

## **Why Do Educated, Successful Women Leave The Workforce?**

**Patti Collett Miles**

Assistant Professor of Management

University of Maine

Maine Business School

United States of America

### **Abstract**

*In the last 30 years women have made considerable strides into the workplace. But when it comes to staying in the workforce beyond the 10-year point, the numbers tell a different story. Specifically a woman at the 10-year point is five times more likely to leave the workforce than her male counterpart. This has left organizations grappling for strategies to retain them. This study first looks at why women leave through the eyes of women who have left the workforce all together, or crafted professional jobs into non-traditional careers, then creates an empirical survey to look at alternate reasons women may leave. The results of this study seem to suggest women leave the workforce because they cannot balance home and work responsibilities. It further suggests that a dynamic flexible full time schedule may prove to be a magical retention force. It also finds women walk a delicate tight rope between acting too masculine and too feminine on the job. It also supports previous findings that women are motivated by intrinsic factors than by extrinsic.*

### **1. Introduction**

Since the 1960's and the beginning of the women's movement, women have made great strides when it comes to education and career opportunities. In 1970, the percent of female high school graduates was 40%; today it is 84%, almost identical to their male counterparts. Standardized test scores have followed a similar path (current SAT averages are about 1040, similar to males) and college education levels for men and women have converged at about 17% over that same period (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). This has led to increasing opportunities for upper level jobs, with women now accounting for 42% of the management, professional and related occupations.

When it comes to staying in these professions and climbing the corporate ladder, however, the numbers tell a different story. When compared to her male counterpart, a professional woman is five times more likely to leave the workforce (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Moreover, this number has doubled since 1989 (Schwartz 1989), suggesting that while more women are now qualified for and beginning professional careers, more are leaving. This rapid departure rate at crucial career points has a significant impact on organizational knowledge transfer and trust (Droege 2003), and the costs to hire, train, retain, and then replace these women are spiraling out of control.

Explaining this phenomenon has not proven to be an easy task. Some have pointed to gender differences in communication and leadership styles, suggesting that there is often a poor fit between the traditionally male created and dominated workplace and the approach and attitudes of women (Tannen, 1990; Schwartz, 1989; Griffiths, 1988). Others have focused on the demands of the workplace that take women away from the home and create difficult logistical problems for those who are trying to be both a professional and a mother (c.f., Jackson and Scharman, 2002; Lizotte, 2001). But while studies abound about wage differences, promotions, leadership styles and motivations, results often end up contradictory or inconclusive (O'Reilly & O'Neill 2003).

Recognizing differences in career success are likely to stem from a combination of sex, gender identity and organizational context (Konrad, Ritchie, and Corrigan, 2000a), this research combines both qualitative and quantitative efforts to move beyond simple explanations.

Building from an extensive literature review and structured interviews with professional women, an online survey was created specifically aimed at women with professional degrees, most of whom are also mothers. The subjects include women who have left the professional workforce altogether, women who have moved to non-traditional work roles, women who have taken part-time professional positions, and women who have remained in the professional full time workforce. The study looks beyond the established rationale for women's workplace choices to examine the latent variables that cause a woman to leave the workforce. Ultimately, it will begin to outline the tenuous strategic components a firm must embrace for women to balance careers, children, and marriages.

The research begins with a review of past explanations for why women leave the workforce, with particular attention paid to what is missing and/or contradictory in these studies. Pulling from both the established literature and extensive interviews with women who are, or have been, in the professional workforce, attention is then turned to alternative explanations for why women leave the work force. The explanations are formalized in hypotheses. This study describes these hypotheses, then analyzes and discusses the results. The paper finishes by addressing the implications of the findings and where future inquiry might be directed.

## ***2. Literature Review and hypotheses development***

With the entry of more women in to the workforce, researchers have shown a considerable amount of interest in the differences between male and female job preferences and attributes. Konrad et al (2000a) conducted a meta-analysis of 242 studies that had been done between 1970 and 1998. These studies, representing a staggering 638,514 males and females across the United States, suggest significant sex differences in 33 of 40 job preferences. Females, for example, prefer to work with people and have opportunities to help others. Conversely, men prioritize income, leadership, and competition. In a similar study, Konrad et al (2000b) focused specifically on managers and found 12 significant differences between men and women. The analysis indicated men and women placed different values on job attributes. Men considered earnings and responsibility very important, while women considered task significance, variety, job security and good coworkers to be very important. Overall, however, the effect sizes for these findings were small (magnitude of .10 standard deviation units or less), suggesting that sex differences and attribute differences alone are not likely to provide a complete answer regarding why women so readily leave the workforce.

Recently O'Reilly & O'Neill (2003) completed an 8-year longitudinal study of 132 female M.B.A.'s which looked at the interactive effects of sex and gender identity on career success. The results indicated women were earning less, preferred supportive organizations, had worked for fewer firms, preferred part time work, and were less willing to relocate than their male counterparts were. While this study did not focus specifically on why women left the workforce, it did suggest they may not choose to participate in the same version of the career track "game" as their male counterparts. Others, though, have suggested that lower pay and the effects of the traditional hegemonic male biases in organizations may be more likely the cause (Ely & Meyerson 2000). How these systemic differences affect professional women is not clear.

While traditional views have suggested that men and women differ in abilities, and this may explain different achievement levels, there is little evidence to support this in today's population. The convergence of graduation rates for women and men at both the high school and college level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003) indicates that women are achieving a comparable education level as their male counterparts. And though Deax (1995) did find that women lag men in traditional mathematical measures, she also found that women more than make up for this in applied mathematical and verbal abilities. Some sex differences have been found in select populations around competitiveness and motivation. But while research is consistent in showing men will work harder for money than will women, research is inconsistent in determining the rewards that will motivate women.

Taken together, the evidence presented above suggests that though the basic abilities of men and women are similar; there are indeed a variety of different male and female specific characteristics. In an effort to explain these differences, Konrad et al (2000a) addressed the notion of gender ideology. Gender ideology is essentially a socially constructed script, which begins early in family rearing and runs through adulthood. Most societies construct some type of sex socialization. By pre-adult hood, gender role socialization has lead to the development of different sets of interests, which ultimately prepare girls and boys for different roles in adult and family life (Konrad, et al; 2000b).

Thus, women are subtly channeled into traditional female jobs through socially constructed norms and other non-discreet factors. As a result, women act on different job and attitude preferences, and ultimately chose different careers, based on the assimilation of these values. Workforce demographics lend some credence to this view. While large gains have been made in some career areas, women still densely populate traditionally 'female' occupations such as childcare worker (97%) and educator (71%). Further, despite shifts in laws and social views that have broadened the job opportunities available to women, they only sparsely populate nontraditional female roles like firefighter (1%), police (9.4%) and truck driver (5%) (Statistical abstract of the United States 2010).

Thus, though societal norms may have shifted to allow women to be fighter pilots and CEO's, a great many women still choose traditional roles in line with stereotypical views. Generally speaking, the stereotypical masculine ideal will be self-reliant, restricted emotionally, physically tough, aggressive, achievement motivated, sexually aggressive and avoid femininity. Conversely, stereotypical females are dependent, emotionally expressive, physically weak, passive, nurturing and self-sacrificing; certainly not traditional characteristics of success in the workplace (Burn 1996). Relying on stereotypes to describe the whole population, though, is misguided. Even if the stereotypical characteristics have some basis in fact, they describe only a "typical" member of the group and any given individual may manifest many, some, or none of the stereotypical characteristics. More disconcerting, however, is the belief that only "male" characteristics can lead to success in the workplace (O'Reilly & O'Neill 2003).

Rather than accepting that characteristics typical of women cannot led to success in the workplace, Griffiths (1998) challenges the "myths of masculinity" by changing the lens through which they are viewed and examining the positive rather than the negative consequences of traditionally female characteristics. Broadly speaking, Griffiths cites three myths. Myth 1 indicates that women are more emotional than men and this is not a desirable trait in the workforce. She confronts this myth by expounding on the idea that women feel more deeply and enact their value system differently than men; they are not simply acting irrationally. Seen as a positive, these deeper feelings could explain the intuitive nature of women that enables them to more easily build complex information networks which act as a lubricant to organizational knowledge transfer (Tsai 2001).

Myth 2 is the assumption that one who is sensitive to their own and others' feelings and more in tune with their bodies and natural rhythms may be less able to handle the world's affairs. This is assumed because traditionally men are seen as being more in control of their bodies and feelings and are said to handle the world's affairs rationally, logically and objectively. To show weakness, especially because of emotion, is to be 'unmanned'. Worse yet, the myth espouses that to be fully human you must have a rational mind that is in control of a strong body (Jaggar, 1983). Again, though, women may use this difference as a positive to create unique organizational advantage, in this case by generating positive communication methods that reach out and encourage people to build meaningful relationships (Tannen, 1990).

Myth 3 assumes humans can and should separate mind and spirit. This stems from a dualism Descartes created with his two-category system consisting of mind and body. He split emotions apart from thought and generated two separate spheres: intellectual and bodily. Philosophical discussions have moved past his simple system, but still struggle with the line of demarcation. In the workplace, value has typically been placed on the ability to separate emotions from thought, but the increasing calls for ethics and social responsibility within the corporate world suggest that this may be changing. Hofstadter and Dennett (1981) take a different view on dualism, arguing "Emotions are an automatic by product of the ability to think. They are implied by the nature of thought." This suggests that balance can be struck where emotions inform and regulate thought, and thought informs and regulates emotions. If this is true, then the stereotyped emotions of women may in fact provide positive input for organizations.

Griffith's (1998) alternative perspective on the "myths of masculinity" portrays a very different picture about the value that stereotypical female characteristics bring to the workplace. Rather than being a negative, these attributes may in fact benefit the organization in a variety of ways. If true, though, then why are so many women are still choosing traditional occupations and why are so many of the women who do choose nontraditional professional careers leaving them early?

One interesting possibility that has not been given much attention builds on the notion of gender ideology (Konrad et al, 2000a) presented earlier.

Rather than looking at whether the socialization of women prepares them for the workplace, though, this new perspective looks at the broader socialization of men and women and what their socialization implies for life outside the workplace. As a rule, it would appear that men are allowed and even encouraged to define themselves through their careers. Success is measured through business success, regardless of the impact this may have on home and family. For women, though, the traditional roles of mother, wife, and homemaker remain even while they may be climbing the corporate ladder.

While studies of work roles and job attributes do not typically look at roles and attributes outside the workplace, these roles do affect work reality for most women. A study by Bittman and England (2003) found that women and men earning identical incomes do not have identical home workloads; conversely, women do twice as much housework as their male counterparts. Further, the study found that a male's contribution to household responsibilities was virtually unaffected by his financial contribution to the family. For a woman, however, the contribution to unpaid labor around the home goes up even as she earns more. At the extreme, women who earn 100% of the household income do on average 26 hours of unpaid labor a week, while their spouse who contributes 0% to the household income does an average of 9 hours.

With this perspective in mind, an alternative explanation can be offered with regard to a woman's continued preference for traditional female jobs such as educator or child care worker. And, possibly explain why such a large percentage of women who begin professional careers end up leaving them at around the 10 year point. Rather than a search for fit between job characteristics and the attributes of women, it may simply be a search for balance and flexibility to meet the dual demands that are more likely to be placed on women than they are on men. Said differently, perhaps women make the choices they do in an attempt to find and maintain the delicate balance between home and work.

With the continued increase in dual-income households and the trends for right-sizing and productivity within corporations that have led to longer work hours for many employees, research regarding work/life balance has begun to creep in to the literature. That said, comprehensive research that addresses the specific needs of women to construct a balance between career and non-career pressures, however, seems to be lacking. The previous discussion, however, suggests that this gap in the research literature is worthy of further study.

## **2.1 Hypotheses development**

Accordingly, a series of qualitative interviews was undertaken as a means of exploring issues related to career balance for women who undertake professional careers. Completed during a two-month time period, the interviews included women who had left the workforce and those who were still working full time. Professions included an Army Lieutenant Colonel (a combat veteran and mother of three) a part time middle school math teacher (mother of two) with an engineering degree and a stay at home mom (mother of four) with a elementary education degree. Building on the literature and perspectives already presented, these interviews led to the development of a set of broad propositions to guide initial quantitative work. The propositions, and a brief discussion of the rationale behind them, are presented below.

The notion of balance clearly resonated with each of the women; age, age of children, those still in the workforce, and those who had left, it concerned them all. On the one hand, the rise of the women's movement over the past 40 years has continued to send a message that women should pursue their interests, develop their talents and not be tied to conventional conceptualizations of what they can accomplish. On the other hand, the vast majority of the women interviewed felt both personal and societal pressure to be a good mother and spouse. This balance between home and work appears to be extremely challenging and could explain the findings of O'Reilly and O'Neill (2003) that women switch employers less frequently and are less willing to relocate than their male counterparts. And while traditional thinking suggests that this problem is most salient for those with young children that did not appear to be the case. If anything, the burden appears to grow as the children age and become more involved in school and social activities. Given the earlier discussion and the consistent assertions from those interviewed it can therefore be proposed that:

*Hypothesis 1: Women leave the workforce because they cannot balance home and work.*

In effort to find a balance between work and home, many women have tried to find employers who will offer flexibility in schedules and at least some assistance with child care.

Organizations, hoping to attract and retain the best employees, have responded with a wide range of options. Which of these various options best satisfy the needs of women professionals, however, are not yet clear. In an effort to gain insight on this topic, three areas that have been getting increased attention were discussed as part of the interviews.

The first of these, flextime, has been broadly defined as "... work schedules that permit flexible starting and quitting times within limits set by management" (Olmsted, 1990: 291). Although a fairly recent innovation, many public and private sector organizations are using different combinations of flexible work schedules. A May, of 1997 study showed about 42% of all-managerial and professional jobs offer at least some flexible elements (Beers 2000). Whether these programs are valuable for women professionals, though, may depend to a large degree on how flexible the schedule options are. While a number of the interview subjects agreed that flextime programs added a measure of convenience, they were not sure that they provided enough options to deal with the myriad demands of motherhood. This was especially true for those with older children and agrees with a recent article by Frase-Blunt (2002) that suggested that company support for parents was generally better for those with young children than those with teens.

A related option, part-time work with flexibility in schedules was also discussed with the interview subjects. While not widely spread, some companies are now letting professionals work less than full-time and may even continue to pay benefits to such workers. Some of those interviewed saw value in this approach however few had chosen to work part-time. There was a general consensus that moving to part-time status was harmful to career advancement and was thus not the primary choice.

A final area discussed under the general notion of flexibility was day care. Many companies are now offering employees at least some assistance with day care, ranging from full service onsite day care centers to backup child care to referral services. For most of the women interviewed, though, this did not appear to be a major issue. Many noted that while it might have some value for those with young children, it again did not address the needs of older children. Further, the advantages of onsite centers versus what the women could find on their own was not great enough to make this option particularly attractive.

Taken together, the above discussion lays the foundation for the next two propositions. Day care, whether onsite or not, only addresses the needs of those with young children; it does not address the needs of women with children in middle school and high school. Given that young children grow and that many women have both young and older children, it is believed that women professionals will prefer flexible schedules to day care. Further, since part-time work options often come at a career cost, it is thought that flexibility within full time positions will be more attractive than addressing flexibility through part-time options. Said more formally:

*Hypothesis 2: Women prefer workplace flexibility to on-site daycare.*

*Hypothesis 3: Women prefer full time flexibility to part time flexibility.*

Job attributes create the foundation to the motivation hypothesis. Specifically, job attributes can be split into two categories, intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors will motivate the fulfillment of material or social needs. Intrinsic factors offer a higher-level fulfillment such as competence, growth and self-esteem, determination and expression (Pinder 1998). Though often difficult to separate in practice (e.g., high paying jobs may provide abundant income to alleviate financial needs, while providing a strong sense of self to enhance self-esteem), the simple distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation resonated with the women interviewed. On average, these women saw intrinsic factors as a bigger driver than extrinsic factors.

The dilemma when it comes to balancing work and home roles, however, is that many of the traditional work place motivators are extrinsic in nature (e.g., financial, perks, etc). Further, achieving these rewards often requires that a person give up at least some intrinsic returns (e.g., flexibility). Many researchers believe that a women's preference for rewards other than high pay and advancement are an important cause of their failure to attain more of the top-level positions (Huckle 1983). In addition, while work may be the primary means of gaining extrinsic rewards, other avenues outside the workplace are available for gaining intrinsic returns (e.g., through time with children, hobbies or other outlets, etc.).

Further complicating the achievement of balance between work and other roles for women professionals is the fact that, on average, men tend to value self-reliance, earnings and advancement (Konrad et al 2000a).

These attributes are normally characterized in the workplace by prowess and physical toughness, often manifested in long grueling hours on the job. Women, in contrast, tend to value interpersonal relationships, nurturing roles and job security, which can be found through work that involves growth, development, and meaning (Brewer et al 2002).

Recognizing these distinctions, many of the women interviewed spoke of the difficulty they had in finding a happy medium between the male and female characteristics. If a woman chooses a strong a feminine stance she will likely to be perceived as too meek and mild to cut it in the business world. Being too tough and aggressive, however, was likely to bring charges of being bitchy an intolerant. This suggests that in the work place women must find the fine line where their actions are not seen as being too feminine or too masculine if they want to be rewarded.

Given the above discussion, the final propositions can be offered. First, it seems clear from both the interviews and the literature that women are likely to favor intrinsic over extrinsic returns, and may chose to forgo work opportunities that men would not pass up. Second, women's work place rewards, especially the extrinsic but also to some degree the intrinsic, may depend on finding a work persona that balances both male and female characteristics. Said more formally:

*Hypothesis 4: Women are motivated to work for intrinsic reasons rather than for money.*

*Hypothesis 5: Women must conform to non-aggressive male gender specific characteristics, but will not be positively viewed if they conform to aggressive male gender characteristics.*

While this literature clearly examines facets of a woman's workplace difficulties, it appears to be missing some important research. This study addresses the gaps in current literature. The five hypotheses are comprised of six measurable latent variables. These variables enabled analysis of the complex interaction of workplace balance, flexibility, gender specific motivations and desirable gender characteristics in the workplace.

### **3. Methods**

A significant portion of the current research on this topic is firm specific and gleaned from women who are still in the workforce. To compensate for this it was determined that an online survey generated from a convenience sample would be the best method to collect sufficient data. The sections below describe the sample, development of the instrument, and how they survey was developed and administered.

#### **3.1 Sample**

The initial research sample was drawn from a convenience sample of 20 women comprised of people the researcher knew. These women ranged in age from 35 to 50 and all had college degrees. Most were married, and had children. From there each participant was asked to either provide the researcher with some other professional women whom might be interested or forward the survey on themselves. In a four-month period this group generated a snowball sample of 147 responses of which 112 were usable.

#### **3.2: Measures**

Relevant theory, previous scales and in depth interviews were used to develop a preliminary online questionnaire consisting of 147 questions in Likert scale format. Respondents were asked to choose between "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree", which were later scaled to represent 1 through 5. This questionnaire was distributed to professional women and academic experts to verify its ability to provide clear, precise, and unbiased information. After minor modifications, the questionnaire was pilot tested to 10 participants. Additional adjustments were made; it was ultimately launched to the web (via web surveyor) which enabled the accumulation of data.

#### **3.4: Variables**

The first variable is *work status*. This variable consisted of a statement which asked the participants to choose the answer which best described their work situation. The available choices ranged from: I do not work (1) to I work full time (6). These responses were aggregated into 3 groups; women who did not work (1), women who worked between 10 and 30 hours a week (2) and women who worked between 30 and 40 hours per week (3).

A woman's *need to work* was assessed in a similar fashion. This variable had 3 items, which represented generally if the woman had a husband, if he made more than 60K and if he had sufficient benefits. After analysis of the items one factor was chosen: husband's income. The responses were again aggregated into no husband (1); husband who makes less than 60K (2); and husband who makes more than 60K.

A third variable was a woman's capacity to *balance* work and family. This factor was comprised of two items, which asked about the influence of home and work balance issue, and ultimately the impact of these issues on a woman's desire to leave the workforce. A response of 1 indicates a strong disagreement with the statement and a response of 5 indicated a strong agreement with the statement. While the two items seem to assess the same variable, they were retained as separate measures.

A woman's desire for *flexibility* was assessed in multiple ways. These factors were comprised of over 30 items, which addressed different types of flexibility based on general flexibility, flexible hours, days, weeks and monthly work plans. These items were subjected to a factor analysis and four distinct factors emerged: general flexibility defined as the general desire to have flexibility in the workplace (*General Flexibility*)  $\alpha = .68$  mean = 4.00; reduced hours with set days, defined as 20% less hours in a week with a consistent work schedule (*Reduced Set Flexibility*)  $\alpha = .95$  mean 2.94; reduced hours with flexible days, defined as having a slightly reduced schedule ~30 hours a week with the complete flexibility to choose how the hours will be completed, but not from home (*Reduced Flexibility*)  $\alpha = .93$  mean = 3.29; full time flexibility defined as a full time schedule with complete flexibility to choose hours, days and week compositions (*Full Flexibility*)  $\alpha = .83$  mean 3.46; and Full time home Flexibility, defined as full time work with the ability to work some of the work week from home (*Full Flexibility Home*)  $\alpha = .76$  mean 3.67.

The fifth variable was the best method to motivate women: *motivation*. Again this factor was comprised of 15 items that addressed traditional motivations and non-traditional motivations. These items were subjected to a factor analysis and two distinct factors emerged: intrinsic *motivation* ( $\alpha = .836$ ) and *extrinsic motivation* ( $\alpha = .706$ ).

The sixth variable was called gender characteristics. This factor was generated from 15 gender specific characteristics. The respondent was asked to read a statement and score if she strongly disagrees (1: statement does not fit her) to strongly agrees (5: the statement does fit her). This enabled the data to be subject to a factor analysis where by two distinct factors emerged. The first factor was called *male aggressive*, ( $\alpha = .63$ ) which respondents were asked to indicate if they were positively evaluated for having a specific male aggressive behaviors. The second factor was called *male general*, ( $\alpha = .78$ ) which respondents were asked to indicate if they were positively evaluated for general male behaviors.

Other supporting variables were daycare and school hours that matched work schedules. The *daycare* factor was generated from three items, which asked respondents to report how important on-site daycare was, as well as general daycare questions. The data was then subject to a Principal Component Analysis, and Varimax rotation factor analysis where by a distinct factor emerged. *Daycare* held together with an alpha of .69 over 3 items. The second factor was called *school*, ( $\alpha = .65$ ) which respondents were asked to respond to questions, which assessed their ability to align their schedules with their children's school schedules. These factors were both enabled using Principal Component Analysis and Varimax rotation factor analysis methods.

#### 4. Analysis

Means, standard deviations, correlations, paired samples and Chronbach's alpha were computed for each of the variables used in the analysis. Tables 1 through 6 indicated specific data for each analysis. As can be seen, there was reasonable variation on statistical methodology and level of analysis on each factor and item.

Hypotheses one posits that women leave the workforce because they cannot balance home and work. Specifically proposing a negative relationship between a woman's work status and her ability to balance home and work. Testing of this hypothesis was done through an analysis of a correlation matrix, which showed significant negative *correlations* ( $r = -.236$   $p < .01$ ). Thus providing support for hypotheses one (table 1). Next this hypothesis was tested using a divided sample, asserting that if the husband made greater than \$60K, the women may feel more able to leave work. To this end, a second analysis was completed this time indicating a stronger negative relationship (table 2:  $r = -.312$   $p < .01$ ).

Additionally, a regression analysis was computed using work status as the dependent variable and desire to leave for balance, and not having the freedom to choose a work schedule were the independent variables. The regression equation was significant ( $f = 3.72$   $p < .05$ ) and explained 10% of the variance. Thus, additional support is provided for hypothesis 1.

Hypotheses two assess the relationship between a woman's desires for flexibility versus her desire for day care or general school hours that matched her work schedule. This relationship was assessed using paired sample t-tests. As shown in table 3 the mean for of the flexibility measure was significantly different than the mean for daycare ( $p < .01$ ). This provides support for the hypothesis.

Hypothesis three considers work place flexibility as a general construct. This hypothesis is designed to assess the type of flexibility a woman desires in the workplace. Six Paired sample t-tests were run to determine differences between the four flexibility options (table 4). The results of this analysis suggests the preferred means of flexibility was a 40 hour work week with the flexibility to work some of the week from *home flexible home* (mean = 3.68). As shown in table 4 the mean for *flexibility home* was significantly different from the mean of *reduced flexibility* ( $p < .01$ ), which indicates these variables are significantly different. Further paired t-test analysis indicated a significant difference between *reduced flexibility* and all other flexibility options. Among the 40-hour a week options the differences were not as clear. When the *full flexibility home* (in a 40 hour work week) was compared to *full flexibility*, using paired sample test the data suggests the former is preferred ( $t = -3.925$   $p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis four examines if there was a difference in a woman's desire for intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. This analysis was accomplished through use of paired sample t-tests (table 5). Specifically this hypothesis proposed a woman would be more intrinsically motivated than her extrinsically motivated. Testing of this hypothesis was done through an analysis of a correlation matrix which showed a significant difference in the means ( $t = 8.74$   $p < .01$ ). Thus hypothesis four is fully supported. Further evidence of this hypothesis can be seen through a separate paired sample t-test by which the mean of *working for the money* is compared to *working for the feeling of accomplishment*. In this analysis the correlation matrix showed as significant difference in the means ( $t = -10.59$   $p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis five examines the data to determine if there is a difference in how a woman perceives her evaluation in the work place. Specifically this hypothesis addresses the characteristics necessary for success in the workplace. Again using a paired sample t-tests (Table 6) several tests were conducted. Specifically, since this hypothesis proposes a woman is viewed positively when she possesses some general male characteristics, however, not aggressive male characteristics. This hypothesis was tested through an analysis of a correlation matrix, which showed a significant difference in the means ( $t = 9.31$   $p < .01$ ). This provided support for hypotheses five.

## 5. Discussion and future studies

Over the last 35 years researchers have shown considerable interest in how women are assimilating into the workplace. Statistics clearly indicate they earn less money, make different career choices, and are much more inclined to leave the workforce at the 10-year point than their male counterparts. Yet there is a surprisingly few research articles which addresses how women see the problem, and their possible solutions and what might motivate them to stay in the workforce. Additionally few investigations have addressed a central question in this literature, that is, how do firms keep professional women with high levels of tacit knowledge in the work force. Instead of using previous scales and literature, and a stable of women who were currently working at a particular organization; this study quarried women who had left the workforce, and women who had crafted nontraditional professional careers, as well as those who have remained in the full time professional workforce. Through a structured interview process these women ( $n=20$ ) divulged critical factors they felt drove them from the workforce. These factors were then built into a series of items which ultimately will provide empirical evidence to suggest why women leave the workforce and some possible mechanisms to increase the likelihood they will remain. This data indicates women leave in effort to strike a balance between home and work. Balance seems to affect all women, regardless of husband or husband's income. Those who have a husband who makes more than 60K do not act significantly different with regard to balance than those who do not have a husband.



Since women still seem to handle the bulk of the childcare, carpooling and cleaning, the need for balance is considerable. Corporations have addressed some of this with on-site daycares and flexible schedules, but this research indicates they may have missed the mark in some important areas.

Flexibility is a dynamic term. Previous research indicates that flexibility exists in a large portion of American business, but the type of flexibility each woman wants will differ from woman to woman, and may differ for a particular woman given the time of year, and the ages of her children. This suggests firms may need to be open to not only flexible schedules, but dynamic flexible schedules, that may include working from home.

As suspected this research confirmed women appear to be motivated differently than men. This data suggests intrinsic motivation is much more powerful than extrinsic motivation for women. This type of motivation extends to pay systems. Specifically women consistently indicated they would be willing to give up money or if the potential to earn more money, for other intrinsic rewards.

Related to these concepts is how a woman projects herself on the job. This data indicated a woman felt ok with identifying with "general Male" characteristics like goal oriented, rational and logical. However if a woman teeters over to aggressive (male aggressive behaviors) or to being a peace maker (female passive behaviors), she will be automatically placed in the too masculine or too feminine conundrum. Here she will step lightly for much of her career, because she has been conditioned through gender ideology to follow certain socially constructed norms. It is here that the question must be addressed of do women choose traditional female careers because they are seeking some of the benefits of these careers, or because they are more nurturing and would like to help people (as in the case with nurses).

These constructs are nested in every facet of a firm. Reward systems are based in financial rewards, performance is evaluated by generally positivistic and functional male based characteristics and motivation is generally driven through the potential for financial gain. But this research indicates this may not motivate women like it does men; if this is the case the multi level strategic implications of this study are significant.

Flexibility evolved to be a very important aspect of this study. The qualitative study indicated women wanted flexibility, but the surprise occurred when analysis indicated most women want full time flexibility with the option to work from home. The least desirable choice for women was to have a reduced workload of 20 or less hours a week.

As previously found, the study supports the idea that women are motivated differently than men. Women work for intrinsic motivators, yet work places are filled with extrinsic motivation. These findings have theoretical and practical strategic implications. From a theoretical perspective, the time has come to expand the literature on alternative workplace solutions such as more and total workplace flexibility. From a strategic perspective this has relatively important impact. Many work place designs rest on the fundamental idea that the majority of the company resides at a common location. Changing this perspective will require a major shift in the way organizations organize.

### **5.1 Future Studies**

This study is limited by the sample. While it does pull from a diverse group of women, they are all at least college educated and most (94%) have children. This is a fertile ground for future research. The possible research in this area extends from extending the sample (beyond college educated women) to including men in the sample. The scope of the study can be extended through broadening the factors to include the gender identity scale, and possibly the organizational justice implications of dynamic flexibility. The sample does not include men, and should have included something from the Bem measure of psychological androgyny (Bem 1974). The addition of these factors may provide clearer insight into the male and female specific motivators.

## References

- Beers, T. (2000) Flexible schedules and shift work: replacing the '9-to-5' workday? *Monthly Labor review*, June.
- Bem, S. (1974) The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of consulting & clinical Psychology*, 42 (1), 155-162.
- Bittman, M. England P., & Folbre, N. (2003) When Does gender trump Money? Bargaining and Time in household work. *American Journal of Sociology*, July (109)1.
- Brewer, N. Mitchell, P & Weber N. (2002) Gender role, Organizational Status, and Conflict Management Styles. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(1), 78-94.
- Deaux, K. (1985). Sex and gender. *Annual review of psychology*; 36(1), 49-81.
- Burn, S. M. (1996). *The social psychology of gender*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Droege, S. B., & Hoobler, J. M. (2003). Employee turnover and tacit knowledge diffusion: a network perspective. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 10(4), 50-64.
- Ely, R. J., & Meyerson, D. E. (2010). An organizational approach to undoing gender: The unlikely case of offshore oil platforms. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 3-34.
- Ely, R. J. & Meyerson, D.E. (2000). Theories of gender in organizations: A new approach to organizational analysis and change. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 22, 105-153.
- Eddleston, K. A., & Powell, G. N. (2008). The role of gender identity in explaining sex differences in business owners' career satisfier preferences. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 23(2), 244-256.
- Frase-Blunt M. (2002). Workplaces Fail to Support Parents of Teens. *Human Resource Magazine*, September (11)2.
- Ferber, M. A., & Nelson, J. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Beyond economic man: Feminist theory and economics*, University of Chicago Press.
- Golembiewski, R., & Proehl Jr., C. (1978). A survey of the empirical literature on flexible work hours: Character and consequences of a major innovation. *Academy of Management Review*, 837-853.
- Hofstadter, D. R., & Dennett, D. C. (2006). *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self & Soul*.
- Huckle, P. (1983). A decade's difference: Mid-level managers and affirmative action. *Public Personnel Management*, 12(249-257).
- Jackson, A. & Scharman, J., (2002). Constructing Family-Friendly Careers: Mothers' Experiences. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 80(2), 180-187.
- Jaggar, A. M. (1983). *Feminist politics and human nature*. Rowman & Littlefield Pub Incorporated.
- Konrad, A. M., Ritchie Jr, J. E., Lieb, P., & Corrigan, E. (2000). Sex differences and similarities in job attribute preferences: a meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, 126(4), 593.
- Konrad, A., Corrigan, E., Lieb, P. & Ritchie, J. (2000). Sex differences in job attribute preferences among managers and business students. *Group & Organization Management*, 25(2), 108-131.
- Lizotte, K. (2001). Are Balance Benefits for Real? *Journal of Business Strategy*, 22(2), 32-34.
- Olmsted, B. (1990). Flexible work arrangements: A sea of change for managers. *Employment Relations Today*, 17(4), 291-296.
- O'Reilly, C. & O'Neill, O. (2004). Women's Careers: The Impact of Sex and Gender Identity on Career Attainment. Stanford Working paper series, Research Paper No. 1775.
- O'Reilly, C.A. III, Caldwell, D.F. and Barnett, W. 2000. People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit." *Academy of Management Journal*, 34: 487-516. perspectives.
- Pinder, C.C. (1998). *Work Motivation in organizational behavior*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall
- Schwartz, F., (1989) Management Women and the New Facts of Life. *Harvard Business Review*, Jan/Feb.
- Statistical Abstract of the United States (2010) *U.S. Department of Commerce*, U.S. Census Bureau Hoovers Business Press, 121.
- Tannen, D. *You just don't understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. William Morrow, 1990.
- Tsui, A. and Egan, T.D. Being Different: Relational Demography and Organization Attachment. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37 (1992): 549-579.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2003) Educational Attainment. April 10, 2011.
- Work and Life Balance, *Harvard Business Review*. 2000. pp. 103-127
- Whitford, M. (1988). *Feminist perspectives in philosophy*. Indiana University Press.

**Table 1**

Pearson Correlation Hypothesis 1	Work Status	Balance	Freedom to Choose
Work Status	1		
Balance	-.236**	1	
Freedom	-.146	.462	1

\*\* correlations significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

**Table 2**

Pearson Correlation Hypothesis 1	Work Status	Balance	Freedom to Choose
Work Status	1		
Balance	-.313**	1	
Freedom	-.177	.480	1

\*\* correlations significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Using sample of women who have a husband who makes more than 60k per year

**Table 3 (Daycare vs. Flexibility)**

Paired Samples t-test	Chronbach Alpha	Mean	t-test	Significance (2-tailed)
General Flexibility & General Daycare	.66 .69	4.00 2.4	12.565	.000
General Flexibility & General School	.66 .65	4.00 3.08	7.027	.000
General Daycare & General School	.69 .65	2.4 3.08	-4.681	.000

**Table 4 (Type of Flexibility)**

Paired Samples t-test	Chronbach Alpha	Mean	t-test	Significance (2-tailed)
Reduced Set Flexibility & Reduced Flexibility	.95 .93	2.94 3.29	-3.92	.000
Reduced Set Flexibility Full Flexibility Home	.95 .83	2.94 3.67	-5.023	.000
Reduced Set Flexibility Full Flexibility	.95 .76	2.94 3.46	-3.733	.000
Reduced Flexibility & Full Flexibility Home	.93 .88	3.29 3.67	-2.751	.007
Reduced Flexibility & Full Flexibility	.93 .76	3.29 3.46	-1.446	.151
Full Flexibility Home & Full Flexibility	.88 .76	3.67 3.46	1.692	.094

**Table 5 (Motivation)**

Paired Samples t-test	Chronbach Alpha	Mean	t-test	Significance (2-tailed)
Intrinsic Motivation & Extrinsic Motivation	.836 .706	3.8 3.01	8.736	.000
Work for Money & Work for feeling of Accomplishment		2.54 4.30	-10.586	.000
Work for Feeling of Accomplishment & Work for money I earn		4.30 3.22	7.748	.000

**Table 6 (Characteristics)**

Paired Samples t-test	Chronbach Alpha	Mean	t-test	Significance (2-tailed)
Male general & Male Aggressive	.73 .68	4.153 3.197	9.314	.000