “hidden world of *noumena*, things-in-themselves” revealing very rational needs to cover ‘the work that just needs to get done’, to ensure a family’s financial security, and to pay for a child’s college education (Rohmann, 1999). At a personal level, participants mention taking pride in one’s job, responding to competitiveness in the workplace, and having to prove one’s worth as a working mother.

Similar to Hope’s understanding that “divinity does not want us to struggle” or Lilly’s belief that internal peace is her ongoing aspiration, Milanovich and McCune (1998) brought forth a deeper level of understanding for our consideration – “To value, honor, and respect one’s being (body, mind and spirit) with full awareness of one’s own inherent worth” (Milanovich & McCune, 1998, p. 274). What if much of the time spent outside ourselves is an indication of conditioning of the spirit wherein we perceive lack within ourselves when there is none and we accept uncompensated hours or do not question the social constructions of our time?

Seemingly caught in the web of our daily routines, the ability to even consider a different lifestyle is difficult let alone identifying other options. Derrida (1967-1968/1973) recognized this dilemma of consciousness as a time when we are not living in the present moment.

The ultimate form of ideality, the ideality of ideality, that in which in the last instance one may anticipate or recall all repetition, is the living present, the self-presence of transcendental life. Presence has always been and will always, forever, be the form in

which, we can say apodictically, the infinite diversity of contents is produced (Derrida, 1967-1968/1973, p. 6).

The advantage of staying in the present moment long enough is in allowing all possibilities to make them known. The options that bubble up reveal our internal makeup (e.g., feelings, thoughts, education, goals, etc.). So, when during the interview a moment is taken to consider *alternative, more balanced* job structures, participants' advocate clearer job expectations, more job flexibility, and increased manager accountability to implement work-life balance options through more employee trust, commitment and ownership. From an employee perspective, participants recommend knowing one's passion, priorities, and boundaries. All of these suggestions seem aligned with current organization and personal management practices. At the heart of the matter is whether doing more of the same will create environments that support work-life balance. Naples (2003) in *Feminism and Method* cautioned 'more of the same' reflects an "ongoing process through which patterns of inequality are reshaped and resisted" (p. 53).

Only Jessie expresses a harboring desire for summers off; in this moment, she opens to a new possibility and her world view expands. A few months later at a point of frustration, she acts on the desire and manifests her ideal job arrangement. Where Jessie made her first move to her ideal work-life balance, Lilly has found a congruency and complete blending of her professional and personal worlds by staying true to her core value of internal peace. *But do we have to wait for that point of frustration to act? Must individual "transcendence through immanence" supersede collective liberation from the constraints of societal norms or is it time "to carry off the supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009, p. 766)?*

### **Erupting Freedoms**

Originally written in 1949, de Beauvoir posited this question in *The Second Sex* to unify our opposites and heal the artificial fractures in society. Still relevant today, many modern day social critics and feminists like Maxine Greene (1988) also eloquently beckoned us to stop and “recognize the role of perspective and vantage point, to recognize at the same time that there are always multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points...There is always more. There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom” (p. 128). So, the time to face the state of current American culture with honesty and integrity is crucial to our ability to replace all false marginalizations and alienation with a single voice of freedom.

Tackling an inclusive societal view at first blush seems daunting; however, Leslie Bloom’s (1998) “progressive-regressive” method compelled separation between the object of analysis and the interpreter. Bloom (1998) detailed this methodology further in her work, *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist methodology and narrative interpretation*.

In the progressive or forward movement, the interpretation emphasizes the individual’s experiences as a journey of becoming. Regressive or backward movement is reflective; it “takes one back on a journey of exploration among the objects, people, places, and events which make up the grounds of one’s being” (Jackson, 1989, 162).<sup>1</sup>...The analysis then concentrates on how past givens are surpassed in present or subsequent events, and how the individual came to be who she is as an accumulation of past events and choices among possibilities (p. 65).

Within this analysis technique, the topic of professional working mother becomes the container for a “collective story” of organizational design (Naples, 2003). Points selected for sociological study include the interplay of “relational ruling” and “bifurcated consciousness” as well as individual transformation as a result of institutionalized behaviors (Naples, 2003; Smith, 1987; Wharton, 2005).

Smith’s (1987) discussion of “relational ruling” grounds analysis in observing the everyday world and practices therein. Through these observations, embedded systems and



agents (i.e., bosses, coworkers, family members, ourselves, etc.) reinforce social norms. “Our world is continually being brought into being as it is and as it is becoming, in the daily practices of actual individuals....The social construction of reality is precisely that of creating a world we have in common” (Smith, 1987, p. 125). Patriarchy is an example of social construction which binds our conceptions of work and family.

Pulling the thread of patriarchy through each woman’s story focuses on the unique controlling practices that have redefined what it means to be loyal to an organization and an ‘A’ team player. With executive positions, the predominant illustration of control is through the combination of job commitment, workload, and schedule. Several participants explain this organizational dynamic:

The way that companies are designed – you know is to produce and work long hours and it doesn’t take a whole person into account...Or, they have to policies for whole people that are supposed to help, but – I don’t know, it shouldn’t be like a perk that companies offer...you hear [about] a lot of people, you know, they don’t get maternity leave or that you hear people back at work after two weeks or four weeks and I just can think that that’s good for the mom. It’s not good for the baby...I wish that as a society or as a government we would really support with our policies working families (Jessie).

So, the mindset was automatically that the family was second to work. When I think about that now...I mean not if someone died or something -- that would excuse them. Short of that, you didn’t have a lot of excuses...I just found that most of us just accepted that as that’s how it was! And, to me having more of the family – the importance of that aspect of it really brings humanity into it (Lilly).

Hard work fosters trust in the people above you and below you in a hierarchal structure that you have to prove yourself and interact to a certain degree and prove that you are consistent in that you are going to do whatever it takes to get the job done and I then will trust you and promote you and therefore pay you more money so that then you can then have a “better life” (Hope).

Perception also controls the personal censorship of time for oneself and family. Angie explains, if “they see you more as an ‘8 – 5’ (I’m just going to do the bare minimum to get by), then when unusual circumstances come up it’s a little harder for them to respond in a way that

you want.” Joy shares another unwritten management practice that has been modeled as an expectation and handed down to the next generation of managers.

I also feel like I’m under some pressure to set a good example for even the people under them who are young twenty-somethings, don’t have kids; but, I think it’s important that I’m there. You know, there first and leave last. And, all that kind of stuff. That’s just in my head. I don’t even know if they think that but that’s sort of what’s in my mind. What I try to do. I’m not always successful.

When asked about the origin of this concept, Joy replied:

I don’t know. It’s ...like a catty thing that you expect your boss to be working harder than you do. You know, I don’t know where that comes from; but, I just wouldn’t want to be the boss that underlings are talking about being a slacker...(Joy).

Whether as an act of good faith, conformance, or simply because technology allows it, extra hours of work ‘whittle away’ and “seep in” into family time. Within these abstract terms, we see where an “extralocal mode of ruling” has come home to roost (Smith, 1987).

In the social division of labor the work of articulating the local and particular existence of actors to the abstracted conceptual mode of ruling is done typically by women. The abstracted conceptual mode of ruling exists in and depends upon a world known immediately and directly in the bodily mode. The suppression of that mode of being as a focus, as thematic, depends upon a social organization that produces the conditions of its suppression. To exist as a subject and to act in this abstracted mode depend upon an actual work and organization of work by others who make the concrete, the particular, the bodily, thematic of their work and who also produce the invisibility of that work. It is a condition of anyone’s being able to enter, become, and remain absorbed in the conceptual mode of action that she does not need to focus her attention on her labors or on her bodily existence. The organization of that work and work expectations in managerial and professional circles both constitute and depend upon the alienation of members of this class from their bodily and local existence. The structure of work in this mode and the structure of career assume the individuals can sustain a mode of consciousness in which interest in the routine aspects of bodily maintenance is never focal and can in general be suppressed (p. 81).

Consistently bringing work into the family sphere silences any feelings of bifurcation because work supports the family in very tangible ways. At times, the intensity of the work draws people into a point where all else fades and work becomes a 24 x 7 affair. The

organization becomes the center of the family universe. Work arrangements seem to be tolerated until someone outside the organizational apparatus speaks up (Smith, 1987).

- “Mom, I thought today would be a vacation day - why are you on your blackberry?”
- “You know Mom; we have been here over a year. We moved here for your job we realize; but, we never see you.”
- “Angie, when you’re 65 – when you’re my age, you’re not going to wish you worked more. You’re really not.”
- “You gotta leave. You’re wasting your energy here.”

With the conversations started, revelations about the impact of work on family life spark self-awareness. Over time (months and sometimes years), most women allow work to shift from center to margin by tendering their resignation and finding a different employer or become self-employed. Both options transfer more control over how to manage the same number of work hours to the women so more time can be spent with family or for oneself. According to Joy, also having a job that one enjoys combined with flexibility makes the shift in compensation acceptable, “it depends on whether you’re there for the mission or you’re there for the money and (pause) the tradeoffs come in your pocket book in a lot of cases.”

In spite of the pay and position tradeoffs, the seeds of erupting freedom spring from the knowledge of choice and action. Through the lived experiences, we see a dialogue form between an individual, her work and family that provides insights as to how each woman evaluates her options and takes action toward better work-life balance.

At a macro level, the intersection of women, work, and family is integral to social life and organizational structures. Central to the standpoint of professional working mothers’ experiences is the point of the convergence between gender, patriarchy, hierarchy, and societal

mores. Collins (1990) articulated this concept through the use of “situated knowledges” or “standpoints” which “are achieved by groups who struggle collectively and self-reflectively against “the matrix of domination” that circumscribe their lives” (p. 234). The study provides a snapshot of our world today, connecting the small stages of everyday life that play out in larger spheres of influence – especially how our collective perceptions, values, and sense of order impose routines at every level of our world (Milanovich & McCune, 1998).

Unfortunately when an employee no longer expects any organizational change to meet his/her ideals, the current systems remain intact. Therefore, society’s source for these structures and frameworks go unquestioned and continue to build over time. More importantly, without a deconstruction of the total ‘apparatus’, we enculturate our children to carry on our traditions and values. The following excerpt from the online Deloitte Women’s Initiative Blog (2007) demonstrates the subtle ways this cycle is sustained.

#### The Other Side of the Kitchen Table

This blog entry is an unintended sequel. What I mean by this is that I did not intend, when writing last week's blog titled "Sitting At The Kitchen Table" that I'd still be on the same topic this week.

But I had a kitchen table epiphany of sorts. Last week I wrote about how whenever I work from home, I do so sitting at the kitchen table rather than in our home office. My argument is that I simply want to be as accessible to my family as possible. Well, the other night I learned there's another side to the kitchen table story.

It was 10 o'clock on Sunday night and the kids were off on Monday. Everyone was upstairs except me, who was sitting at the kitchen table working on the orals deck to present later in the week (our team did a kick-ass job!). My daughter, Ellie (on the verge of turning seven) comes into the room. I told her it was late and that she really needed to get to bed. She simply replied "no". (Anyone who knows my spitfire daughter can likely visualize her just standing there in a very matter-of-factly stance stating "no".)

Then I gave her the look...you know, the "are you kidding? I told you to go up to bed" look. Her response stunned me.

She said that if I needed to be downstairs working, then so did she. She then went and got out her coloring book and crayons and sat right next to me at the kitchen table. For

two plus hours, she sat next to me. When I pressed her that it's late or that she could lie on the couch, she refused. She just sat there and colored. She never spoke; never complained; never moved (a very un-spitfire like occurrence). Though her eyes were heavy with sleep, she simply would not give into it.

A while later we walked upstairs together, and she was wearing a grin from ear-to-ear. I didn't really understand her satisfaction at the time, but I do now. You see, she just wanted to be accessible to me. Like mother, like daughter I guess (C Benko, 2007, p. 6).

Similar to the lived experiences of study participants, this blog entry also indicates a need to “decenter dominant discourse” that work-life balance is only a woman’s issue (Naples, 2003). Until a more collective inquiry of balanced work-life structures is conducted, participants’ advice to their children to follow their passion while keeping family first may continue to be a difficult proposition. Left unexamined, this “individualistic perspective” encourages rationalizations for living within the status quo and does not take into consideration the effects to all working parents and their children (Wharton, 2005; Hochschild, 1997).

If more motivation is needed for change, consider the world from Foucault’s perspective. Current working environments successfully meet the same militaristic madhouse checklist of the eighteenth century:

1. Spacialization – a place for everyone and everyone in his place.
2. Minute Control of Activity – especially using timetables.
3. Repetitive Exercises – must be both standardized and individualized according to rate of progress.
4. Detailed Hierarchies – a complex chain of authority and training. Each level of the hierarchy keeps watch over the lower ranks.
5. Normalizing Judgments – a continual analysis of whether the disciplined one deviates in any way from normality. If the prison does succeed in remaking the individual through this process, what kind of person will be made? A docile worker who does as

ordered without question. An automaton, the perfect fodder for the Capitalist factory (Fillingham, 1993, pp. 120-129).

Two centuries later, we are now desensitizing our children to these mental models in our homes and socializing them to the normalcy of working ten or more hours a day. *Is this really the lifestyle we wish for our children and grandchildren? Do we have the strength to draw the line, not in sand, but in the bedrock of society that 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' is everyone's right; and, we have the capacity to create an abundant and harmonious vision that unifies all of society -- no longer seeing out of a man's or a woman's eyes but through the sight of collective humanity? Is it time for people and engaged business leaders to inspire a new way of living, "if not for themselves, then for their children" (The Historical Marker Database, 2008)?*

### **Conscious Transcendence**

Carefully consider your answers to the previous questions. What does your future look like if the answers are yes versus no? As we have observed in the lived experiences of these professional working mothers, if you long for change *in any aspect of your life*, the do not wait for someone else to make it happen. It is up to every individual to courageously seek a new way of living and to put aside what we know for a leap of faith in our inherent bias towards wholeness, happiness, and joy.

Futurists of our time echo the sentiments of Hegel (1807/1954) that the actualization of consciousness is measured by society's progress towards a consciousness of freedom. Looking over history, freedom has been an eternal and external quest for rights and liberties. For many, freedom has become synonymous with oppression and impoverished states of being. The time has come to take the final journey within ourselves and lovingly reintroduce what freedom and well-being feels like; how we define freedom in action; and, distinguishing the terms of work-

life, family-life and work-life balance to clarify what we want in these aspects of our lives and free ourselves from whatever is in the way of joyfully living within every moment. Hope's advice to her children seems very fitting:

Because when you follow your heart, you are being divinely guided to do this [work] and divinity does not want any of us to struggle and to be out of balance. We cause our own self to be out of balance by not listening well enough [to ourselves].

Looking within for heart-felt answers requires a move away from an ego-centric, rational mindset (Lombardo, 2006). In addition to the women participating in this study, there are many others taking this same journey. Anita Roddick, CEO of the Body Shop and pioneer of 'ethical consumerism' encourages everyone to "measure the success of places and corporations against how much they enhance human well-being...Measuring what really matters can give us the revolution in kindness we so desperately need. That's the real bottom line" (Williams, 2009).

Hubbard (1998) also observed this shift in perspective through spiral theory and sees a growing, global trend toward a universal humanity through the transcendence and integration of spiritual, social, and scientific/technological evolution.

We are working in alignment with the whole process of creation. This process has a direction that is animating our heart's desire for greater freedom, union, and transcendence. The new meme encourages each of us to attune to our own creative urge, to express our potential for the sake of ourselves and the world. It urges us to find others and cocreate together. It gives meaning to the present as the fruition of evolution, the moment in which the wisdom of the entire past comes to life in the expression of each individual cocreator. Conscious evolution offers us the possibility of an open-ended, choiceful, glorious future. Within each of us stirs the mighty force of creation in the process of its next quantum transformation (Hubbard, 1998, p. 93).

Making the conscious decision to live life with joy and happiness is all we need to make the quantum leap out of the old energetic paradigms. Now, freedom becomes a fearless choice to live life to the fullest in every moment and embody your life purpose as a way of being -- "For the world you live in has less to do with your physical location than it does with your spiritual

vibration” (Carroll, et al., 2009). Conscious transcendence also requires faith to live from the heart, to see new ways to live and work with others of like mind, and maybe not influence “*the world*” but *your world* (Carroll, et al., 2009). As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase” (ThinkExist.com, 2011).

### **Summary**

Throughout history, relationships to self and others define one’s place in society. Phenomenology brackets the lived experiences of professional working mothers to enable the appreciation of how relationships to self and others shape their views of the world. From this vantage point, a dialogical process arises between the observer and the observed which creates *sources of knowledge*. Applied to a broader historical context, the experiences demonstrate humanity’s evolution or as Hegel (1807/1954) would suggest, a spiritual and intellectual process of becoming.

Through the lives of professional working mothers, we witness humanity’s use of “difference” as an *expression of power* and a measuring rod which divided society by gender to create systems of advantage and assimilation. In the working world, rules of conduct and societal expectations surrounded gender differences until an ‘ideal worker’ formed to best support a masculine work model.

However, living in a complex world demands a new, more flexible, inclusive work model which equalizes the workplace and eliminates the concept of *Other* (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009). To realize such a change requires an individual’s motivation to disassemble internalized inequity controls as well as a collective response which deconstructs the physical apparatus with the intent to create unbiased social structures. Inevitably, without the active pursuit of this goal as a whole, children continue the same work expectations and values into their work-family lifestyles.



As a result, change occurs sporadically through individual awakenings whereupon crises or fatigue inspire *erupting freedoms* and actions toward a more balanced lifestyle.

As seen in this study and prior research, more individuals will *consciously transcend* unhealthy work arrangements, allowing work to shift from center to margin and find more work-life friendly career options. Organizations concerned about attracting and maintaining employees must follow the path of other pioneering organizations, measuring their success against “how much they enhance human wellbeing” (Williams, 2009). The new currency of the future is not the number of zeros after your name, but the freedom of living life to the fullest in every moment and embodying your life purpose as a way of being.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the research while providing conclusions, recommendations, and phenomenological limitations of the study. Additionally, the chapter discusses implications for theory, research, and practice. Through a structured interview process, the participants' stories explored the lived experiences of professional working mothers. Study participants held professional or executive level positions with children under the age of 21 living at home. Learning how professional working mothers experience the modern workplace enabled often silenced or overshadowed voices to be heard and understood, yielding new insights about the universal constructs of work, family, and society. Transcendental phenomenology framed the research while the integration of poststructuralist, feminist, and conscious evolution theories, revealed compelling, reflexive explorations of self and society.

### **Summary of the Research**

Examining the day-in-the-life of a working professional mother confirmed many work-family studies presented over the last twenty years. Participants found that the continuum between work-life balance and work-family conflict swayed based on the intersection of organizational culture, job structure, and their personal outlook on the best way to blend work and family (Freidman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Snir & Harpaz, 2009; Williams, 2000).

Politics, competition, and compensation also influenced participant responses to workplace demands (Gaffey & Rottinghaus, 2009) and use of family friendly policies (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976; Blair-Loy, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Williams, 2000). Most frequently, the pendulum swung towards conflict when work continually mandated long hours and the workplace environment was detrimental to financial (Bennetts, 2007), physical, mental or spiritual well-being (Hochschild, 2003a; Mason & Eckman, 2007).

The research construct was based on transcendental phenomenology which “emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and proves a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge” (Husserl, 1935/1965, pp. 5-6). In other words, this methodology elicited participants’ lived experiences about life events and interactions between work and family. This approach gave the participants permission to be intentionally conscious of their lived experiences. Therefore, consciousness became an essential component to understanding the whole experience and opened the door to knowing what it is like to be a working professional mother in modern society.

Furthermore, the individual interviews formed the phenomenological basis of shared meaning also known as “shared consciousness” (Diesing, 1999) about these women’s experiences of work-family conflict and work-life balance. The “goal is not really to reduce to the unity of a principle, but rather to disclose the whole wealth of the self-given phenomena in an unbiased way” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 146). Their collective experiences, including areas of convergence and divergence, gave rise to the contextual social conditions. In turn, the stage was set to develop a thinly sliced interpretation of their “life-world [and] contribute to the unfolding of this horizontal structure of consciousness” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 156).

Using phenomenological data analysis as an inductive form of discovery also revealed the rhythm of each professional working mother’s lifestyle. The analytic steps allowed me to keep returning to the research question and the participants’ stories looking again and again for deeper layers of meaning. In turn, the essence of what it means to be a professional working mother was made visible and data trends expressed themselves at three levels -- individually, societally, and universally.

## Conclusions and Discussion

Through language and story, phenomenology offered a process of awakening to the world as it was immediately experienced by participants rather than being conceptualized, categorized, or reflected upon. Mirroring the findings of similar studies, participants revealed how social conditioning, work culture, and technology influenced their lived experiences; and, in doing so, confirmed the slow evolutionary process of organizational and societal change. Unfortunately, often prolonged work-life imbalances led to personal crisis or fatigue. Inspired to transcend old work-life paradigms, most women consciously created an integrated lifestyle blending work and family to complement one another – suggesting that women, not organizations, are more apt to create balanced lifestyles.

The lived experiences of professional working mothers also enabled the philosophical exploration of social constructions of power, freedom, and transcendence. By bringing forward philosophical and sociological connections through time, I discovered an ongoing expansiveness and continuity of thought around four common themes: *sources of knowledge*, *expressions of power*, *erupting freedoms*, and *conscious transcendence*. This section briefly outlines how each theme expresses itself in the lived experiences of working mothers.

Traditionally, relationships to self and others have defined one's place in society. Phenomenology brackets the lived experiences of professional working mothers to enable the appreciation of how relationships to self and others shape their world views. From this vantage point, a dialogical process arises between the observer and the observed which creates *sources of knowledge*. Within this context, some women change their approach to work and make a conscious effort to shift towards a more spiritually-based lifestyle. Applied to a broader historical context, the experiences demonstrate humanity's evolution or as Hegel (1807/1954) suggested, a spiritual and intellectual process of becoming.

Through the lives of professional working mothers, we also witness humanity's use of "difference" as an *expression of power* and a measuring rod which divided society by gender to create systems of advantage and assimilation. In the working world, rules of conduct and societal expectations surrounded gender differences until an 'ideal worker' formed to best support a masculine work model. In reality, the 'ideal' translates into a tendency of employees to prioritize work over family and someone who is 'always on' (Gambles, et al., 2006; Stone, 2007). Essentially, these women are experiencing work-life patterned after single men or women and married persons with someone who cares for the family full-time (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2008; Williams, 2000).

However, living in a complex world demands a new, more flexible, inclusive work model which equalizes the workplace and eliminates the concept of *Other* (de Beauvoir, 1949/2009). To realize such a change requires an individual's motivation to disassemble internalized inequity controls as well as a collective response which deconstructs the physical apparatus with the intent to create unbiased social structures. Inevitably, without the active pursuit of this goal as a whole, future generations uphold the same work expectations and values into their work-family lifestyles. As a result, change occurs sporadically through individual awakenings whereupon crises or fatigue inspires *erupting freedoms* and actions toward a more balanced lifestyle.

As seen in this study and prior research, more individuals will *consciously transcend* unhealthy work arrangements, allowing work to shift from center to margin and find more work-life friendly career options. Organizations concerned about attracting and maintaining employees must follow the path of other pioneering organizations, measuring their success against "how much they enhance human wellbeing" (Williams, 2009). The new currency of the

future is not the number of zeros after one's name, but the freedom of living life to the fullest in every moment and embodying one's life purpose as a way of being.

### **Phenomenological Limitations**

Derrida (1967-1968/1973) once stated, "Phenomenological reduction is a scene, a theater stage" (p. 86). In the role of researcher, one can only see into the lives of participants at a point in time within the context they wish to share. Using an interview process, a researcher cannot know what goes on behind scenes to fully comprehend the women's lived experiences. However, authenticity of the participants and their willingness to convey that which is in the realm of study question relevance is apparent. Some "internal silencing" may have occurred either consciously or unconsciously which is an accepted risk to a phenomenological study (Derrida, 1967-1968/1973).

Although Husserl, through Derrida (1967-1968/1973), postulated that a sign needs signification, I don't know if he really addresses the issue that sometimes the sign is mystifying...unintelligent to the individual until a level of conscious recognition takes place so that it makes some intelligible sense. For purposes of this study, I assume that common themes are phenomenological signs that play consistently within the participants' lives. The indicated relation of meaning underlies each sign and reflects individual and societal values which form their lived experiences. I do not presume to put words to the unspoken and have tried to faithfully allow their stories to unfold through their interview language.

### **Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice**

#### **Research**

Frankly, it feels like only the surface is scratched on all the factors which control and contribute to individual perceptions of work-life balance as well as the impact on organizations and society overall. With more time, a larger study potentially may uncover how the projections

of self and society blend to create the lived experiences of professional mothers. Expanding the study to include more professional mothers as well as their spouses, family members and organizational units would provide a more well-rounded view of the professional working mothers lived experiences. The potential value resides in triangulating how each participant observes the women's lived experiences; describes terms of work-life balance and work-family conflict; and, considers what conditions or solutions may contribute to more holistic, healthy lifestyles, and organizational models.

On a more leading edge, a research project focused on developing contemporary work-life balance constructs and conducted in partnership with an established community or organization could be extremely informative and transformative. The opportunities are in finding new ways of living and working that enable both the person and community or organization to thrive. There will be challenges in concept and form; however, with an integrity of purpose and fair wages, we can shift from the current "poverty consciousness" to establish a loving, working community (Milanovich & McCune, 1998). Within this environment, every person's spiritual path and gifts will be honored. Further, we will find ways to nourish a person's ideal work-life balance so that she or he can bring a fully balanced body, mind, and spirit to address present-day challenges. Using our higher collective consciousness, we can evolve in mastery towards advanced levels of spiritual awareness with joy and abundance while passionately fulfilling our life's purpose.

## **Theory**

The study of professional working mothers required an integrated, historical context to expose the underlying social structures of the phenomena. Hegel (1807/1954), drawing upon Aristotle, Plato, and Kant, provided a strong foundation from which to study the dialectic of

freedom, consciousness, and phenomenology of the spirit. From this universal foundation, feminist existentialists, post-structuralists, feminists and modern-day futurists were able to articulate the result of social constructs which limited freedom, reduced consciousness, and exchanged religion for spirituality.

As a theoretical framework, the existing limitations of society and the effects of duality were uncovered and well-articulated. Paradoxically, in making the phenomena visible, the theories seemed to divide individuals into well-established social groups rather than unite people towards positive social change. Perhaps in applying the experiences and values of professional working mothers to the most recent extension of theory (conscious evolution), more practical and inclusive models of reality can be explored. In turn, the construction of social covenants and workplaces has the potential of evolving to support a healthier society.

## **Practice**

Whether looking back or looking ahead every participant accepted responsibility for finding the right balance between work and family (Bennetts, 2007). Self-determination, independence, and maturity opened new avenues within one's personal life and career that led to setting one's priorities, learning one's passion, and finding work-life fulfillment (Grzelakowski, 2005). That said, organizations also have the opportunity to ignite new possibilities by supporting employee well-being in several fundamental ways.

First, establish trust with clear, reasonable job expectations for employees and clients — this includes honoring the 40-hour work week for executives. As Jessie concluded, employers must recognize that “you're getting the whole person as an employee; not some artificial part that doesn't eat, sleep, or breathe” (Dychtwald, et al., 2006; O'Toole et al., 2006; Vithoulkas,



1980). Also set clear contractual boundaries to account for employees who travel to the client site, permitting more personal time.

Second, allow for autonomy and flexibility in terms of where, when, and how a job is to be completed (Ahuja, et al., 2007; Carlson, et al., 2010); Carlson, & Kacmar, 2000). However, do not take ongoing advantage of flexibility to mean ‘24 x 7’ availability. In contrast to the women’s experiences, several studies describe flexible work plans in terms of compressed work weeks, part time, and telecommuting (Carlson, & Kacmar, 2000; Hill, et al., 2006; Williams 2000). For part-time work, Williams (2000) cautions organizations to pay for all hours worked which is dissimilar to Angie’s experience. Possibly hitting closer to home for Angie and Jessie is the finding by Carlson, & Kacmar (2000), “that flexible schedules are not a panacea, they have the potential to increase problems because employees may take on even more responsibilities” (p. 348). Whether this is imposed by personal belief systems and/or organizational culture must be studied further to assess how to better estimate workloads and create balanced work cultures.

Third, engage employees in the use of Family Medical Leave Act and other benefits with the spirit and function for which they were intended (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004); otherwise, culturally using these benefits and “family friendly” policies will continue to be underutilized (Baxandall & Gordon, 1976; Blair-Loy, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Williams, 2000). In addition to underutilization, participants generally agree that FMLA and other paid leave benefits should be increased to elevate the level of well-being in America (The Economist, 2009).

Fourth, engage employees in understanding how their life fits within the context of work and vice versa (Carlson, et al., 2009). Characterized in this manner, Gandossy, et al., (2006) found employees will be most productive if there is a good job fit and time for a balanced life.

The nuanced evolution we see in the participant findings encompasses a deeper level of spirituality that fosters well-being for people and organizations.

On a final note, there is no single formula for success; one must always engage their heart to understand the values which drive career choice and set boundaries between work and family. If a time comes when a job becomes ill-fitting, do not try to rationalize what is happening or “sacrifice authenticity and wholeness for success” (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). Look behind the issue and discover a solution that returns one back to a state of equilibrium and joy.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We live in a time when many organizations and executives are working without a sustainable balance between work and family. Set in the context of American professional working mothers, work-family conflict issues have long been ascribed as a ‘woman’s issue’; however, time and research have shown that the social implications extends to all of society. For me, the most haunting illustrations of this point include Jessie feeling like she is ‘sneaking downstairs’ to have lunch with her daughter; Angie creating the concept of ‘a bank account’ for uncompensated time with the hopes of a more secure future; or, sitting at the kitchen table one evening with a mother and daughter until the work for the day is completed.

Additionally, it seems very *unreasonable* to accept work conditions where executives are paid for 40 hours a week and yet the performance expectation is to actually work 50+ hours per week ‘to get the job done.’ Unfortunately, when an employee no longer expects any organizational changes to meet his or her ideals, the current system remains intact. More importantly, without a deconstruction of the total ‘apparatus’, we enculturate our children to carry on our traditions and values.

With each day the tension between work and family rises, affecting the health and well-being of employees and their families. The benefit of increased tension is an equal amount of

focus on the issue. Through a conscious effort to disassemble accepted workplace patterns, there is an opportunity to question and unmask the very nature of how Americans have institutionalized work and family.

As Berger (1963) so aptly pointed out, “each social situation is sustained by the fabric of meanings that are brought into it by the several participants. It is clear, of course that in a situation whose meaning is strongly established by tradition and common consent a single individual cannot accomplish very much by proffering a deviant definition. At the very least, however he can bring about his alienation from the situation” (p. 126). Although one cannot predict the future, we are emboldened to deepen our conversation of the issue and actively consider our role in constructing reality for ourselves and future generations.

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APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

**RE: IRB Protocol # B10-226-02 - Exploring the Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers - Expedited - Full approval**

**From:** Roulis, Eleni

**Sent:** Friday, November 12, 2010 11:39 AM

**To:** Lonetti, Ilena A.; Fish, Thomas L.

**Cc:** Roulis, Eleni

**Dear Ilena,**

**IRB Proposal # B10-226-02 - Exploring the Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers -Expedited**

**Researcher: Ilena A. Lonetti**

**Advisor: Dr. Tom L. Fish**

**Full Status Approval**

Your application for your proposed research involving human subjects has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the University of St. Thomas and been given Full Approval Status. Your application has satisfied all of the criteria necessary for full status. This means that you may proceed with your research immediately. This is your official letter of approval.

Please place the IRB log number on all of your future correspondence regarding this protocol.

Please note that under IRB Policy principal investigators are required to report to the IRB for further review when changes in the research protocol increase the risks to the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in the study and/or in the event of any adverse episode (e.g. actual harm, breach of confidentiality) involving human subjects.

Thank you for all of your work.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Best wishes as you begin your research.

Eleni  
Eleni Roulis, Ph.D. Institutional Review Board Chair  
2115 Summit Avenue #5037  
St. Paul, MN 55105  
Aquinas 314A  
651-962-5341

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

### Part I - Introductory Phone Interview Instrument

My name is Ilena Lonetti, a doctoral candidate with the University of St. Thomas. My doctoral thesis focuses on professional working mothers and their experiences working while raising a family. I've received your name and contact information from {name of referent} who thought you might be interested in volunteering your time to participate in a study that tries to learn from your experience in the workforce. Specifically, we will talk about your career, daily routine, and life experiences in balancing work and family.

I am seeking working mothers with children at home and who hold a full-time position of director level or above. Do you meet these requirements?

- If the response is yes, go to the next section, Study Participation.
- If the response is no, state: I'm sorry that we don't have a demographic fit. Do you know someone who might meet these demographic requirements?
- I will record any references and state: Thank you for your time and consideration.

#### Study Participation

In terms of time, your participation would include two one-hour meetings. We would meet in a neutral location that is convenient for you (e.g., a local coffee shop). The two meetings would be scheduled approximately three weeks apart and at a time that works best for you. Are you interested in learning more about the study?

- If the response is no, state: Thanks so much for considering participation in the study. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.
- If the response is yes, state: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The decision to take part or decline participation in the project will not affect your current or future relations with me or the University of St. Thomas.
  - You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty (by phone or email). If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have the choice to sign a consent form to allow the use of the data collected to this point. If you choose not to be a part of the study, all data collected will be destroyed immediately.
  - You may request a copy of the interview questions before participating in the study. During the interview process, you may skip any question or stop the interview process at any time. At the conclusion of each interview, you will be able to ask questions regarding the interview process and study.
  - In your words, please tell me your understanding of the interview process and meeting schedule.
  - Let's also review the study's confidentiality guidelines.

#### Study Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Pseudonyms will be used. Specifically, no names will be associated with direct quotes.

Research records will be coded and kept in a locked file. Only Dr. Fish, my research advisor

who guides the study process/analysis, and I will have access to the records. To maintain confidentiality, you will be identified by pseudonym only.

Interviews will be audio recorded with the tapes and transcripts stored in a locked file drawer in my home office. I will transcribe the recorded tapes. Only Dr. Fish, my research advisor who guides the study process/analysis, and I will have access to the tapes and transcripts.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have the choice to sign a consent form to allow the use of the data collected to this point. If you choose not to be a part of the study, all data collected will be destroyed immediately. Otherwise, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed within one week after completion of the research project. Specifically, paper records will be shredded and audio records will be destroyed.

All of this is outlined in a University Consent Form that we both will sign prior to starting our first interview (Appendix C). What more do you need to know to feel you are entering into this study informed about the nature of the research?

### **Additional Background Information & Scheduling**

1. Will you be able to participate in the study?
  - If the response is no, state: Thank you for considering my request to participate in this study. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.
  - If the response is yes, state: Would you provide me with some additional demographic information before we meet?
    - What are the age(s) of your children?
    - Which age group do you identify with: 20-25, 26-44, or 45-63?
    - What is your position title within your organization (e.g., director)?
    - How long have you held this position?
    - What level of education have you achieved?
2. What date and time work best for scheduling our first interview? Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the study. I look forward to meeting you at [location] on [day] at [time].

## Part II - One-on-One Interview Instrument

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to better understand how work-life balance is defined and experienced today by professional working mothers. The study intends to answer the following questions:

- What are the lived experiences of professional working mothers?
- How do the lived experiences of professional working mothers reflect modern organizational workplaces, family, and the contemporary definitions of work-life balance and work-family conflict?

I believe that professional working mothers will provide a unique perspective that can build a better understanding of the interactions between the modern work environment and family. Before we get started with the study questions, I need to quickly recap study participation and confidentiality guidelines.

### Study Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The decision to take part or decline participation in the project will not affect your current or future relations with me or the University of St. Thomas.

You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty (by phone or email). If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have the choice to sign a consent form to allow the use of the data collected to this point. If you choose not to be a part of the study, all data collected will be destroyed immediately. You may request a copy of the interview questions before participating in the study. During the interview process, you may skip any question or stop the interview process at any time. At the conclusion of each interview, you will be able to ask questions regarding the interview process and study.

- In your words, can you tell me your understanding of what the study is attempting to do?
- In your words, can you explain how to withdraw from the program?
- Let's also review the study's confidentiality guidelines.

### Study Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Pseudonyms will be used. Specifically, no names will be associated with direct quotes.

Research records will be coded and kept in a locked file. Only Dr. Fish, my research advisor who guides the study process/analysis, and I will have access to the records. To maintain confidentiality, you will be identified by pseudonym only.

Interviews will be audio recorded with the tapes and transcripts stored in a locked file drawer in my home office. I will transcribe the recorded tapes. Only Dr. Fish, my research advisor who guides the study process/analysis, and I will have access to the tapes and transcripts.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have the choice to sign a consent form to allow the use of the data collected to this point. If you choose not to be a part of the study, all data collected will be destroyed immediately. Otherwise, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed within one week after completion of the research project. Specifically, paper records



will be shredded and audio records will be destroyed.

Here is the University Consent Form that we discussed over the phone. We both sign this form and then start the interview. Once signed, I will ask the following broad contextual questions followed by the work-life balance probes (if needed).

### **Broad Contextual Understanding**

- Our initial phone discussion gave me initial background information; however, before we dive into the questions, I'd love to learn more about your career path and family. Can you tell me more about both areas of your life? Before moving into the remaining questions, I ask that you suspend any personal judgments on the topic itself and allow your story to unfold.
- Can you describe a day-in-your-life as a professional working mother?
- What situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences with balancing work and family?
- How have you adjusted your life to balance work and family?

### **Additional Work-life Balance Probes**

- What, if any, recurring challenges do you experience when trying to balance work and family?
  - If they describe recurring challenges, ask: What may be the root causes of these challenges? How are conflicts resolved and by whom?
  - If they have not experienced any challenges, ask: What strategies or tactics do you use to balance work and family so that neither is negatively impacted by the other?
- How does balancing work and family affect your career? And, how does it affect your home life?
- Would you recommend any changes to better balance work and family? If so, what recommendations would you make? If you assigned the responsibility to implement these recommendations to whom would it fall?
- If you were asked to give advice to your children in how to balance working full-time while raising a family, what would it be?
- Are there any other significant areas on the topic of balancing work and family that we should explore further?

Before closing the interview, let's quickly discuss any questions or concerns that you may have.

## APPENDIX C: IRB CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

University of St. Thomas

IRB # B10-226-02

I am conducting a study that explores the lived experiences of professional working mothers. I believe that professional working mothers will provide a unique perspective that can build a better understanding of the interactions between the modern work environment and family. You have volunteered for the study and I invite you to review this form, asking any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

This study is being conducted by: Ilena Lonetti and Dr. Fish, Department of Leadership, Policy and Administration, School of Education, University of St. Thomas.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand how work-life balance is defined and experienced today by professional working mothers. The study intends to answer the following questions:

- What are the lived experiences of professional working mothers?
- How do the lived experiences of professional working mothers reflect modern organizational workplaces, family, and the contemporary definitions of work-life balance and work-family conflict?

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following: Allow me to interview you about the topic. In terms of time, your participation would include two meetings, averaging 60 minutes each. We would meet in a neutral location that is convenient for you (e.g., a local coffee shop).

The two meetings will be scheduled approximately three weeks apart and at a time that works best for you. The initial interview will take about one hour, and will involve a set of interview questions that you are welcome to see before agreeing to participate. The interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed. You will receive a transcript of our first conversation to review with the option to edit.

A follow-up interview will be scheduled for the purpose of clarifying any statements or questions that you or I might have after the initial interview. The conversation also will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interview will be available to you for review with the option to edit.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Pseudonyms will be used. Specifically, no names will be associated with direct quotes.

Research records will be coded and kept in a locked file. Only Dr. Fish, my research advisor who guides the study process/analysis, and I will have access to the records. To maintain confidentiality, you will be identified by pseudonym only.

Interviews will be audio recorded with the tapes and transcripts stored in a locked file drawer in my home office. I will transcribe the recorded tapes. Only Dr. Fish, my research advisor who guides the study process/analysis, and I will have access to the tapes and transcripts.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have the choice to sign a consent form to allow the use of the data collected to this point. If you choose not to be a part of the study, all data collected will be destroyed immediately. Otherwise, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed within one week after completion of the research project. Specifically, paper records will be shredded and audio records will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The decision to take part or decline participation in the project will not affect your current or future relations with me or the University of St. Thomas.

You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty (by phone or email). If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have the choice to sign a consent form to allow the use of the data collected to this point. If you choose not to be a part of the study, all data collected will be destroyed immediately. During the interview process, you may skip any question or stop the interview process at any time.

**Risks:**

The study will pose no risk to you because of the confidentiality measures integrated into the study: (1) you are an adult; (2) prior to the interview process, you will be informed of the confidentiality measures and know that you will be able to refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time; (3) at the conclusion of each interview, you will be able to ask questions regarding the interview process and study; and, (4) transcribed interviews will be available to you for review with the option to edit. Additionally, any results from the one-on-one interviews will be aggregated in a summary format.

**Benefits:**

There are no benefits to you for participating in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

My name is Ilena Lonetti. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-356-4890, or my advisor Dr. Tom Fish at 651-962-4436. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study by participating in the above-mentioned interview. I consent to be tape-recorded.

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Signature of Study Participant

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Date

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Signature of Researcher

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Date