

2017

Female Executive Worldviews that Support Professional Endurance

Rebecca Taylor Kipp

Follow this and additional works at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maolhonors>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kipp, Rebecca Taylor. (2017). Female Executive Worldviews that Support Professional Endurance. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maolhonors/20>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Organizational Leadership at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Julie Belle White-Newman MAOL Leadership Award by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.

Female Executive Worldviews that Support Professional Endurance

By

Rebecca Taylor Kipp

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership

St. Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

May 2016

Research Advisor: Sharon Radd, Ed.D.

Research Reading Committee:

Rebecca Hawthorne, PhD

Paula Hart, MAOL

Signature of Advisor

Date



ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY
.....
School of Business
and Professional Studies

Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership

© Copyright by Rebecca Taylor Kipp, 2016

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Purpose Statement.....	7
Conceptual Context.....	8
Female Executives Face Challenges that Effect Long-term Endurance.....	8
The Effect of Worldviews on Female Executive Endurance.....	16
Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions.....	19
Method.....	23
Research Design.....	23
Participant Selection.....	24
Ensuring Participant Confidentiality.....	25
Research Participants.....	25
Data Analysis.....	26
Validity.....	28
Ethical Considerations.....	30
Findings.....	30
Stay True to Self.....	31
View Challenge as Opportunity.....	43
Let Go of Perfection.....	47
Cultivate Professional Networks.....	52
Express Gratitude.....	57
Summary of Findings.....	63

Discussion.....	64
Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) Time Orientation.....	65
Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) Activity Direction.....	68
Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) Control Location.....	71
Implications.....	75
Considerations for Female Executives and Aspiring Female Executives.....	75
Considerations for Organizations.....	78
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.....	80
Summary.....	81
References.....	83
Appendix A: Research Instrument.....	91
Appendix B: Email Requesting Participant Recommendations.....	92
Appendix C: Recruitment Email for Potential Participants.....	93
Appendix D: Research Participant Consent Forms.....	94

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1.....26

Abstract

Of Standard & Poor's 500 Index companies, women comprise 45% of the labor force, yet occupy only one in four executive leadership roles and 4.4% of Chief Executive Officer positions (Catalyst, 2015). Female executives often face the challenges of being both a woman in the workforce and an executive. Dealing with significant challenges and adversity on a daily basis can affect long-term professional and personal endurance (Kenworthy, Fay, Frame & Petree; Kwoh, 2013; Lian & Tam, 2014; Loh, 2010). For the purpose of this paper, *effective endurance* is defined as the ability to face long-term challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Contemporary research on female executives focuses heavily on barriers to career advancement, strategies to obtain executive positions, and tactics used to manage work/life roles. Very little research exists to identify the unique perspectives, beliefs, and values these women hold that encourage their professional endurance. This thesis explores the worldviews of nine female executives who positively identified as effectively enduring long-term professional challenge throughout their careers. Five categories of endurance-supporting worldviews emerged from this research: *Stay True to Self*, *View Challenge as Opportunity*, *Let Go of Perfection*, *Cultivate Professional Networks*, and *Express Gratitude*. Additionally, all nine women presented *Future Time Orientation*, *Inward Activity Direction*, and *External Control Location* worldview orientations (Koltko-Rivera, 2004) that prove countercultural to the norms of Corporate America.

Of Standard & Poor's 500 Index companies, women comprise 45% of the labor force, yet only 25% hold a senior management or executive leadership position (Catalyst, 2015). Female executives face a unique combination of personal and professional challenges. On a daily basis, these women may confront gender bias, systemic barriers and work/life role conflict, as well as the intense demands of executive leadership (Gregory-Mina, 2012; Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013; Pincott, 2014). Continually managing these challenges produces significant stress that can threaten individual well-being (Gloria, Faulk & Steinhardt, 2013; Lian & Tam, 2014; Loh, 2010). With compromised well-being, leadership efficacy and endurance can be reduced (Kenworthy, Fay, Frame & Petree, 2014; Kwoh, 2013; Loehr & Schwartz, 2001).

To maximize the long-term impact of their leadership, female executives must effectively endure challenge and adversity. For the purposes of this paper, *effective endurance* is defined as the ability to face long-term challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Contemporary research focuses on the many challenges these women face, the unique traits of the few who have achieved executive positions, and best practices for work/life balance. Yet, we know very little about the specific perspectives, beliefs, and values women executives hold that encourage their professional endurance. Armed with deeper understanding of female executive worldviews, I hope to raise awareness of perspectives that encourage the staying power of existing and aspiring female executives. It is my great hope that this research motivates more women to strive for and sustain executive leadership roles.

Purpose Statement

As an advocate for female equality in all arenas and as a hopeful executive myself, I am passionate about women's equal representation at the highest levels of organizational leadership.

The purpose of my research was to explore the unique ways women in executive roles view and make sense of their worlds to enhance long-term professional endurance. Understanding the worldviews these particular women use to sustain endurance may encourage the long-term resilience of other female executives and women who aspire to executive leadership.

Conceptual Context

To appreciate the challenges female executives confront on a daily basis, we must closely examine the specific barriers that many working women face. We must also understand the specific challenges inherent with executive leadership and the dominant cultural norms of American business. Understanding the potential ramifications of managing this dual set of challenges can help contextualize the lack of women in executive leadership. To understand how female executives can effectively endure adversity, we need to explore how they see and make sense of their worlds. Worldviews provide an avenue for exploring the unique values, perceptions, and beliefs that female executives use to support their long-term professional endurance.

Female Executives Face Challenges that Effect Long-term Endurance

On a daily basis, many female executives face both the challenges of being a woman in the workforce and those inherent with executive leadership. As working women, they may confront gender bias, systemic barriers, and work/life role imbalance. As executives, they often face pressure to deliver superior results to their organizations, which can equate to long work hours and frequent personal sacrifice. Conforming to the *time macho* (Slaughter, 2012, p. 20) norms and expectations of contemporary American business culture can affect long-term well-

being and endurance efforts. Due to the many challenges they may face on a daily basis, female executives can be in a perilous position for endangered endurance.

Working women face challenges. Despite recent advances toward workplace equality, women still face significant challenges as professionals. While American law protects against blatant sexism in the workplace, more subtle forms of gender discrimination persist. *Second-generation gender discrimination* (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013, para. 8) involves cultural expectations of gender norms and subtle institutional practices and policies that keep women from achieving executive leadership positions. Working women face three significant areas of occupational challenge including gender bias, systemic barriers, and work/life role incongruity.

First, many working women still face gender discrimination and bias surrounding their professional capabilities. While organizational leadership trends favor *androgynous* or *feminine* traits, effective leadership is still overwhelmingly associated with traditionally *masculine* terms (Gregory-Mina, 2012; Kark, Waismel-Manor & Shamir, 2012; Ward, Popson & DiPaulo, 2010). Additionally, the *think manager-think male* (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, p.435) mentality is still prevalent in many male-dominated industries (Kark et al., 2012). Often, organizations with a long history of male leadership continue to promote men to leadership positions simply because of *status quo bias* (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, p.434). Kanter's research in the late 1970s on homosocial reproduction indicates that groups often foster member similarity by restricting entry to those who are different (as cited in Ezzedeen, Budworth & Baker, 2015). Status quo bias and homosocial reproduction thus act to keep organizations from actively seeking out female leadership.

Exacerbating the issue of gender bias in the workforce is a phenomenon known as *gender fatigue* (Kamberidou, 2010, p.89). Gender fatigue refers to an individual or organization's lack of effort in continuously challenging subtle forms of gender discrimination (Kamberidou, 2010). Due to the advancement of women's rights in recent decades, many feel that gender bias is no longer an issue needing attention. In fact, Kelan found that "gender mainstreaming has given [the] impression that gender issues at work have been resolved, making more subtle discrimination harder to spot" (as cited in Kamberidou, 2010, p. 92). Additionally, research shows that women are often reluctant to identify the ways gender discrimination personally affects them (Ibarra et al., 2013; Kamberidou, 2010). Kelan also found that even when women acknowledge that gender discrimination exists, they are likely to identify their own workplace as being *gender neutral* (as cited in Kamberidou, 2010, p. 92).

The second major area of occupational challenge for working women involves systemic barriers that keep women from reaching the highest levels of organizational leadership. Female professionals still face the persistent barriers of the *sticky floor* (Kamberidou, 2010, p. 90), *glass ceiling* (Kamberidou, 2010, p. 90), and *leaky pipeline* (Kamberidou, 2010, p. 90). The sticky floor refers to low-wage, low-opportunity jobs that keep women entrenched in the lowest levels of an organization (Kamberidou, 2010). The glass ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that keep women from reaching the highest levels of organizational leadership (Kamberidou, 2010). Exclusion from informal networking groups, lack of mentors and sponsors (Ezzedeen, et.al., 2015; Ibarra, et al., 2013; Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz & Wiethoff, 2010), and a reluctance to self-promote (Fels, 2004), all contribute to the glass ceiling effect. Proponents of the Pipeline Theory believe that a growing number of women in middle management combined with retiring male executives will eventually push more women up the leadership pipeline (Ezzedeen et al.,

2015, Kamberidou, 2008; Kamberidou, 2010). Yet in actuality, persistent gender bias, greater competition for top management positions, and a lack of senior female sponsors to help women ascend the corporate ladder results in pipeline leaks (Ezzedeen et al., 2015; Kamberidou, 2010).

The third area of significant challenge for working women comes from constant negotiation of work and life roles. Despite an increase in dual family earners, the lion's share of childcare and eldercare responsibilities still resides with women, even when they work full-time (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Roebuck, Smith & El Haddaoui, 2013). The influx of women into the workforce has not yet transformed contemporary American work practices. The norms of American work culture often support a society where men participate in the workforce and women stay home to raise children (Ibarra, et al., 2013). Perceptions of the *ideal* American worker are still overwhelmingly associated with long office hours and dedication to organizational *not* familial responsibilities (Harris & Giuffre, 2010; Waumsley & Houston, 2009). The norms of contemporary American business culture, often based on excessive work hours, short-term goal achievement, and increased profitability, are frequently at odds with sustainable work practices and wholistic well-being (Slaughter, 2012). The pressure to be both a committed employee and a devoted parent, spouse, or family member can produce dual-role stress for working women that results in higher attrition rates (Fels, 2004), health ramifications (Harris & Giuffre, 2010; McMillan & Morris, 2012), and decreased personal satisfaction both at work and home (Lian & Tam, 2014).

Executives face challenges. Although different in scope from the adversity working women confront, executives face challenges as well. An increasingly wired and rapidly changing world demands that executive leaders strive to deliver faster, cheaper, better results for their companies. Shareholders expect executives to be shrewd business people, transformational

corporate leaders, and responsible global citizens. Long work hours, continuous travel, and extended time away from home can create mental, emotional, and physical fatigue. Additionally, the lack of exercise, reduced sleep, and poor diet combined with excessive workloads and little time for renewal practices may create an unsustainable lifestyle for many executives (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001). In a business culture that values personal sacrifice for company benefit, exhausted executives rarely acknowledge their fatigue openly (Kwoh, 2013). Often the very traits that help executives attain high profile positions, push them to ignore the negative signs of stress (Kwoh, 2013). A recent Harvard Medical School study indicated, “96% of senior leaders reported feeling burned out to some degree, with one-third describing their burnout as extreme” (Kwoh, 2013, para. 4).

Additionally, the many responsibilities of today’s executives can create significant work/life balance stress. Many senior executives admit, “work/life balance is at best an elusive ideal and at worst a complete myth” (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014, para. 1). For many executives the extensive responsibilities of their work life require significant reconfiguration of their personal lives. Hired help, use of technology to work from home, and selective business travel can assist executives in their quest for work/life balance, yet each of these strategies has drawbacks. Domestic help can be expensive, 24/7 access to communication prohibits personal/professional boundaries, and refusal to travel in a globalized business world can be detrimental to an executive’s career. Constantly negotiating work/life role responsibilities can consume significant effort and energy, and take a toll on executives’ long-term endurance (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). However, in a business culture that often exults and rewards personal sacrifice for organizational gain executives may find it difficult to resist conforming to unsustainable work practices (Slaughter, 2012).

In her widely publicized article “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All,” former State Department Director of Policy Planning, Slaughter (2012), details how contemporary American cultural values and work norms are directly at odds with healthy work/life balance. “To value family over professional advancement, even for a time – is directly at odds with the prevailing social pressures on career professionals in the United States” (Slaughter, 2012, p.7). American business culture often reflects overarching societal values of individualism, self-reliance, determination, and Social Darwinism (Scarborough, 2001). Americans often believe that success in business, as in life, comes from individual drive, ambition, and a commitment to outwork others. All too often, our picture of the ideal professional still involves “someone who can climb the ladder the furthest in the shortest time” (Slaughter, 2012, p. 7). A corporate culture that exalts and rewards professional sacrifice holds little room for equal dedication and loyalty to personal commitments. Even in Washington, D.C., where politicians publically espouse to support *family values*, a decision to leave the professional world “‘to spend time with your family,’ is a euphemism for being fired,” (Slaughter, 2012, p.7). Corporate America’s frequent unwillingness to value and promote policies and practices that support professional and personal life congruity often results in significant costs in increased employee attrition, lost productivity, and decreased global competitiveness (Rikleen, 2012).

Female executives face both sets of challenges. Female executives face the dual challenge of being both a woman in the workforce and an executive in Corporate America. They must concurrently manage gender bias and stereotypes surrounding their leadership capabilities, work/life role incongruity, and the stress inherent with being an executive. Additionally, female

executives face a completely separate set of challenges that include tokenism, emotional dissonance, and the *glass cliff* (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, p. 83).

When a woman becomes the first female to occupy a high-level position, she may face *token status bias* (Nelson & Burke, 2000, p. 111). Tokenism creates challenges for individuals who occupy minority status in an organization, and include increased visibility, isolation from the majority group, and designation as a representative for an entire minority group (Kamberidou, 2010; Nelson & Burke, 2000). Often in the minority, female executives are more isolated within organizations, and consequently may experience more tension, lower self-confidence, and continual subtle forms of discrimination (Lucia-Casademunt, Ariza-Montes & Morales-Gutiérrez, 2013).

Additionally, gender stereotypes can create expectations in how female executives communicate and display emotions. American culture often expects women to display positive emotions and lead in communal and inclusive ways (Gregory-Mina, 2012; Kenworthy, et al., 2014). This cultural expectation persists even when women occupy executive positions. Researchers Simpson and Stroh found that those who “follow typically feminine display rules (hiding negative emotions and faking positive emotions) report experiencing higher levels of inauthenticity” (as cited in Kenworthy, et al., 2014, p. 97). This can lead to emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion, which have “stronger adverse effects for women than for men” (Kenworthy, et al., 2014, p. 97).

Finally, female executives face challenges associated with the glass cliff. The glass cliff, identified by researchers Ryan and Haslam (2005), refers to a phenomenon where women are more likely to achieve executive leadership positions in times of organizational crisis. Gender

trait stereotypes of collaborative female leadership styles often fit well with organizational needs in times of crisis (Brückmuller & Branscombe, 2010). A *think crisis-think female* (Brückmuller & Branscombe, 2010, p. 435) mentality and subsequent appointment of women to leadership positions in times of adversity unduly set these women up for failure. Females who accept glass cliff positions are at greater risk of disproportionate blame for negative outcomes, even if organizational performance was poor before their ascension to power (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

Ongoing challenge leads to stress and diminished endurance. Navigating the unique challenges of being a female executive on a daily basis can threaten long-term health and endurance. Nelson and Burke (2000) found that women who achieve executive positions experience higher rates of headaches, depression, feelings of isolation, and even suicide. Additionally, female executives are also more likely to report experiencing guilt and anxiety in not meeting the societal expectations of parenthood (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). In a study conducted by researchers Sandmark and Restig, as published in 2010, female executives in male-dominated professions reported that an imbalance between their professional and personal lives contributed to significant external and internal stressors that “manifested as overexertion” (Lian & Tam, 2014, p. 44).

Occupational burnout, a condition characterized by “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (Chan, 2002, p. 381), directly affects an individual’s well-being and professional endurance (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011). Most executives admit to some level of burnout (Kwoh, 2013), and women endure greater occupational stress than their male colleagues (Lian & Tam, 2014). Female executives can therefore be in a doubly perilous position when it comes to their long-term professional endurance.

For some female executives, the continual management of personal and professional stress leads to a decision to *off-ramp* (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, para. 7) their careers. A combination of pull factors (i.e., childcare or eldercare responsibilities) and push factors (i.e., glass ceiling policies or unsustainable career demands) lead many female professionals to exit the workforce temporarily, if not permanently (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). For those women who do decide to return to their careers after taking time off, the penalties are harsh. Professional opportunities to rejoin the workforce at the same level at which they left are rare and these women experience a significant decrease in total career earning potential (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Female professionals, once forced to fight for access to top leadership positions, are now increasingly re-evaluating the costs and benefits of achieving and sustaining executive leadership roles (Belkin, 2003). The conscious decision of women to leave high-powered careers to dedicate their efforts elsewhere, a phenomenon called the *opt-out revolution* (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, para. 1), speaks to professional women's perception that executive life is often unsustainable and undesirable. If women are to achieve parity with men at the highest levels of organizational leadership, we must more clearly understand how existing female executives effectively endure challenge and adversity.

The Effect of Worldviews on Female Executive Endurance

To understand how female executives effectively endure challenge and adversity, we must first have a sense of the unique ways in which they see the world. In exploring worldviews and their impact on long-term professional endurance, we may question if certain views on life support endurance more than others do. Little, if any, research exists on female executive

worldviews and the specific ways these women see the world to support their endurance as professionals. The purpose of my research was to identify and explore the unique endurance-supporting worldviews of female executives.

What is a worldview? The term *worldview*, derived from the German word *Weltanschauung*, refers to the way one sees the world. Similar to a frame of reference or lens, a worldview helps people make sense of their circumstances and surroundings. A unique combination of core values, beliefs, and understanding of how things work and why, worldviews influence our perceptions, reasoning, and ultimately, our actions. Author and management researcher Senge describes worldviews as “mental models...deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (2006, p. 8).

Worldviews have application in virtually every realm of science and religion. The fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy have long studied the impact of worldviews on human behavior. While labeled many things, worldviews ultimately shape conscious and unconscious cognition. Freud and Jung examined worldviews in light of their impact on psychotherapy, while anthropologist Kluckhohn used worldviews to construct her model of cultural orientations (as cited in Koltko-Rivera, 2004). Psychologists Kelly and Royce each respectively explored worldviews as the basis for individual constructs of reality, and Maslow furthered research by identifying a connection between worldviews and human motivation (as cited in Koltko-Rivera, 2004). More recently, gender theorists Gilligan, Noddings, and Tannen have employed worldviews to explore the “differences in male and female views on moral reasoning, moral education, and communication” (as cited in Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 21).

Worldviews affect endurance efforts. Worldviews, ingrained in all we think and do, can help or hinder our ability to confront challenge and endure adversity (Brendel, 2015). Sociologists and psychologists studying life satisfaction have associated greater “well-being...sense of life meaning, feelings of hope and trust, and long-term perspective on life’s woes” (Vidal, 2008, p. 7) with belief in a personal worldview. It is imperative, however, that for worldviews to serve as a source of strength in adversity, an individual must be at some level, consciously aware of their own personal worldviews (Videl, 2008). Brendel (2015) suggests exploration of one’s worldviews through daily self-reflection to help identify and solidify “eternal values” (para. 6) to draw upon in challenging times.

Individual worldviews can be dynamic or static. While some aspects of worldview are deeply embedded and rigid, others are more malleable and evolve with new experiences and learning (Schlitz, Vieten & Miller, 2010). Sometimes an experience, whether singular or cumulative, is profound enough that an individual undergoes a shift or transformation in worldview (Schlitz, et al., 2010). Worldview transformation (Schlitz, et al., 2010) causes individual epistemology (*how* we know what we know) and ontology (how we define our reality) to shift, and people subsequently see their very existence differently (Vidal, 2008). For some, worldview transformation is traumatic, instilling fear, intolerance and antisocial behavior (Schlitz et al., 2010). Others use transformative experiences to alter worldviews in a positive way. Positive worldview transformation may result in greater compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness that can improve individual well-being (Vieten, Schlitz & Amorok as cited in Schlitz, et al., 2010).

The worldviews of female executives. Much of the existing research on female executives highlights the numerous challenges these women face in the workplace (Ezzedeen et

al., 2015; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Ibarra et al., 2013; Kamberidou, 2010; Lian & Tam, 2014). A much smaller body of research outlines the strategies female executives use to encourage their professional longevity (Back, 2007; Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014; Nelson & Burke, 2000; Pincott, 2014). However, very little, if any, research examines the specific worldviews female executives use to sustain their endurance as professionals. Understanding the specific worldviews female executives hold that support their professional endurance advances the research on this important population of leaders. It is my hope that this research will encourage the professional endurance of more working women, and especially those who strive to attain and sustain executive leadership positions.

Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions

In order to identify and analyze the salient aspects of female executive worldviews that support endurance, I draw upon Koltko-Rivera's (2004) worldview theory. This model, called *The Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions* combines the seminal worldview research of the 20th century. It consists of seven key groupings with two or more internal dimensions that detail worldview orientations (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). The seven groupings include Human Nature, Will, Cognition, Behavior, Interpersonal, Truth, and World and Life (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). This integrated model suggests that unique combinations of worldview orientations directly influence "personalological processes...[that affect] personality traits, motivation, cognition, and social context" (Winter & Barenbaum as cited in Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 36). When we understand foundational aspects of one's worldviews, we can more closely examine concepts of self, behavior, and experience (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). For the purposes of my research on female executive worldviews that support endurance, I focus on three internal components of the Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Behavior group: *Time Orientation*,

Activity Direction, and *Control Location*. I have selected these three worldview orientations because of their specific relevance and significance in American business culture and the lives of corporate executives.

Worldview orientation #1: Time Orientation. Time Orientation refers to an individual's value of time and temporal focus of behavior. Options fall on a continuum of past, present, or future orientation. The value a person places on time is an important consideration in this orientation. Is time a precious resource or an abundant commodity? When the value of time is great, individuals focus on tasks and productivity, avoiding socialization and relationship-building efforts in the work environment (Scarborough, 2001). The Time Orientation worldview dimension of Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Collated Model draws strongly on Kluckhohn and Hofstede's anthropological research on temporal focus of behavior.

In Past Time Orientation, tradition and stability are highly important, and individuals find significant comfort in established structure and hierarchy. They face change with caution, mindful of past events and precedents, and seek to maintain the status quo (Hills, 2002). A Past Time Orientation associates past precedents with the best model for making present decisions (Yang, 2012). People with a Past Time Orientation feel the future should simply be an extension of the past (Scarborough, 2001).

Present Time Orientation focuses on living for the moment and finding immediate gratification in current circumstances. This orientation views present needs as paramount to past or future considerations (Yang, 2012). Present Time Orientation allows for greater adaptability and flexibility in achieving tasks and productive outcomes, and willingly accommodates changes

in traditions and beliefs (Hills, 2002). Short-term productivity and results are highly valued in this time orientation (Yang, 2012; Weeks & Fournier, 2010).

Finally, Future Time Orientation focuses on long-term considerations and future rewards. Those who embrace this worldview orientation seek to find new ways to replace old customs and traditions (Hills, 2002). Personal relationships hold greater importance as does the time it takes to cultivate these relationships (Scarborough, 2001). Future Time Orientation places heavy emphasis on developing skills and knowledge for the specific purpose of future benefit (Scarborough, 2001). This orientation sacrifices short-term gratification for long-term future betterment (Yang, 2012).

Worldview orientation #2: Activity Direction. The Activity Direction of Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions revolves around preferences in behavioral focus and motivation. Mainly, where does an individual prefer to funnel his or her energy: inwardly or outwardly?

An inward focus of behavior places emphasis on "internal qualities such as affect, personality attributes, and spirituality" (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 32). Inward Activity Direction is reminiscent of a *Being* versus *Doing* cultural orientation where work is a worthwhile end in and of itself, not just a necessary means to some other more pleasurable outcome (Scarborough, 2001). Motivation is internal with regard for what one finds personally satisfying (Hills, 2002). Connection to purpose and organizational fit are important to those with an Inward Activity Direction orientation.

Conversely, outward-focused behavior seeks "external qualities such as achievement or possessions" (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 32). An Outward Activity Direction places greater

emphasis on occupational titles, power, and prestige. Motivation is external, and emphasis placed on activities deemed valuable by others in a group (Hills, 2002). Again, the author relies heavily on research from Kluckhohn and her colleague, Strodtbeck, for construction of this worldview dimension (Koltko-Rivera, 2004).

Worldview orientation #3: Control Location. Finally, the Control Location of Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Collated Model of worldviews identifies individual's beliefs about personal outcomes in life. Put another way, to what does a person attribute his or her success or failure in achieving desired goals? Options include internal sources such as *personal action* (direct personal affect in achieving desired outcomes) or *personality* (charm or likeability), and external reasons like *luck* (magic), *chance* (randomness), *fate* (destiny), *society* (cultural bias or preferentiality), and *divinity* (intervention from a higher power) (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). This worldview orientation resembles Rotter's Locus of Control (LOC) construct (as cited in Leach-Lopez, 2013) with either internal or external LOC orientations. Those who believe they affect their own life outcomes are classified as internal LOC, while those who attribute fate, luck or other people as influencing outcomes are viewed as external LOC (Leach-Lopez, 2013).

Koltko-Rivera's (2004) three Behavior group dimensions of Time Orientation, Activity Direction, and Control Location provide a theoretical lens through which to interpret research data exploring female executive worldviews that support professional endurance. Identification of research subjects' specific orientations in these worldview dimensions allows for closer examination of the unique worldviews female executives hold that encourage their long-term professional endurance.

Method

My thesis research sought to answer the question: What worldviews do female executives hold that support their endurance as professionals? This research question guided all aspects of the research design, participant selection strategies, data analysis and interpretation, and validity and ethical considerations of my study. In this section, I detail the major facets of the research method.

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative research study using a responsive interview method to obtain rich and detailed data from interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A responsive interview method is one where “main questions, follow-up questions, and probes” collectively focus on a specific research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 116). Additionally, responsive interviews allow for greater flexibility in customizing interviews based on specific participant responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A naturalist-constructionist philosophy guided my research as I identified themes in how interviewees’ worldviews supported their professional endurance (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The naturalist-constructionist philosophy suggests that individual experience is “sifted through people’s prior experience and biases” and “meaning is always contextual and always interpreted” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 16). In this philosophy, researchers seek to analyze interview responses through participants’ particular frames of reference (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As I am not an executive, I studied the subject from an etic versus emic perspective, trying to understand the unique worldviews of research participants.

In semi-structured, responsive interviews, I asked female executives six prepared questions (see Appendix A). These questions emerged from review of research and theoretical

literature. I then followed up with participant-specific questions to probe further into responses. Interview questions sought to capture participants' thoughts and beliefs on the challenges of working women and female executives, work/life sustainability, and effective endurance practices. Interviews lasted up to 60 minutes, were conducted in-person or via phone, and were recorded for transcription.

Participant Selection

I selected interview participants using a purposeful selection process (Maxwell, 2013). For my research study I focused on female executives (C-suite level or industry equivalent), 45 years of age or older, who had held an executive position for five or more years. A focus on women with five or more years of senior leadership provided a pool of potential research subjects with greater experience in enduring the unique challenges that female executives face. Additionally, I included the age requirement of 45 years or older, to gain insight from participants with more years in the workforce and greater professional experience.

My participant recruitment strategy was two-fold. First, I reached out to colleagues to generate recommendations of female executives they felt outwardly demonstrated effective professional endurance (see Appendix B). I defined *effective endurance* as “the ability to face challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional and mental well-being.” I requested that my colleagues share my email and research study summary with potential candidates. Interested participants then emailed me directly, and answered a short three-question survey (see Appendix C) to determine if they 1) were a female executive with five or more years of C-suite (or industry equivalent) experience, 2) were 45 years of age or older, and 3) self-identified as effectively enduring the challenges of being a female executive.

Ensuring Participant Confidentiality

One week prior to the interview, participants received an emailed summary of the research study detailing confidentiality practices used to keep their data safe. A consent form was included, and participants reviewed and signed before the start of each interview (see Appendix D). I informed participants that pseudonyms would be used, that I would de-identify their data, and that only my research advisor and I would have access to their information. All recordings, notes, memos, coding instruments, and final documentation used only the participant pseudonym. The interview-recording device was password protected, and the notebook used for analytic memos resided in a locked file cabinet in my home when not in use. I saved all electronic spreadsheets and documents under the participant's pseudonym, and they were password protected.

Research Participants

I selected nine women for inclusion in my research study on female executive worldviews that support professional endurance. These women held a variety of executive titles including Senior Vice President, Superintendent, President, National Sales Director, Vice President of Human Resources, Vice President/Director of Production Solutions, and CEO. They lived and worked in several states with the largest concentration, five of nine, residing in the Midwest. Eight women identified as Caucasian and one woman identified as African-American. They represented myriad industries including insurance, advertising, pharmaceutical/medical, education, human services, manufacturing, technology, and finance. All women were more than 45 years of age, and all but one of the interviewees had children. Finally, all of the selected executives held more than 10 years of executive leadership experience.

Table 1*Interviewee Pseudonym, Industry, and Years of Executive Leadership*

Female Executive Pseudonym	Industry	Years of Executive Leadership
Kjersten	Advertising	12
Olivia	Education	12
Pamela	Technology	15
Diane	Insurance	19
Tamara	Finance	20
Faye	Human Services	23
Anita	Manufacturing	25
Shirley	Pharmaceutical/Medical	30
Karen	Pharmaceutical/Medical	31

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved three stages, and employed both categorizing and connecting strategies (Maxwell, 2013). The first stage of data analysis involved memo writing. Throughout the interviews, I took abbreviated notes highlighting key words, core concepts, and general sentiments of participants. Immediately after the interview, I reviewed my notes and wrote a more descriptive analytic memo summarizing my thoughts. In these memos, I captured memorable stories, specific word choice, and any strong or consistent theme presented. I then

personally transcribed each interview, and printed it out for review. After reading the exact verbiage of interviewee responses, I added new thoughts and ideas to the analytic memo. Upon completion of the first three interviews and subsequent preliminary data analysis, I began to see some emergent patterns in the respondents' data. As each new pattern emerged, I logged it in a spreadsheet and when applicable, referenced in subsequent interview notes and analytic memos.

The second stage of data analysis involved Initial Coding. Initial Coding is the “breaking down (of) qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences,” (Strauss & Corbin as cited in Saldaña, 2013, p. 100). I chose Initial Coding because it has application in virtually all types of qualitative research and is well suited for novice researchers (Saldaña, 2013). I used Initial Coding as a tool for microanalysis of each sentence in the transcribed interviews. A key aspect of Initial Coding involves the “search for *processes* – participant actions that have antecedents, causes, consequences, and a sense of temporality” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 102). Consequently, I paid specific attention to any processes I saw in the data throughout the Initial Coding phase, and noted each.

The third and last stage of my data analysis involved using Values Coding as a secondary, sub-coding strategy to identify “participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing...her perspectives or worldview,” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 110). I selected Values Coding because this type of analysis is particularly suited to exploring the relationship between values, attitudes, beliefs, and their manifestation in interviewees’ thoughts, feelings, and actions (Saldaña, 2013). Worldviews involve a complex interplay of core values and foundational beliefs that dictate behaviors; therefore, I felt that Values Coding would be a particularly applicable method of data analysis. Once again, I read the interview transcripts, and this time noted any values, thoughts, or beliefs present in participant responses.

To organize the various categories that emerged in my Initial and Values Coding, I used a matrix listing the code and the specific verbiage that justified the code. This coding matrix allowed me to see the data points in isolation, so I could begin to categorize participant responses. Categories fell into three types: Organizational, indicating broad areas of interest, Substantive, detailing specific values and beliefs, and Theoretical, placing data in an overarching framework (Maxwell, 2013). Lack of a larger context is a significant limitation of categorizing information into fragmented data points (Maxwell, 2013), and therefore, I was intentional about noting and considering the larger context in which the data points fit.

After categorizing the Initial and Values Coding data into a large matrix for each participant, I sought to connect the data within a larger context. In this connective data analysis, I stepped back and examined how the data points and coding categories worked together as a whole. Once again, I used analytic memos to help formulate and explore my ideas about what phenomena the data suggested. Connecting the data in a larger context provided five key categories and multiple supporting themes. Both categorizing and connecting strategies were useful in helping me form a larger understanding of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance.

Validity

To reduce the validity threats of researcher bias and reactivity in my research (Maxwell, 2013) I built in several provisions to test the validity of my conclusions. As a feminist and aspiring female executive, I have biases in believing that women should have access and inclusion in all levels of organizational leadership. Additionally, in facing my own challenges and adversities as a woman in the workplace, I have bias in believing that female executives face

greater adversity than their male counterparts do. Finally, I acknowledge a bias in believing that women hold unique perspectives and worldviews that can benefit others. To counter this researcher bias I used four strategies of validity assurance as outlined in Maxwell (2013). First, during the interviews, I often verbally summarized participant responses to ensure my clear and complete comprehension. This gave interviewees an opportunity to clarify, correct, or expound on their responses. Second, I used my interview notes and analytic memos to call out my bias and the ways it may color my understanding of the data. Third, I intentionally looked for discrepant evidence that could offer alternative conclusions or explanations of the data and compared participant responses to promote validity. Fourth and finally, I compared my research findings to concepts published in the literature.

Participant reactivity was also a potential validity threat. Research subjects, selected specifically for their *successful* endurance capabilities, may have been reluctant to share insight into times when they did *not* effectively endure challenge. Additionally, as Fels (2004) states, women are often reluctant to openly discuss their ambition, personal successes, and individual responsibility for achievements. To mitigate these reactivity validity threats, I used Maxwell's (2013) strategies of searching for discrepant evidence and intervention. To identify possible reactivity I actively looked for discrepancies in my subjects' responses and the existing research literature. Furthermore, I encouraged participants to think beyond *socially acceptable* answers by intervening with relevant research findings. For example, in asking participants about their success, I prefaced my question by stating that some women find it uncomfortable to talk about personal accomplishments and their own role in their successes (Fels, 2004). Intervention with existing research findings gave subjects pre-emptive *permission* to discuss their true thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. I informed interviewees of the purposes of the research, allowed them to ask any clarifying questions regarding use of their data, and asked participants to review and sign a consent form at least one week prior to their interview. Additionally, I reminded each interviewee before beginning the interview that they could share as much or as little information as they chose. I also clearly stated that if at any time, they desired the interview to be over, they could simply say so, and we would conclude.

Findings

Data analysis and interpretation revealed five key categories of female executive worldviews that support endurance. The five categories include *Stay True to Self*, *View Challenge as Opportunity*, *Let Go of Perfection*, *Cultivate Professional Networks*, and *Express Gratitude*. Within each of the five categories significant supporting themes also emerged. In this section, I describe each category and subsequent themes in detail, and provide supporting data points from each of the nine interviews I conducted with female executives. Following this section, I then use Koltko-Rivera's (2004) three worldview orientations of Time Orientation, Activity Direction, and Control Location to explore female executive worldviews that support professional endurance and compare these worldviews to the dominant norms of contemporary American business.

Stay True to Self

All nine of the female executives interviewed indicated that a commitment to stay true to self was a key aspect of their long-term professional success and endurance. While Shirley, Karen, and Kjersten explicitly stated “be true to yourself,” “don’t hide who you are,” and “stay

true to your person,” dedication to self was often discussed more implicitly. Defining *success* in personal terms, practicing critical awareness in core value and occupational alignment, and developing their own unique *voice* were three key ways these women stayed true to self.

Define success in personal terms. When asked to define *success*, interviewees all chose to define the concept in personal terms. While Kjersten, Karen, and Pamela qualified their personal definition with details of what their industry considers success (external status markers like salary, title, and number of direct reports), each executive ultimately went on to describe success in more personally meaningful terms. The nine interviewees discussed three specific definitions of success that included professional challenge and goal attainment, healthy family lives, and the ability to have meaningful impact on people and organizations.

Karen, a newly retired pharmaceutical executive, described her success as professional respect and goal achievement:

I define success by how I’m received by my colleagues. I define success by meeting the goals and objectives that I’ve either set up for myself or have been set up for me by my executive team or Board.

Tamara, a seasoned veteran of the financial industry, defined success as a personal satisfaction that comes from feeling good about what she does professionally, and how she challenges herself in moving to the next stage of her career:

I think success is personal. And so, it’s what makes you happy. For me, success isn’t necessarily making the most money or having the biggest house. But it’s feeling good about what I do. The other thing is feeling challenged professionally...Am I looking at the next level? Success is personal. I don’t think that one size fits all.

Shirley, an executive with thirty years of senior leadership in the medical and dental pharmaceutical industry, believed success to be about goal achievement for herself and others:

I think success is lots of things, but I think the major part is...not only achieving for yourself, but achieving for others and helping them achieve...seeing yourself accomplish something. Creating a goal and riding it to finish.

Two other female executives defined their personal vision of success as a rich family life. Diane, an insurance industry executive, who delayed having children for years in order to advance her professional career, described success as two joyful and confident daughters:

Success is individual. What makes one feel whole, personally...Raising a healthy and happy family. I have two girls, so success is that they're joyful and confident...learning where their passions are and helping them have the confidence to go after their dreams.

Anita, a long-time human resources executive, told a touching story about success as cherished moments spent with her dying father. While working in the fast-paced epicenter of innovation, Silicon Valley, Anita received a call from her sister telling her that she needed to come home immediately because her father had been diagnosed with cancer. Coincidentally, Anita received a call from a recruiter that same day requesting that she consider an executive position at a company of which she had never heard, but one that was located in her father's hometown. She decided to take the position and move her young family back to her home state to care for her ailing father every night after work. When she told her boss, a well-known and respected CEO of a premiere technology company, he asked her if she had lost her mind, and told her she would be "throwing away her career." She refused his offer to fly back and forth

until her father's illness passed. Stating that for her, it was never a question of what held more importance, her family or her career, she shared:

So...I made the decision. Quite honestly, it was a great life lesson, and I tell my kids this all the time. You really need to follow your heart and follow your gut...Being able to help my dad...unfortunately he only lived for four more months, but the good news is that I was here for those four months and saw him every day, and took care of him every night after work. And so, that's priceless. You'll never get that back.

Finally, interviewees resoundingly discussed success as the ability to impart a meaningful impact on people and organizations. Faye, the president of a human services company that helps mentally, socially, and physically challenged people find meaningful work opportunities, described success as positive affect on the people her organization serves:

If the people we support are satisfied with the supports that they are getting and they are living lives that have purpose and meaning, then that's success to me. If I'm working, and that happens, that's success. Just being able to be a part of that.

Olivia, a former banking professional who changed careers and rose up the ranks of education, also defined her concept of success as service to others:

I believe that any change that you make that leads to better outcomes for students, I would define as success...I feel that success for me is getting up every day and kids are learning. Kids are safe, and parents feel like their (kids) are in a good place.

Pamela, an executive who spent her entire professional career with one Fortune 500 financial services company, defined success as the relationships you cultivate:

I think the network of people that you develop, the friendships, whether they're your peers or your employees. I think those relationships really define the success of a person.

Even Karen, who had initially described success as collegial respect and professional goal achievement, discussed how good she felt when a colleague told her that her former company still used the acronym of W.W.K.D. – “What Would Karen Do?” She told this story as she detailed her own personal definition of success and stated:

And I thought, that's the legacy I want...it was about making a difference. Doing the right thing. Helping develop future leaders in the industry...and when I walked away, I thought, you know, this feels good.

Kjersten, a recently retired executive from the high-pressure, fast-paced world of advertising and public relations, discussed her definition of success as contributions to the world and wholistic wellness:

Now I define success as ‘Am I giving back’? Literally, what am I giving back to the world and people or animals or organizations...if I'm balancing that with my health and wellness and spirituality, along with what I want to do with business, then that will be success...I think it was defined differently over the last twenty years, personally, and so now my definition of success is a lot more wholistic.

Defining success in their own terms, be it professional challenge and goal attainment, healthy family lives, or meaningful impact on people and organizations was the first theme of female executives' ability to stay true to self.

Ensure core value and occupational alignment. The second way female executives demonstrated a commitment to self, involved their insistence on alignment between personal core values, organizational culture, and occupational roles. Research participants recounted powerful experiences of both alignment and misalignment in their core values and professional roles. Two interviewees, Pamela and Faye, experienced such a match between their core values and organizational culture that they dedicated their entire careers, each nearly forty years, to a single company. Others indicated that as they became clearer around their own values they were compelled to seek out new roles, organizations, and even entire industries.

Olivia, who left the banking industry to become a leader in education, shared:

And, I saw it as an opportunity to make a difference. Because I think we had all gotten kind of tired and fed up and disillusioned with the idea of just making money to make money...It gave me the opportunity to really think about what I wanted to do when I grew up. And I knew I wanted to do something different than working at (the bank) and helping people make more money, as opposed to helping kids learn to read and write.

Tamara discussed her interaction with a boss that she felt stifled her advancement and professional development. She described the conversation she had with human resources, and the process of questioning whether the organization that she had dedicated more than twenty years of her career to, was stifling her growth:

I called HR, and asked, 'Who is watching out for my career? Who is actually thinking about talent review and talent management and what's the next step? Have I reached the glass ceiling? Because if I've reached the glass ceiling – I have so much more that I want to do, and I'll look someplace else.'

Karen described the process of using all employment experiences, both good and bad; to forge an understanding of what roles and organizational cultures resonated most with her core values:

I think early on learning what you like and what you don't like. An employment experience can be a bad experience because you learn that you're a round peg in a square hole, but it's a good experience because you know 'this isn't for me.' And I learned that...I knew the type of roles that would make me feel good, and therefore I would be successful. There's a lot to be said about people being more successful in terms of meeting their goals and objectives and being happier people when they're in positions doing things they like to do.

Two executives, Pamela and Kjersten, both recently retired, described a changing organizational culture and core value misalignment as impetus for their retirement. Pamela, who recently left a major financial services organization stated:

I think one of the reasons why I actually chose to retire was the company was getting so big, and the demands of the employees were getting so huge that I just personally refused to work 60-70 hours a week.

Kjersten, the executive production director for a multinational advertising firm, described industry and organizational changes that increasingly created dissonance between her core values and occupational fit. Where once she saw the industry as exciting, influential and glamorous, she came to view it differently after decades of working in the business:

And, the industry has changed so much. The company has shrunk, the dynamics have changed for many reasons, so I flattened out...which I think finally led me to my final choice to leave.

Resoundingly, a feeling of organizational *fit* came from interviewees' ability to affect change and make a meaningful difference professionally. Karen discussed always knowing the type of culture she wanted to work in, and her personal inability to work for a major corporation where bureaucratic red tape made change more difficult:

To me it's more about goal attainment. Making a difference. That's why I always chose to be in roles that were different, were entrepreneurial, were forward-thinking, pioneering kinds of things. I knew myself that I would not do well in a Fortune 500 company...I need to be able to make a difference.

Anita described her decision to leave the elite, best practices world of Silicon Valley for a company that, although a prominent manufacturing multinational corporation, had much further to go in their organizational development. The ability to foster and implement meaningful organizational change spoke to her sense of purpose:

The environments in which I worked in Silicon Valley, everything you did was best in class. And so, I came here, and nothing was best in class. But the cool thing about that – the impact you can have...when you're tweaking something that's already fantastic, it's great. But it's not all that gratifying because you're spending hours to move the dial this much. As opposed to being in a situation where we introduced all sorts of stuff...In terms of seeing the needle move and bringing people along has just been phenomenal.

Finally, when asked what advice they would give other women seeking executive leadership positions, three women specifically discussed the importance of core value alignment and occupational fit. Olivia talked about staying strong in one's commitment to personal values and making certain that occupational roles and culture mirror these values stating:

When you're trying to do a position when you feel you're making decisions that are not aligned with your values or what's best, and you go along with it – you go along to get along...In the long run, it doesn't work. So you have to be strong.

As she described her own experiences with occupational and core value misalignment, Kjersten discussed the need for aspiring female executives to remain resolved in dedication to core values:

Don't lose yourself. Don't ever lose yourself because you feel that's what's going to get you further. If that's what you feel you have to do to get further, you're not in the place you want to be. You want to be in a place where you can be your most authentic self...be true to yourself, and be in a place that fosters that.

Anita offered sage advice to hopeful female executives in resisting the limited mindset she sees in some of her female colleagues. She urged women to stay true to self in their commitment to core value alignment and organizational fit:

If you find yourself in a situation or on a team where you don't feel like you're making an impact or you don't feel aligned with the mission and values: go do something else. Try and make change happen, but I've seen some women in jobs, even though they're

miserable, they just keep doing it...They don't call it the Fortune 500 because there's only one place you can work! Life is short. Life is really short.

Dedication to aligning personal core values, occupational roles, and organizational culture was the second facet of how female executives stayed true to self.

Strengthen and courageously speak their voice. The third and final tenet of female executives' commitment to stay true to themselves involved developing and courageously speaking their *voice*. The women I interviewed described voice as something much more significant than their physical vocal characteristics, and instead saw voice as a representation of their person. Several participants discussed the challenge female executives face ensuring their voice is heard, particularly as the only woman in the room. Pamela stated, "Walking into a room when you're the only female, you have to work harder to be heard," and Kjersten acknowledged, "You have to fight a little harder...talk a little louder." Respondents discussed the process of developing and strengthening their voice over time and with experience. Olivia, spoke about her own experience of voice development, and recommended that other women seek to gain confidence in expressing their voice:

It's how people think of you. It's your 'voice.' And I always try to ask myself...how am I projecting my own voice. So, you start to question yourself a lot, and you start to get stronger around your own voice. You've got to get strong around your voice.

Tamara shared an insight that she and her husband discussed frequently, particularly as she moved up the ranks of her financial services organization. She described her commitment to expression of voice as a willingness to sacrifice popularity and likeability:

To be a smart woman isn't always socially acceptable. So, one thing I've had to learn over time is how to package that in a non-threatening way, which a lot of times made me walk away not having my opinion known. And, what I've been able to refine over time is how you can make your opinion known. And, sometimes you know that you aren't going to make friends, and people aren't going to agree with you or like you for it. And being okay with that.

Olivia, the only African American in the study shared her thoughts on the additional challenge of consistently being in the racial minority professionally, and the need to be even more vigilant in her commitment to voice:

Usually, (in a meeting) I'm always with white people, usually men, making a comment about something, and people nod their heads, and then go on. And then, a white person will say something, you know five minutes later...will say the exact same thing, and they'll say "Bob! That's a great idea. Good idea, Bob." And depending on my frame of mind and what kind of mood I'm in, I will say, "Excuse me. I need someone to help me understand what did I say that was so different from what Bob said?" I mean, it's not that I want the recognition or the accolades, it was more that it felt dismissive of me and my idea. The idea was more important when it came from the white man. And, you start to see those sorts of things and you know sometimes I would ignore it, and sometimes I wouldn't...Be clear about what your values are and know your voice. This is so critical...I think the biggest challenge is...people will try, try hard, to silence your voice.

To enhance expressing their personal voice, the women I interviewed described a strategic use of emotion. For some, like Pamela and Diane, their strategy involved removing emotion and mindfully communicating like the men with whom they interact. Pamela stated:

I think we (women) tend to be more emotional people just by nature, and being able to (mentally) remove yourself from the situation... You just have to figure out a way to separate yourself from what's happening. Yes, definitely (it's an effort to be less emotional), and I think that was something that just as you matured you became better at, whether it was showing frustration or again letting yourself have hurt feelings by what's happening... I think you come to a point when you have to realize that there are more important things than the job. And being able to separate.

For Diane, strategic use of emotion meant that she intentionally mirrored the emotional tone of her male colleagues in her communication style. She discussed purposefulness in conveying a communication style modified to fit male audiences:

We communicate totally differently... and we have to be mindful in the group that we're working with, particularly if there's men, and adjust our style. One might think that is fair or unfair – that really is immaterial... If you want to be successful and achieve your desired outcomes, your job is to figure out how to adjust to the environment in which you are working. When in Rome do as the Romans do. And, it isn't being untrue to yourself. It's being effective. I think women have to really work at that.

For other executives, like Kjersten, emotion was a significant part of their voice and used as a strategy to convey authenticity:

I'll never forget the president of (the company) sitting me down and going, 'Here's the thing. You just need to show your emotion a little less at work. When people see you crying, it makes people uncomfortable' ... And I went home, and I was so pissed, which is another part of who I am – I'm impulsive, I'm fiery... and I went in the next day, and went into his office and sat down and said, 'Here's the thing. This isn't my problem, this is your problem. If I have tears running down my face as I'm talking to you about something that matters to me, whether that means my family, my son, a circumstance at work... your discomfort with that, that's your problem. And, I need you to remember that moving forward, because I'm not changing who I am for this job. I'll get better at my skills in handling it, but I'm not changing who I am.'

Olivia, also discussed incorporation of authentic emotion into her voice, and again illustrated the categorical theme of staying true to self through voice expression:

I worked every day at trying to be my authentic self...(being emotional) that's just who I am... don't hide who you are... I think that if (emotion), if it's genuine and authentic, people will see that and say, 'Wow! This person is human and real.'

Defining success in personal terms, practicing critical awareness in core value and occupational alignment, and developing and exercising their unique voice were three tools the women of this research study used to stay true to self. A commitment to stay true to self was the first of five emergent categories that emerged in my research of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance.

View Challenge as Opportunity

The second emergent category in my research of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance involved viewing challenge as opportunity. Although each woman openly shared stories of personal and professional adversity, including health crises, divorce, and employment termination, all interviewees expressed a belief that challenge provides opportunities. The nine women I interviewed expressed this worldview by enjoying problem solving, staying open to outcome in uncertainty, and willingly taking professional risks to improve their knowledge and skillsets.

Enjoy problem solving. A majority of the women interviewed discussed their love of solving problems. For them, an ability to work alone or collaboratively to solve problems represented triumph over adversity. Whether implementing a new enterprise-wide software system, establishing a new international business division, or completing a successful multi-million dollar employee giving campaign, the female executives I spoke with saw challenges as opportunities to solve problems.

Kjersten described her willingness to take on challenges and her eventual professional designation as an effective problem-solver:

People just sort of came to me. They came to me and said, ‘Can you do this? Can you do that?’ and before you know it I’m overseeing six departments and I’m on everyone’s radar as ‘The Problem-Solver.’

Karen viewed problem solving as a means to demonstrate to her team that collective discussion of problems and brainstorming solutions was always a helpful way to overcome obstacles:

I would always say, ‘Don’t ever lie to me. Don’t ever hide anything. Don’t ever sweep anything under the carpet. There’s not a problem that we cannot solve if you bring it to the table and we talk about it.’

Tamara spoke candidly of the two sides of her need to solve problems; pride when she overcame obstacles and anxiety when the problem seemed daunting:

It’s like a big puzzle every day. And sometimes it’s really fun and invigorating, because you’re like, ‘My God! I made that happen with all these people,’ and then sometimes it’s very overwhelming. How am I going to make that happen? How am I going to move that stone?

Enjoying problem solving was the first way that female executives displayed their worldview that challenge represents opportunity.

Stay open to outcome. Additionally, the female executives in this study displayed an aptitude for staying open to outcome and embracing uncertainty. All nine women stated that their career paths were unplanned and unscripted. When asked to describe their professional journey, Diane, Karen, Anita, and Tamara responded with “it was not by design,” “a great growth opportunity, not necessarily a plan,” “never planned this way,” and “serendipitous.” Resoundingly, the focus for these women involved committing to life-long learning, developing new skillsets, and fulfilling professional responsibilities. They remained open to outcome at each stage of their professional careers.

Anita described her personal career journey as very “serendipitous,” and talked about her professional philosophy founded on hard work and determination:

Did I plan it? Did I have a certain milestone in place? I would say, no I didn't. I found my philosophy was always...you just go out there and you work really, really hard, and you get it done. And you learn as much as you can...From a philosophy perspective I wanted to be as broad as I could be, and I also wanted really to keep a focus on learning. At that time, I would not have used this term, but I use it today, which is really 'learning agility.'

Similarly, Olivia focused her energy on continuous learning:

I kept advancing. I kept taking courses, because learning has always been important to me, and I loved being in school. I loved reading. I kept advancing.

When asked if she had certain milestones in mind when she envisioned her career path, Karen indicated an openness to outcome as:

I guess I didn't really have (milestones), because once I got to a certain place, I was way more successful than I ever imagined I could be. So, it was like, this is just fine. And I was busy enough and going enough, so if (advancement opportunities) come or they don't that's just fine too. I'm okay...I just loved what I was doing.

Tamara advised other professional women to be open to outcome in career advancement when she offered:

Don't have a pie-in-the-sky definition or goal that you're working toward. Be flexible with your career. Be open. Maybe in getting to this role, I've watched this happen so much in the last five years; people that felt they were the heir apparent to a job or role and suddenly, when it's gotten to that point that role has been eliminated or that role has been changed or transitioned, and people are devastated...and so I think we have to be open...and not just (focused on) the way we have it in our head.

Staying open to outcome was the second way in which the women I interviewed illustrated their worldview belief that challenge provides opportunity.

Take professional risks. Finally, the female executives involved in this research study demonstrated their belief in challenge as opportunity with their willingness to take professional risks. Whether completing a full-time West Coast MBA program while working full-time in the Midwest, deciding to follow a mentor to another state to help run a city's school district, or establishing a revolutionary home pharmaceutical service all nine women displayed a propensity to take professional risks. Most notably, these women mentioned that despite some brief moments of self-doubt in whether or not they could effectively meet challenges, each ultimately relied upon their courage and confidence to guide them through. Anita advocated:

Have confidence and have courage. And don't be afraid to take the next job even if you don't think you're ready for it...In the (Silicon Valley) days, these jobs would come, and I would think, 'Oh my God. This is a huge job.' But having confidence and just knowing that you're going to work hard and figure it out.

Diane overcame self-doubt with confidence and courage in her ability and desire to learn, and urged other hopeful female executives to do the same:

Mostly, it's about going where your challenge and your courage will take you, and using both...even if you don't think you have the expertise and knowledge. You just have to have the ability, the desire to learn, and then you have to have the courage and self-confidence to take on increasing roles...And I think having the courage is harder.

Enjoying problem solving, staying open to outcome, and willingly taking professional risks were the three key ways female executives demonstrated their propensity to view challenge as opportunity.

Let Go of Perfection

More than any other category that emerged in my research study of worldviews that support female executive endurance, letting go of perfection evoked the most self-reflection, vulnerability, and offerings of sage advice from participants. Emotional stories that detailed the personal struggles of trying to be and do everything for everyone all ended with the same lesson learned: nothing is perfect. Research participants embodied a willingness to let go of perfection as they learned from past mistakes and regrets, accepted reality and the need to sacrifice, and understood that work/life *balance* was an illusion.

Learn from past mistakes and regrets. The female executives I interviewed were frank in their discussion of personal and professional failures. Some stories involved unsuccessful business ventures or important presentations that went poorly. Other stories involved regrets over focusing more on professional success than personal relationships. No matter the severity of the setback or the level of expressed regret, each executive stated that she learned valuable lessons from the experience, and consequently did not repeat them in the future.

Faye, when asked what she has learned from decades of personal and professional role negotiation discussed a time when her son became gravely ill with Type I Juvenile Diabetes. At the same time as his diagnosis, her organization had opened a new branch that required extensive management and leadership. She discussed the struggle in her attempt to be present for both her son and her organization:

I still look back with a little bit of regret over, you know, I should have been able to just take some time off. But, nothing is perfect, and you can't expect perfection. Just do the best you can.

Kjersten reflected upon her first marriage, one that ended in divorce, and newfound honesty in what went wrong:

But, I think as I got older, I went, wow, that 'horrible' husband that I first had that I put all the blame on, and thought everything was his fault – (I) had a lot to do with that. And that marriage was actually, although he wasn't the right person for (me), if he had known I was not just focused on the success of what my job was, and that I was 'successful' being a wife, or 'successful' being a mother...checked me over to let me know I have to be better at this.

Diane discussed the importance of success and failure in the creation of her personal fabric and embracing the wisdom gleaned from both types of experience. She shared:

I've had the opportunity to enjoy a lot of success, and I've had the opportunity to have a lot of setbacks. And, I've been able to learn from both of them. They all become part of our fabric. Who you are and your capabilities and motivation.

The women in my research study openly acknowledged past shortcomings, mistakes, and regrets. These were not aspects of their lives they sought to hide or diminish, rather opportunities to gain insight and learn valuable life lessons that they did not repeat in the future.

Accept reality and necessary sacrifice. In addition to their candor about mistakes and regrets, the nine research subjects also described a need to be realistic about their professional and personal situations and the need to sacrifice. This facet of their ability to let go of perfection

manifested in stories about acknowledging the personal costs of professional success, the hardships of female executive life, and acceptance that their journeys would be challenging.

Diane shared thoughts on the difficulties inherent with a dual-career family and different rates of career advancement. She spoke candidly about the struggles she and her husband faced when her career took off faster than his did:

One of the consequences of my (professional) choices, was my career took off faster than my husband's. And that was a very hard thing for us at first. Ultimately, he jumped to my career. We had to choose, which was not an easy thing for him. But we started relocating around the country. Every time we did, he had to give up his company and start over again. So...there was a real professional consequence to that. That was a cost that he and I were willing to bear, but no doubt about it, there's a cost.

Diane went on to offer that being certain about professional aspirations was of vital importance in the female executive's journey and necessary to weather the inevitable challenges:

My advice would be to be clear why you want this life, and know that there's a real consequence to doing it. Some moments are great, and some are really hard. And you can't repeat them. I can't get back time that I wasn't home and seeing my girls, or making my husband feel important like he should, because I'm giving all my time and attention to work. There are consequences. Know for sure why you want something, and what success is going to look like and what the potential risks are and how you're going to control for that.

Kjersten echoed Diane's theme of personal sacrifice in negotiating professional and personal roles:

First and foremost, be willing to sacrifice at different stages and different things throughout your journey. You'll get it back, but you have to be willing to sacrifice. You have to be willing to put yourself second, and just work really hard.

The female executives of this study accepted the difficulties of professional and personal role negotiation and understood that their professional journeys would be challenging. Two women explicitly discussed their willingness to sacrifice and several others implicitly described this concept as dedication to hard work for future betterment, willingness to defer gratification, and an ability to focus on future gains. These women were keenly aware of the personal costs associated with their executive careers, and willingly accepted the *imperfection* of their situations.

Realize that work/life balance is an illusion. The third and most crucial dimension of female executives' ability to let perfection go involved their keen understanding that work/life *balance* does not exist. Emphatically, all nine women admitted to struggling with the concept of professional and personal life balance. All were forthright in stating that balance is an illusion, and a concept that does not coexist with professional endurance.

Kjersten described her efforts to manage personal and professional roles as dedication to two different and equally important aspects of her life. Realizing her desire to be active in both areas of her life helped her accept imbalance in her work/life roles. She stated:

I wouldn't suggest that I was ever truly balanced. I would say that it was a dedication to two things. That's the best I could get, because there were work expectations on me that weren't going to go away, and there was a need from a child, and my desire to be with that child and that wasn't going to go away. So, there wasn't balance.

When asked how she navigated both personal and professional roles, Tamara discussed an effort to be truly present in the times she *was* with her daughter. She also chose to see herself as an example of professional success for her daughter's benefit. Tamara exemplified critical awareness around society's unrealistic definition of work/life balance:

I do think it comes on the other side, that I did spend the time. It wasn't a lot of time. I wasn't the mom who read to (my daughter). I wasn't the mom who spent hours taking her places, but when I was there, I tried to be present. And I tried to teach her about how she could be successful. And that whole balance thing. I think you have to determine what 'balance' is because we get pushed around all the time and told what it looks like.

Anita talked about her own struggles with perfectionism, and the eventual realization that she needed to let perfection go if she wanted to have the energy necessary to be effective in both her personal and professional lives:

I meet a lot of people with this perfectionistic kind of thing going on. And, I have fought, struggled with that myself, and finally, it's one of these things that comes with, I don't know, maybe with age. You finally just think, God, that's just way too much, takes up way too much energy to try to have everything be perfect all the time, and nothing is. Nothing's perfect.

When asked what she has learned in the process of personal and professional role negotiation Diane candidly shared:

I've learned that...as a professional woman, you will always have an opportunity to feel inadequate. It is a perpetual state of feeling inadequate. You feel inadequate that you're not giving enough time at work. You feel inadequate that you're not giving enough time

at home. So, I have never felt that I'm adequately addressing everything that I should be. And I think that's unique for women...I think it's much more rare for a man to think about that. And we do.

The female executives who participated in this research study showed vulnerability and candor in their willingness to discuss the struggles they have faced with perfectionism in both their professional and personal lives. Their stories of perceived shortcomings and failures all offered the same advice: let go of perfection, because nothing in life is perfect. Willingly learning from past mistakes and regrets, accepting reality and the need to sacrifice, and realizing that work/life balance is an illusion were all significant ways that interviewees demonstrated their ability to let go of perfection to support long-term professional endurance.

Cultivate Professional Networks

The fourth emergent category in my research of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance involved developing, and relying on, professional networks. The nine women in this study were intentional about creating meaningful connection with employees, peers and colleagues. They were also purposeful in developing shared power and leadership within their networks, and relied on these support systems for personal and professional strength.

Be intentional about connection. All nine female executives associated their professional networks with a positive influence on their long-term professional success and endurance. Whether to engage team members, share experiences with peers, or show respect to senior leaders, these women were intentional about cultivating connections. This personal connection helped the female executives in this study create networks of professional advocates and supporters.

Kjersten described her efforts to intentionally engage others and create personal relationships at work:

I was engaging...I cared about people immensely, and I never blocked that stuff out...I have a personality that is empathetic, and I try to be funny, and I try to learn something about everyone I sit next to. I try to have a relationship. And, I did that, so they knew that I respected them, and that I liked them, and that helped me gain credibility.

Shirley, who was responsible for thousands of sales people, identified her listening skills as foundational in all of her professional relationships:

It's listening. It's hearing what they have to say. It's looking them in the eye, and truly being connected and listening.

Pamela found it imperative to forge a personal connection, no matter how small, with colleagues and employees. She described her efforts to acknowledge the personal side of others, and her willingness to take the time to be genuinely interested in their lives outside of work:

It really comes down to managing relationships. Much more than anything else. Even in the first five minutes of a meeting having casual talk before going into business. Asking people how they are, or how was their weekend, those kinds of things.

The women of this research study were intentional about cultivating connections in their professional lives. Demonstrating respect and genuine interest, actively listening, and personally engaging others were three ways female executives displayed their desire to forge connection with others.

Share power and leadership. In addition to intentionally creating personal connection with employees, peers, and colleagues, the female professionals in this study purposefully cultivated shared power and leadership in their networks. Regarding her employees or direct reports, Kjersten described her efforts to “always be a team player.” Faye focused on intentional inclusion so “people feel a part of the team,” and Tamara paid attention to “build(ing) up the team.” Karen vocalized her efforts to share successes, power, and leadership with others on her team:

I believe, you are more successful if you’re a leader rather than a manager, and building leaders is one of the most critical things in today’s world because everything moves so fast that you have to help build them, and be there to support them.

Shirley saw shared power as creation of win-wins for not only herself, but for all involved with a project:

I always like win-win-wins in my success, and it’s not just for me. It’s for those I’m participating with, those I’m communicating with. It’s not just about me, but it’s finishing it together. And it’s a win for a lot of people that are involved.

Faye shared a story about her organization’s recent implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Management software. She described meetings where entry-level and mid-level managers would openly talk about their fears that they would not be able to learn the new system to the required level of proficiency. Faye discussed her intentionality in sharing leadership in the software implementation process:

So, I work really hard to try to manage in a way that's a shared leadership role where people feel a part of the team. What they have to say is equally important, so we work really hard at that.

Olivia shared her thoughts that women are more apt to use power with, versus over, people. She talked of her efforts to be inclusive of multiple voices, and to share power with those in her professional network:

Another thing I think women do differently, is that women use power *with* people. And not so much power *over* people. And if you use power with people that's when you get to inclusivity. You're including multiple voices...I'm more inclusive than people think...I get on the phone and call people.

Intentionally sharing leadership and power with others comprised the second dimension of female executives' cultivation of professional networks to foster professional endurance.

Rely on networks for strength and support. Finally, the female executives in this research study discussed using peer and colleague networks for both professional and personal strength and support. Notably, they discussed using their professional networks for support much more frequently than their personal support networks. While only Olivia and Tamara specifically called out their friend groups as helpful in adversity, all interviewees described the mental and emotional support they received from their professional networks. Embedded in their comments about using peer networks for support, was a sense of comfort derived from a shared professional experience. Particularly beneficial support came from female colleagues and peers.

Faye identified the isolation senior executives face as a major challenge, and relied on her peer network for support in struggles and successes:

(As an executive) you're really there to build up the team. It's not like you can share your challenges that much with (employees). That's a different kind of thing. So you have to have a network...I have friends, but they're not people who work in this type of role, so that's a benefit to have a network of peers.

Additionally, Pamela discussed her peer network as the foundation of her professional success:

Somebody once said to me that your next job is chosen by your peers, and not by the people above you, but what your peers think of you...it's being pushed up, not pulled up.

Olivia talked of the deep respect and admiration she shared with her network of executive colleagues. She passionately described the strong bonds they developed over their shared experience, and their uncompromised willingness to provide assistance, advice, and support to each other:

There was a group of us. And a guy referred to us as the 'Sisters of Soul.' So, if I ever turned some of this into a book, I would call it *The Sisters of Soul*. Because if we had problems, we had challenges, we'd call each other. This is other thing. I had a rule: (The Sisters of Soul) pick up the phone for each other...It's like the red phone! You pick up the phone when somebody else calls you, because you're one of the only people they can trust and ask hard questions to help on the spur of the moment.

Diane described the significance of well-developed networks, particularly for female professionals:

The other thing about networks and professional women, they are an advantage. We can tap into the network to support one another, share experiences, open doors for one another, and that then becomes a very powerful act we have.

Fostering meaningful connection with employees, peers, and colleagues, sharing power and leadership, and using professional networks for support were three significant ways that the female executives in this research study demonstrated their worldview belief in cultivating professional networks to encourage professional endurance.

Express Gratitude

When asked, “to what or to whom do you credit your success?” all nine female executives explicitly credited someone or something outside of themselves. While Kjersten, Faye and Karen, mentioned that they worked hard, always learned as much as they could, and made the sacrifices necessary to succeed professionally, each woman expressed gratitude for the external factors to their success. Participants discussed three types of gratitude in the interviews. These included gratitude for luck, good fortune, or divine intervention, gratitude for family support, and gratitude for the generosity of professional mentors and colleagues who believed in them along the way.

Gratitude as luck, good fortune, or blessing. When asked why they were successful, female executives often used the words “lucky,” “fortunate,” and “blessed.” The conversation did not include whether or not the women’s own efforts played a part in the luck, good fortune, or blessing, rather simply acknowledged that something outside of their own power contributed to their success.

Tamara, as she discussed a project in which she significantly raised revenues and employee engagement, followed up her response with:

I'm not going to take all the credit for that because I was lucky to work with a lot of people who gave me a lot of good ideas, and who partnered with me and collaborated with me.

Faye, as she reflected on her 30-plus year career in a single human services organization, expressed gratitude that things in her life “fortunately” all “worked out”:

I mean it all just worked out...I feel like the luckiest person on earth because things just worked out. I have been so lucky and fortunate to be able to do the things I love and not everybody gets to do that.

Karen detailed a story where both of the pharmaceutical companies she simultaneously consulted for offered her permanent positions. She described the offers as blessings instead of direct results of her hard work and dedication:

So, I was very blessed to have two really great offers, and from two companies that were really innovative in pioneering my industry.

Expressed appreciation for luck, good fortune, and blessings was the first supportive theme in the larger Gratitude category of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance.

Gratitude for family support. When asked the reason for their success, participants often acknowledged luck and good fortune along with familial support. Whether the career

sacrifices of spouses, healthy children, or assistance from parents all nine women expressed family support as a critical factor in their success and professional endurance.

Anita, who described herself as a “complete anomaly” because she had a spouse who suspended his legal career to support her career trajectory, expressed feeling fortunate that his decision made her professional progress possible. She also acknowledged that their fortunate financial situation was instrumental in her occupational success:

Again, we were very fortunate in that we were in a situation where we didn’t need the dual income. We could not have done the ex-pat assignment if I would have had a spouse who had a legal career...so that situation made all these things possible for me, which otherwise wouldn’t have been possible. We were the luckiest, most fortunate people to have that situation because then all these bigger jobs presented themselves.

Olivia, like Anita, credited her husband’s willingness to manage their home life as the reason she was able to advance her career. She discussed her good fortune in having older children and credited her husband’s management of familial duties as foundational in her professional success and endurance:

I’m fortunate, my kids are older, so I didn’t have to miss...activities or events. My husband has been very supportive of me, and has been the one who – he even got up this morning and made coffee. He cleaned the kitchen. So I mean there have been people that have backed me up and that’s been really important.

Shirley too, expressed gratitude for her “progressive thinker” husband who fostered her career success. She also attributed her children’s good health and supportive parents and in-laws as instrumental in her career success:

I was fortunate enough to marry my high school sweetheart. Progressive thinker. I was fortunate that (my kids) were healthy. I had great parents and in-laws. I mean I had that little bit of community to help me get my dreams reached.

Anita, who talked early in the interview about her appreciation for a partner who supported her career at the expense of his own also cited her parents as a foundational source of her success. She answered the question, “to what or to whom do you credit your success” with:

It sounds so cliché, but my parents...that’s who I owe my success to. And an unbelievable partner in (my husband.) That’s it. That’s what I would have to say.

Karen also expressed gratitude for her spouse’s continuous support of her career and his willingness to take on the majority of familial duties as critical to her career success and long-term professional endurance:

We made a decision when (my daughter) was little, about what career we were going to follow. We can’t follow both, and he said, ‘Well, you have a way better chance of great success than I do,’ so he, at that point, just made a decision that he was going to support my career...I was very fortunate. He was Dad Extraordinaire.

All nine executives expressed deep gratitude and appreciation for familial support of their careers and credited this support as foundational to their long-term professional endurance. Female executives acknowledged their spouse’s support and willingness to take responsibility for childrearing and homecare, having healthy children, and receiving encouragement and help from parents as significant sources of professional success and endurance.

Gratitude for the generosity of mentors and colleagues. Finally, all of the female executives in this study expressed gratitude for specific people who had “believed in them” and

“given them a chance” along their professional journeys. Interviewees spoke fondly of colleagues, bosses, and mentors, who had taken the time to acknowledge their strengths and talents, encouraged their professional advancement, and believed in them.

Anita spoke passionately about the kindness of colleagues and bosses, particularly men, who generously offered advice and provided learning opportunities. In addition to her parents and spouse, she attributed her success to:

An array of unbelievable partners and colleagues. People who have been so generous. And as a woman, here’s what I’d say. We all have had people who we’ve met all along the way who haven’t been particularly helpful, but what I would say is in my experience, the generosity of the *men* who mentored me, taught me, promoted me, gave me opportunities...unbelievable. Unbelievable.

Tamara fondly recalled a female mentor she encountered in the formative years of her career. This woman’s belief in Tamara’s skills and potential provided Tamara with the self-confidence she needed to advance in her career. Tamara expressed gratitude for this woman’s role in her professional success stating:

I had a boss at (the bank)...and she really believed in me. Just going to the next level. She was like, ‘Oh yeah. You want to go do that? Just go do that. You’ll do fine. And I’ll be here if you have questions. You can do anything you put your mind to. I’m convinced.’

Kjersten emotionally recounted her gratitude toward three individuals who meaningfully impacted her career success by giving her a chance. Their faith in her ultimately helped her to believe in herself. When asked about her success she discussed “defining moments:” significant instances when others had taken the time to acknowledge their confidence in her:

Defining moments...it's amazing people who actually took the time to stop and say, 'You're good. Go do this.' 'You're good. We're going to give you this opportunity.' 'You're good. Believe in yourself.' So, that moment when Ron said, 'You're going to get this interview.' That moment that guy from work said, 'I'm going to give you this job because I don't care if you don't have experience, I know you can do it.' Those moments of where people actually saw in me, and believed in me, I think that truly fed into how I became successful.

Furthermore, female executives cited their gratefulness for these supporters and advocates as inspiration to help others in their professional journeys. These women, now in positions of power and influence, discussed their purposefulness in passing on the generosity they received from others.

Tamara discussed the encouragement she received from her first boss, and acknowledged the importance of approval, confidence, and support from others. This understanding fueled her desire to help other women gain the confidence they needed to be successful professionals:

(She) was the first person that said that aloud. It was like, 'Oh my God! Somebody believes I can do this.' It's one of those things that, people who don't have that...everybody has a security issue and to not ever have somebody articulate that, you know, 'You can do this.' It really makes me want to be a mentor to young women. I'm trying to share experiences.

Anita described in detail the generosity she received from others throughout her career, and shared a story from her first day of work at a human resources firm that was active in union negotiations. She recalled her awe and amazement, when only moments after first meeting her,

one of the pre-eminent negotiators for the unions told her to get her coat on because they were going to a major contract negotiation meeting:

He says, 'Come on! Let's go.' And I said, 'Are you *sure*?! Am I really supposed to be there?' And he goes, 'If I can't trust you, it's far better for me to find out today, than two years from now.' So, here I am...in this room, with all these senior people and lawyers...and it was a gift. And it was such a lesson to me to say, 'Hey, we're here to help teach, and help develop people,' and so I had all these great people that did that for me. And so, that in large degree is the reason for my success. It's the generosity of these people, and that was a lesson that I tried to instill, not just in myself as I managed people, but also in bringing people forward.

Expressing gratitude for fortunate circumstances, supportive families, and the generosity of colleagues, bosses, and mentors who contributed to their professional success was the fifth and final theme that emerged from my research on female executive worldviews that support endurance. All nine women conveyed a deep sense of gratitude for the circumstances and individuals who they felt were foundational to their success and long-term professional endurance.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore female executive worldviews that support professional endurance. The nine female executives I interviewed described their endurance-supporting worldviews in five distinct categories: Stay True to Self, View Challenge as Opportunity, Let Go of Perfection, Cultivate Professional Networks, and Express Gratitude. Participants demonstrated an ability to Stay True to Self by defining success in personal terms,

practicing critical awareness in core value and occupational alignment, and developing their own unique voice. They displayed a propensity to View Challenge as Opportunity by enjoying problem solving, staying open to outcome in uncertainty, and willingly taking professional risks to improve their knowledge and skillsets. Let Go of Perfection manifested in learning lessons from past mistakes and regrets, accepting reality and the need for sacrifice, and realizing that work/life balance is an illusion. Research participants demonstrated their aptitude to Cultivate Professional Networks by intentionally fostering connection, purposefully sharing power and leadership, and willingly relying on professional networks for support. Finally, all nine female executives demonstrated their proclivity to Express Gratitude for professional success as luck, good fortune, divine intervention, familial support, or the generosity of professional mentors and colleagues who believed in them along the way.

In the next section of this paper, I discuss the research findings in light of Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions. Using the Time Orientation, Activity Direction, and Control Location dimensions of this theory allows for further exploration of endurance-supporting worldviews that emerged in this research study of nine female executives.

Discussion

The Koltko-Rivera (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions proves useful in the further exploration of worldviews female executives hold that support their professional endurance. As discussed earlier in this paper, the Koltko-Rivera (2004) worldview model uses the past research of prominent psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists as a foundation for seven groupings of worldview orientations. For the purposes of my research, I

have chosen the three specific Koltko-Rivera (2004) worldview orientations from the Behavior group: Time Orientation, Activity Direction, and Control Location. I have selected these three specific dimensions due to their particular relevance in understanding female executive worldviews in light of the dominant norms of contemporary American business.

Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Time Orientation

The female executives interviewed for this research study on worldviews that support professional endurance all demonstrated a Future Time Orientation. This orientation places greater emphasis on future betterment, and sacrifices immediate gratification for long-term benefit. Future Time Orientation was evident in the way female executives discussed the past solely to refer to its importance for future wisdom. As demonstrated in their ability to let go of perfection, interviewees reflected on past mistakes and regrets, and then used these events to shape and improve their future experiences. They also accepted present realities as necessary sacrifices for future gain. With regard to their career paths, all nine women displayed Future Time Orientation in their openness to outcome. Additionally, these women focused on intentionally cultivating relationships and developing professional networks, two key aspects of Future Time Orientation. They willingly devoted the necessary time and energy to develop long-term relationships, and valued personal connection over productivity. Using past failures to enhance future wisdom, committing to work through adversity and sacrifice when needed, and cultivating long-term relationships, all point to a Future Time Orientation.

Past experiences improve future knowledge and skills. Female executives were candid in their discussion of past mistakes, setbacks, and regrets. Whether describing regret over personal and professional role imbalance as mentioned by Faye, Tamara and Kjersten or

professional setbacks as discussed by Diane and Karen, none of the women in this study dwelled on the past. Instead, they used past experiences to enhance future insight. Karen described the setback of a near bankruptcy in her business as a “big lesson learned.” Diane indicated past experiences all became part of her future “fabric” helping her gain greater clarity and commitment moving forward. Female executives learned from their past mistakes, and used these events to enhance future wisdom.

Adversity and sacrifice for future betterment. In addition to using past experiences to enhance future wisdom, the interviewed professionals expressed a drive to work through adversity and sacrifice for future benefit. They accepted present adversity as a temporary challenge they needed to overcome to enhance their future. Female executives demonstrated this aspect of Future Time Orientation by enjoying problem solving and seeing challenges as opportunity for future growth. Karen, Tamara, and Kjersten all indicated that problem solving was enjoyable and key to their long-term endurance as professionals. Additionally, the female executives in this study accepted necessary sacrifices to improve future outcomes. As Kjersten stated:

First and foremost, be willing to sacrifice at different stages and different things throughout your journey. You’ll get it back, but you have to be willing to sacrifice. You have to be willing to put yourself second, and just work really hard.

The female executives in this research study used their problem solving skills and willingness to sacrifice to overcome present challenge and adversity for future betterment.

Devote time and energy to cultivate relationships. The final way in which these women illustrated a Future Time Orientation involved their willingness to devote time and

energy to developing professional relationships and networks. Those with a Future Time Orientation are dedicated to relationship growth, and devote more time to cultivating connections (Scarborough, 2001). Female executives discussed in detail their intentionality in creating meaningful connection with employees, peers, and colleagues. Pamela talked about her efforts to ask employees and colleagues about their external work lives before discussing business. Shirley exemplified her desire to create connection by listening deeply to others. Kjersten continually forged connection with others via purposeful engagement. Each of the women described how they cultivated meaningful connection with employees, peers, and colleagues: a key tenet of Future Time Orientation.

The nine female executives interviewed for my research on worldviews that support professional endurance demonstrated several aspects of Future Time Orientation as presented in the Koltko-Rivera (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions. These women displayed Future Time Orientation in using past experiences to enhance future outcomes, overcoming adversity and sacrificing for future rewards, and investing time to cultivate relationships and build professional networks.

The Present Time Orientation of American business culture. While the female executives interviewed for this study displayed a Future Time Orientation, American business culture more closely aligns with a Present Time Orientation (Scarborough, 2001). Corporate America frequently sees time as a precious resource that must be scheduled, used for maximum productivity, and managed efficiently. Often, Corporate America focuses on immediate gratification and short-term results. Optimum productivity and speed in achieving goals is a highly valued aspect of American business culture. Sociologist Weber associated America's Protestant work ethic with an industrial emphasis on productivity (as cited in Yang, 2012). He

posited that to waste time was “the deadliest of sins” because “time is infinitely valuable (and) every hour lost is lost to labour for the glory of God,” (Yang, 2012, p. 170). *Time macho* is the term Slaughter (2012) uses to describe American business culture’s frequent obsession with relentless schedules, intense drive to work more, and billable hours. American business culture often values busyness, productivity, rapid change, and forward progress. All too often, future consequences receive little consideration, and short-term results like profit, efficiency, and productivity take precedence. As further demonstration of a Present Time Orientation, the average American executive spends 12 to 14 hours a day in tightly scheduled meetings, often works on weekends, and takes less than three or four weeks of vacation per year (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001). Since the late 1970s, the percentage of American professionals who work more than 50 hours per week has steadily increased (Slaughter, 2012). In contemporary Corporate America, relationship-building and meaningful social interactions are often secondary to getting business done. The Present Time Orientation norms of contemporary American business culture seem contradictory to the Future Time Orientation worldview of the nine female executives interviewed for this study.

Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) Activity Direction

The Activity Direction of Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions revolves around preferences in behavioral focus and motivation. This worldview orientation seeks to understand where an individual prefers to funnel their energy: inwardly or outwardly. The women involved in this research study all indicated an Inward Activity Direction in their interview responses. Instead of focusing on externally validated activities such as accumulation of titles, wealth, and professional prestige, the women in this study concentrated their activity direction on internal rewards. Defining success in their own

terms, aligning core values with occupational roles and organizational culture, and developing their own unique voice were three ways these women demonstrated an Internal Activity Direction.

Define success in personal terms. As discussed earlier, female executives defined success in their own personal terms. While Kjersten, Karen, and Pamela acknowledged their industry's external-focused activity direction, they, like the other six female executives ultimately defined success in personal terms. Tamara defined her success as pride in developing her career skills and knowledge. Shirley focused on achieving team and personal goals. Diane demonstrated Internal Activity Direction by defining success as two confident daughters with the courage to follow their dreams. Anita illustrated Internal Activity Direction in her willingness to put her father's illness and quality time with him above keeping her high-prestige job in Silicon Valley. Faye and Olivia found that their internal motivation and purpose came from serving others. All of the female executives displayed an Internal Activity Direction by defining success in their own terms.

Core value and occupational/organizational alignment. The second way that the women of this study demonstrated Internal Activity Direction centered on their commitment to core value and occupational role/organizational culture alignment. They derived satisfaction from the harmony of their occupational roles and organizational culture and their internal sense of purpose. Research participants recounted powerful stories of both alignment and misalignment in their core values and professional roles. Recall Pamela and Faye, who both dedicated their entire careers to one organization because they so deeply valued the culture. Olivia, who started her career in finance, demonstrated Internal Activity Direction in her realization that banking would never provide the kind of impact she wanted to have in her career. She left the financial

industry to become a key leader in public education because she wanted the “opportunity to make a difference...wanted to do something different than working at (the bank) and helping people make more money.” Karen too, focused on the internal rewards of her career efforts, and discussed her need to “make a difference. That’s why I always chose to be in roles that were different, were entrepreneurial, were forward-thinking, pioneering kinds of things.” Finally, Anita described her Internal Activity Direction orientation as “the impact you can have...being in a situation where we introduced all sorts of stuff...In terms of seeing the needle move and bringing people along has just been phenomenal.” All nine female executives in this research study indicated their commitment to core value and occupational alignment, a key aspect of Internal Activity Direction, was foundational to their long-term professional endurance.

Develop and exercise voice. The final way in which the female executives in this research study illustrated their Inward Activity Direction involved their dedication to developing and articulating their own unique voice. The ability to express internal values and beliefs by conveying their personal voice proved a meaningful source of staying true to self. Olivia discussed her internal satisfaction with strengthening her voice, while Tamara was proud of her developed ability to use her voice to share her opinions. Additionally, the female executives interviewed described using their voice to reflect the internal emotional tone they wished to convey. Recall Pamela and Diane who deliberately removed emotion or mirrored the emotional tone of their male audiences while Kjersten and Olivia intentionally shared their emotion to display authenticity. The women of this research study focused efforts on cultivating their own unique voice, and subsequently displayed an Internal Activity Direction worldview orientation.

The Outward Activity Direction of Corporate America. In contrast to the Internal Activity Direction of the nine professionals in this research study, American business culture

frequently promotes Outward Activity Direction. The *Doing* versus *Being* nature of the United States' workforce often places significant importance on title, salary, and externally validated professional achievements (Scarborough, 2001; Hofstede, 2004; Yang, 2012). The Outward Activity Direction norms of Corporate America often value achievements and possessions (Koltko-Rivera, 2004), and encourages workers to strive for occupational prestige, personal wealth, and status (Hofstede, 2004). Conversely, we saw the women of this study acknowledge the Outward Activity Direction tendencies of their professions, yet choose to focus on Internal Activity Direction. Contemporary American business culture frequently motivates workers with external recognition and rewards deemed valuable within American society: a key tenet of Outward Activity Direction (Hills, 2002). Conversely, female executives associated their long-term professional endurance with aspects of their Internal Activity Direction worldview. They routinely described choosing impact over wealth and purpose over prestige. The nine interviewees of this research study valued Internal Activity Direction over the Outward Activity Direction worldview orientation often promoted in the norms and expectations of American business culture.

Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Control Location

The final Koltko-Rivera (2004) worldview orientation used to examine interview data on female worldviews that support professional endurance involves Control Location. This worldview dimension explores an individual's beliefs about personal outcomes in life. Put differently, to what does a person attribute his or her success or failure in achieving desired goals? Options include *action* (direct personal affect), *personality* (charm or likeability), *luck* (magic), *chance* (randomness), *fate* (destiny), *society* (cultural bias or preferentiality), and *divinity* (intervention from a higher power) (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). This worldview orientation

resembles Rotter's Locus of Control (LOC) construct with either internal or external LOC orientations (as cited in Leach-Lopez, 2013). Those who believe they affect their own life outcomes are classified as internal LOC, while those who attribute fate, luck, or other people as influential to their life outcomes are deemed external LOC (Leach-Lopez, 2013).

The nine women of this research study resoundingly presented responses that indicate an External Control Location worldview orientation. Continually expressing gratitude, female executives described three external sources for their success: luck, good fortune, and blessings, familial support, and the generosity of mentors and colleagues.

Luck, good fortune, and blessings. The first category of External Control Location described by the women in this study included luck, good fortune, and blessings. Discussing the reasons for their professional success yielded words like "lucky," "fortunate," and "blessed." As described in the findings section, these women did not discuss whether their own efforts played a part in this luck/good fortune/blessing. Instead, they spoke of positive external forces outside their control as key to their professional success. Remember that Tamara attributed her success to being "lucky to work with a lot of people who gave me a lot of good ideas, and who partnered with me and collaborated with me." Similarly, Faye mentioned her good fortune in having a professional life where "things just worked out." She said, "I have been so lucky and fortunate to be able to do the things I love and not everybody gets to do that." Karen talked of blessings in her career success, stating, "I was very blessed to have two really great offers, and from two companies that were really innovative and pioneering my industry." The female executives I interviewed cited luck, good fortune, and blessings as the first distinct genre of external control in their professional success.

Familial support. Female executives also described the support they received from family members including parents, children, and, most importantly, spouses, as a key external factor in their professional success and long-term endurance. Shirley attributed the “progressive thinking” of her husband, parents, and in-laws as crucial to her endurance efforts. Recall Anita, who considered herself a “complete anomaly” because she had a spouse who suspended his legal career to fully support hers stating, “that situation made all these things possible for me.” In actuality, Anita was not an anomaly among the executives I interviewed. Olivia, Diane, Karen, Tamara, Faye, and Kjersten all discussed their spouses’ support in either completely “jumping” to their careers or willingly managing the vast majority of household and childrearing responsibilities. Female executives saw the willingness of partners to shirk gender norms and facilitate their professional advancement as a major contributor to their career success. Eight of the nine female executives explicitly credited the external source of familial support as foundational in their career development and long-term professional endurance.

The generosity of mentors and colleagues. Finally, all of the female executives in this study described their success and professional endurance as related to the external generosity of mentors and colleagues. They told emotional stories of bosses, mentors, and colleagues who had “believed in them” and “given them a chance” along their professional journeys. Karen described the willingness of her mentor to give her a chance when she first started out as the main reason for her success. “I will always credit him for my professional success, because he gave me a shot.” Anita spoke of her success as owed to partners and colleagues, particularly “the generosity of the men who mentored me, taught me, promoted me, gave me opportunities...unbelievable. Unbelievable.” Tamara described the confidence her first boss had in her capabilities as foundational to her future professional success. Tamara’s boss’ assurance that she could “do

anything (she) put (her) mind to,” encouraged her self-confidence and fostered courage for her to pursue professional advancement. Finally, recall Kjersten’s description of “defining moments” where someone took the time to identify her skillsets and share confidence in her abilities. She cited her success as attributable to “those moments (when) people actually saw in me, and believed in me. I think that truly fed into how I became successful.”

All of the women in this study conveyed a deep sense of gratitude for the circumstances and individuals who contributed to their success and long-term endurance as professionals. Attributing their success to the external guidance and confidence given by mentors and colleagues was the third way that female executives demonstrated their External Control Location worldview orientation.

The Internal Control Location of American business culture. Once again, the worldview orientation of female executives proved contrary to the prevailing norms of Corporate America. Self-determination, individualism, and self-reliance are oft-touted American cultural values that pervade both social and business realms (Scarborough, 2001). The Internal Control Location orientation often prevalent in American business norms places greater emphasis on personal affect and responsibility in one’s own success than external forces. In Hofstede’s study of 60 nations, America ranked the highest in individualism, and Trompenaars found the culture of the United States to highly value personal achievement and individual control of life outcomes (Scarborough, 2001). The Internal Control Location orientation of American business culture, often credits individual factors as the primary determinant of personal success. This contrasts significantly with the External Control Location worldview orientation expressed by the female executives in this research study. Instead of focusing on how their own efforts influenced professional success these women chose to highlight external factors that contributed to their

success. Citing luck, good fortune, and blessings, the support of family, and the generosity of mentors and colleagues as reasons for their professional success and long-term endurance, female executives demonstrated an External Control Location worldview orientation.

Implications

The nine women involved in this research study presented five categories of worldviews that support professional endurance including Stay True to Self, View Challenge as Opportunity, Let Go of Perfection, Cultivate Professional Networks, and Express Gratitude. A key finding of this research study involved understanding participants' worldview orientations as countercultural to many of the norms of Corporate America. Instead of embracing the Present Time Orientation, Outward Activity Direction, and Internal Control Location proclivities of contemporary business culture, the female executives I interviewed embodied Future Time Orientation, Inward Activity Direction, and External Control Location worldviews (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). The views and perspectives these women held to support their long-term professional endurance were countercultural to the norms often espoused by contemporary American business culture. This finding may have implications for two populations: existing and aspiring female executives and organizations serious about encouraging female executive leadership. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the possible implications of interviewees' countercultural worldviews and offer considerations for existing and aspiring female executives and organizations.

Considerations for Female Executives and Aspiring Female Executives

This research study identified worldviews of nine female executives that support professional endurance. The endurance-supporting worldviews identified in this research paper

appear to be countercultural to many of the prevailing norms of contemporary American business culture. What significance does this hold for female executives and those women who aspire to executive leadership? The findings of this research study suggest three key recommendations for this population of professionals.

The first recommendation for female executives and those who aspire to executive leadership involves committing to increased self-awareness. Research participants demonstrated a mastery of self-awareness and a continual willingness to explore their core values and beliefs. These women knew who they were, what they believed in, and the unique ways in which they viewed the world. Reflection and introspection were common practices for these executives and helped foster a deep awareness of self. Interviewees demonstrated their self-awareness by expressing their unique voice, committing to core value and occupational alignment, and defining success in personal terms. The findings of this research study suggest that a highly developed self-awareness is associated with holding worldviews that support professional endurance.

The second recommendation for existing and aspiring female executives concerned with long-term professional endurance involves practicing critical awareness in accepting and adhering to contemporary American business norms. The nine executives involved in this research study held worldviews that contradicted many of the cultural norms and expectations of contemporary Corporate America. More importantly, these countercultural worldviews were associated with female executives' long-term professional endurance. Interviewees were acutely aware of the cultural norms and beliefs often prevalent in Corporate America, yet each chose to view the world differently from the dominant belief systems. In other words, these women practiced critical awareness around widely accepted cultural business norms and expectations,

and ultimately chose to see the world counter-culturally. They actively challenged gender norms of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, questioned transactional leadership styles, and refused to conform to Corporate America's oft-touted definition of an *ideal* executive.

This suggests that it may be helpful for those interested in long-term professional endurance to examine closely the cultural norms espoused by contemporary American business, and determine for themselves if these norms *help* or *hinder* their long-term professional endurance. Are the dominant cultural norms of American business fair? Are they still relevant in today's contemporary business environment? Are they sustainable? Finally, who benefits from these norms staying in place and who could benefit from them changing? Determining one's own answers to these questions can help existing and aspiring female executives practice the critical awareness necessary to develop individual worldviews that support their professional endurance.

The third and final research recommendation for female executives and those women who aspire to executive leadership involves understanding the significant challenges inherent with holding countercultural worldviews. Each of the nine executives in this study described the difficulties, isolation, and personal costs of challenging deep-seated norms of contemporary American business culture. Traditional, male-dominated workplace norms are still prevalent in Corporate America. Recognizing the tremendous energy involved with non-conformity to dominant worldviews is imperative for those who desire long-term executive endurance. Female executives and those seeking executive leadership need to simultaneously coexist with, and challenge, prevalent business norms and expectations. This is no easy task.

The women of this study protected and sustained their unique worldviews that encouraged their professional endurance with self-validation and support from like-minded

advocates and allies. Additionally, they shirked the dominant cultural definitions of *ideal* career trajectories, *proper* professional demeanor, and work/life *balance*. The findings of this research study suggest that those women seeking long-term executive endurance in contemporary Corporate America may benefit from holding countercultural worldviews. Culture is continuously and collaboratively created, and no doubt the increased long-term presence of women in the workforce will shape and impact future American business norms. However, until a cultural shift occurs in the dominant norms of contemporary American business, female executives and those women seeking executive leadership positions must be prepared for the significant challenges inherent in holding countercultural worldviews and challenging the status quo.

Considerations for Organizations

Female executives operate within the context of larger organizational cultures, and consequently cannot change contemporary American business culture solely on their own. Therefore, organizations play a crucial role in creating and fostering a corporate culture that encourages long-term professional endurance. Each of the interviewees discussed that alignment of core values and occupational roles and organizational culture was critical to their long-term professional endurance. Because culture is something created between individuals and the larger environment in which they operate, the findings of this research study can also offer considerations for organizations committed to supporting female executive endurance.

As the research literature suggests, many of the norms and expectations prevalent in contemporary American business culture are unsustainable and unhealthy. Therefore, it may behoove organizations to promote a business culture that encourages the professional endurance

of all employees, not just female executives. Organizations can play an important role in the effective endurance of their employees by encouraging and supporting cultural business norms that foster long-term professional endurance.

Organizations can support the endurance of female executives (and other employees) by honestly acknowledging and assessing internal policies and practices that may hinder professional endurance. As the research literature indicates, many organizations have built their corporate cultures around antiquated, male-centric workforce models. Companies and organizations can encourage professional endurance by asking if theirs is a culture that values and promotes *time macho* activities, short-term gratification, and personal sacrifice for organizational gain. Conversely, organizations can also explore if and how their culture supports professional and personal role congruity, innovation in how work is done, and long-term employee development. Openly examining and identifying the aspects of their organizational culture that help or hinder endurance efforts is the first step to cultivating an endurance-supportive environment.

The second way in which organizations can foster and support professional endurance, as evidenced in this research study, involves questioning the benefit of larger contemporary American business norms, and when appropriate adopting new norms and ways to view the world. Do organizations really benefit from employees who sacrifice personal wellbeing to work harder and longer hours? Increased attrition rates and less committed employees would suggest otherwise. If long work hours are imperative, must all occur in the office? Telecommunication advances and a globalized workforce would indicate in-office hours are not mandatory. Finally, does compartmentalization and separation of work and life roles and responsibilities really improve productivity and organizational growth? Studies show that organizations with

comprehensive work-family policies have higher perceived rates of performance and increased share prices (Slaughter, 2012). It is time that organizations start to question the true benefit of outdated American business norms, and instead look to the ways in which they can instill and cultivate a corporate culture that encourages professional endurance.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance has at least three significant limitations. First, the number of research subjects, nine in total, was far too small to allow for generalized and transferable findings to larger populations. Second, the research population was rather homogenous in composition. Nine out of ten research subjects identified as Caucasian, and only one executive identified as African American. Exploring the impact of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and a host of other culturally significant aspects of worldview constructs were outside the scope of this research. Finally, the research subjects included in this study were purposefully limited to those female executives 45 years of age or older. While this increased the chances of participants with greater breadth of professional experience, it skewed the findings to be overly representative of Baby Boomers. The worldviews of Generations X and Y, as well as Millennial female executives, were not represented in this research. To ascertain whether countercultural worldview orientations are categorically supportive of female executive endurance calls for much more research. Greater diversity in research populations and higher numbers of study participants are imperative for the generalization or transferability of any research findings regarding long-term female executive endurance.

Summary

Female executives face a unique set of personal and professional challenges on a daily basis. Not only must they endure adversity in being a woman in the workforce, they must also manage the stress of being an executive. While many female professionals decide that the continuous negotiation of these challenges is not worth the reward of executive leadership, a select few endure. This research paper studied the unique worldviews of nine female executives who identified as effectively enduring long-term professional challenge in their careers. Anita, Diane, Faye, Karen, Kjersten, Olivia, Pamela, Shirley, and Tamara provided significant insight into the worldviews they hold that support their long-term professional endurance. Data analysis and interpretation of one-on-one interviews conducted with these women revealed five key categories of female executive worldviews that support professional endurance: Stay True to Self, View Challenge as Opportunity, Let Go of Perfection, Cultivate Professional Networks, and Express Gratitude. Additionally, the female executives in this research study presented Future Time Orientation, Inward Activity Direction, and External Control Location worldview orientations as outlined in Koltko-Rivera's (2004) Collated Model of Worldview Component Dimensions. The worldviews of the nine female executives involved in this research study proved countercultural to many of the norms espoused by contemporary American business culture. The findings of this research study offer considerations for female executives, those women who aspire to executive leadership positions, and organizations interested in increasing and supporting female executive leadership. Additional research on this unique population of professionals is necessary to support any generalizations or transferability of findings. It is my great hope that future research on female executives will encourage the endurance efforts of all

working women, particularly those who, like myself, long to see equal representation of women at every level of organizational leadership.

References

- Back, D. P. (2007). *Perceptions and reactions to career barriers among women in executive leadership roles at community colleges*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/listing.aspx?id=1085>
- Belkin, L. (2003, October 26). The opt-out revolution. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/26/magazine/26WOMEN.html?pagewanted=all>
- Brendel, D. (2015, September 8). Manage stress by knowing what you value. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2015/09/manage-stress-by-knowing-what-you-value>
- Bruckmüller, S., & Branscombe, N. R. (2010). The glass cliff: When and why women are selected as leaders in crisis contexts. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 49*, 433-451. doi: 10.1348/014466609X466594
- Catalyst. (2015, October 13). *Pyramid: Women in S&P 500 companies*. New York, NY: Catalyst. Retrieved from <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-sp-500-companies>
- Chan, D. W. (2002). Hardiness and its role in the stress-burnout relationship among prospective Chinese teachers in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 19*, 381-395. doi: 10.1016/S0742-051X(03)00023-4
- Chawla, D., & Sondhi, N. (2011). Assessing work-life balance among Indian women professionals. *The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, 47*(2), 341-352. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23070581>

- Duberley, J., & Carrigan, M. (2012). The career identities of ‘mumpreneurs’: Women’s experiences of combining enterprise and motherhood. *International Small Business Journal*, 31(6), 629-651. doi: 10.1177/0266242611435182
- Ezzedeen, S. R., Budworth, M., & Baker, S. D. (2015). The glass ceiling and executive careers: Still an issue for pre-career women. *Journal of Career Development*, 1-15. doi: 10.1177/0894845314566943
- Fels, A. (2004, April). Do women lack ambition? *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <http://hbr.org/2004/04/do-women-lack-ambition>
- Gloria, C. T., Faulk, K. E., & Steinhardt, M. A. (2013). Positive affectivity predicts successful and unsuccessful adaptation to stress. *Motivation and Emotion*, 37(1), 185-193. doi: 10.1007/s11031-012-9291-8
- Gregory-Mina, H.J. (2012). Gender barriers of women striving for a corporate officer position: A literature review. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 32, 54-78. Retrieved from http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl_wordpress/
- Groysberg, B. & Abrahams, R. (2014, March). Manage your work, manage your life. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <http://hbr.org/2014/03/manage-your-work-manage-your-life>
- Harris, D. A., & Giuffre, P. (2010). “The price you pay”: How female professional chefs negotiate work and family. *Gender Issues*, 27, 27-52. doi: 10.1007/s12147-010-9086-8

- Hewlett, S. A., & Luce, C. B. (2005, March). Off-ramps and on-ramps: Keeping talented women on the road to success. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2005/03/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-keeping-talented-women-on-the-road-to-success>
- Hills, M. D. (2002). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's values orientation theory. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 4(4), 3-14. doi: 10.9707/2307-0919.1040
- Hofstede, G. (2004). Business goals and corporate governance. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 10(3/4), 292-301. doi: 10.1080/1360238042000264379
- Ibarra, H., Ely, R. J., & Kolb, D. M. (2013, September). Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers>
- Kamberidou, I. (2008, November). *Eliminating the leaky pipeline: Sustaining-normalizing-engendering women's careers as academics, researchers and professionals in engineering, computers and the sciences*. Paper presented at the UNICAFE Dissemination Conference "Beyond the Glass Ceiling: Women Academics in Engineering, Technology and Life Sciences across Europe", Istanbul, Turkey.
- Kamberidou, I. (2010, June). *The "glass escalator" & "gender fatigue": Getting gender back on the agenda*. Paper presented at The 5th International Conference on Interdisciplinarity in Education ICIE'10, Tallinn, Estonia.
- Kark, R., Waismel-Manor, R., & Shamir, B. (2012). Does valuing androgyny and femininity lead to a female advantage? The relationship between gender-role, transformational leadership

- and identification. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 23, 620-640. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.12.012
- Kenworthy, J., Fay, C., Frame, M., & Petree, R. (2014). A meta-analytic review of the relationship between emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 44, 94-105. doi: 10.1111/jasp.12211
- Koltko-Rivera, M. E. (2004). The psychology of worldviews. *Review of General Psychology*, 8(1), 3-58. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.8.1.3
- Kwong, L. (2013, May 7). When the CEO burns out. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323687604578469124008524696>
- Leach-Lopez, M. A. (2013). Moderating effect of Hofstede's cultural values on the locus of control/job performance relationship of managers in USA, Mexico, South Korea and Hong Kong. *Journal of Business Strategies*, 30(1). Retrieved from <https://business.highbeam.com/578/article-1G1-335733212/moderating-effect-hofstede-cultural-values-locus-controljob>
- Lian, S., & Tam, C. L. (2014). Work stress, coping strategies and resilience: A study among working females. *Asian Social Science*, 10(12), 41-52. doi: 10.5539/ass.v10n12p41
- Loehr, J., & Schwartz, T. (2001, January). The making of a corporate athlete. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2001/01/the-making-of-a-corporate-athlete>
- Loh, S. Y. (2010). Insights into the occupational pressure of women health professionals. *Medical and Health Science Journal*, 4, 80-90. doi: 10.15208/mhsj.2010.64

- Lucia-Casademunt, A. M., Ariza-Montes, J. A., & Morales-Gutiérrez, A. C. (2013). Determinants of occupational well-being among executive women. *Academia Revista Latinoamericana de Administración*, 26(2), 229-257. doi:10.1108/ARLA-06-2013-0064
- McMillan, H. S., & Morris, M. L. (2012). Examining the relationship between work/life conflict and life satisfaction in executives: The importance of problem-solving coping interventions and HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 14(4), 640-663. doi: 10.1177/1523422312455626
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Nelson, D. L., & Burke, R. J. (2000, May). Women executives: Health, stress, and success. *Academy of Management Executive*, 14(2), 107-121. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4165639>
- Perrakis, A. & Martinez, C. (2012). In pursuit of sustainable leadership: How female academic department chairs with children negotiate personal and professional roles. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 14(2), 205-220. doi: 10.1177/1523422312436417
- Pincott, A. E. (2014). *A qualitative exploration of strategies that promote resilience in the lives of female executive leaders* (Master of Arts thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. (1561075)
- Ramaswami, A., Dreher, G. F., Bretz, R. & Wiethoff, C. (2010). The interactive effects of gender and mentoring on career attainment: Making the case for female lawyers. *Journal of Career Development*, 37(4), 692-716. doi: 10.1177/0894845309358886

- Rikleen, L.S. (2012, March). A key to U.S. competitiveness: Work-life balance. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2012/03/a-key-to-us-competitiveness-wo>
- Roebuck, D. B., Smith, D. N., & El Haddaoui, T. (2013). Cross-generational perspectives on work-life balance and its impact on women's opportunities for leadership in the workplace. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 33, 52-62. Retrieved from http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl_wordpress/
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2005). The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management*, 16, 81-90.
doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00433.x
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Scarborough, J. (2001). *The origins of cultural differences and their impact on management*. Westport, CA: Quorum Books.
- Schlitz, M. M., Vieten, C. & Miller, E. M. (2010). Worldview transformation and the development of social consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 17(7-8), 18-36.
Retrieved from <http://marjadevries.nl/artikelen/WorldviewTransformation.pdf>
- Senge, P. (2006). *The fifth discipline* (rev. ed.). New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Simpson, P. A., & Stroh, L. K. (2004). Gender differences: Emotional expressions and feelings of inauthenticity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 715-721.

- Slaughter, A.-M. (2012, July/August). Why women still can't have it all. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>
- Rikleen, L.S. (2012, March). A key to U.S. competitiveness: Work-life balance. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2012/03/a-key-to-us-competitiveness-wo>
- United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). *Current population survey*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Labor. Retrieved from http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/laborforce_participation_rate_sex_2014_txt.htm
- Vidal, C. (2008). *Wat is een wereldbeeld?(What is a worldview?)* In H. Van Belle, H. & J. Van der Veken (Eds.), *Nieuwheid denken. De wetenschappen en het creatieve aspect van de werkelijkheid* (pp. 1-13). Leuven: Acco. Retrieved from http://cogprints.org/6094/2/Vidal_2008-what-is-a-worldview.pdf
- Ward, R. M., Popson, H. C., & DiPaulo, D. G. (2010). Defining the alpha female: A female leadership measure. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 17(3), 309-320. doi: 10.1177/1548051810368681
- Waumsley, J. A., & Houston, D. M. (2009, December). Flexible working, professional success and being female: Are they incompatible? *Review of European Studies*, 1(2), 39-53. Retrieved from: <http://ccsnet.org/journal.html>
- Weeks, W. A., & Fournier, C. (2010). The impact of time congruity on salesperson's role stress: A person-job fit approach. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 3(1), 73-90. doi: 10.2753/PSS0885-3134300105

Yang, B. (2012). Confucianism, socialism, and capitalism: A comparison of cultural ideologies and implied managerial philosophies and practices in the P.R. China. *Human Resources Management Review*, 22, 165-178. doi: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2012.01.002

Appendix A

Research Instrument

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the journey to your current executive position. Was it linear or non-linear? Did you achieve desired milestones in the timeframe you expected?

2. What do you feel are the unique challenges of being a female executive? How have you personally managed these challenges?

3. How have you effectively balanced personal and professional roles throughout your career? What have you learned in the process?

4. How do you define “success”? To what do you attribute your success? What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment?

5. How do you ensure your continued well-being (physical, mental, spiritual), particularly in challenging times?

6. What advice would you give to other women wanting to achieve and sustain an executive leadership position?

Appendix B

Email Requesting Participant Recommendations

Hello _____,

As you may know, I am currently a graduate student at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. I am conducting research on female executive worldviews that support endurance as professionals. I am seeking recommendations of female executives who outwardly demonstrate effective endurance as a professional. Effective endurance, for the purposes of this research is identified as *the ability to face long-term challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being*.

If you know a female executive (C-suite level or industry equivalent) that you feel meets the definition of “effective endurance” listed above, please email my contact information to them for future correspondence.

RMT0220@GMAIL.COM

612.226.3706

Thank you for your consideration,

Rebecca Taylor Kipp

Appendix C

Recruitment Email for Potential Participants

Hello _____,

My name is Rebecca Taylor Kipp and I am a graduate student at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. I am conducting thesis research on female executives and their worldviews that support their endurance as a professional. You have been identified as a female executive who outwardly demonstrates effective endurance as a professional. Effective endurance, for the purposes of this research is identified as *the ability to face long-term challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being*.

In order to participate in this research study you must identify and confirm the following:

- I am a female executive (C-suite level or industry equivalent), 45 years of age or older

- I have been in a senior executive role for five or more years

- I have been able to endure challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being in the long-term.

Appendix D
Research Participant Consent Form

12/23/15

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study titled Female Executive Worldviews that Support Endurance as Professionals.

I am a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Sharon Radd, Ed.D, a faculty member in the Department of Organizational Leadership. I am completing this study as a part of my Masters degree in Organizational Leadership.

In order to make sure that this research is both ethical and credible, it is important that each participant be fully informed of the risks and benefits of the study, as well as of their rights as a participant. Please read the attached Informed Consent Form for this important information. We will review this information at the beginning of your interview, and I will ask you to sign it at that point.

If you have any questions about the form or the study please do not hesitate to discuss them with me.

Thank you for your support of my study,

Rebecca Taylor Kipp

4811 Greenhaven Drive, St. Paul, MN 55127

612.226.3706

RMT0220@GMAIL.COM

ST CATHERINE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

Study Title: Female Executive Worldviews that Support Endurance as Professionals

Researcher(s): Rebecca Taylor Kipp

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is called Female Executive Worldviews that Support Endurance as Professionals. The study is being done by Rebecca Taylor Kipp, a Master's candidate student at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. The faculty advisor for this study is Sharon Radd, Ed.D., a faculty member at St. Catherine University.

The purpose of this study is to explore the unique ways women in executive roles view and make sense of their world, specifically surrounding their long-term professional endurance. This study is important because female executives are an underrepresented population whose worldviews surrounding endurance have not yet been studied. This study will advance research on female executives and their worldviews that encourage endurance as professionals. Approximately 7-10 women are expected to participate in this research. Below, you will find answers to the most commonly asked questions about participating in a research study. Please read this entire document and ask questions you have before you agree to be in the study.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been recommended as a female executive who outwardly demonstrates effective endurance. "Effective endurance," for the purpose of this study is defined as "the ability to face challenge and adversity while maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being." Additionally, you have self-identified as a female executive, forty-five years of age or older, with five or more years of senior executive leadership experience.

If I decide to participate, what will I be asked to do?

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in a one-on-one confidential interview consisting of six semi-structured questions, and lasting for 60-90 minutes.
- Verify the accuracy of your interview transcript.

In total, this study will take approximately 60-90 minutes over one interview session. Review of your transcript may take another 15-20 minutes.

What if I decide I don't want to be in this study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide you do not want to participate in this study, please feel free to say so, and do not sign this form. If you decide to participate in this study, but later change your mind and want to withdraw, simply notify me and you will be removed immediately. Your decision of whether or not to participate will have no negative or positive impact on your relationship with St. Catherine University, nor with any of the students or faculty involved in the research.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

The risks of participation in this study are minimal. By participating, you do face a risk to confidentiality of your information. However, precautions including de-identification of data (associating your information with a pseudonym only and never using your real name or organization's name) and data security measures (locking recording devices and research documents in locked file cabinets) will be fully exercised to protect confidentiality. Additionally, interviews will discuss personal information. You may experience negative feelings after discussing personally sensitive information. You may stop the interview at any point without cause or consequence.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

Participation in this study will further research on female executives. Greater insight into this underrepresented population may encourage more women to achieve and sustain executive leadership positions.

Will I receive any compensation for participating in this study?

You will not be compensated for participation in this study.

What will you do with the information you get from me and how will you protect my privacy?

The information that you provide in this study will only be associated with a pseudonym, not your real name or any identifiable information. The device used for recording your interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will keep the data files in a password-protected document on a password-protected computer. Only my research advisor and I will have access to your information while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by May 2016. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Additionally all audio recordings will be destroyed at this time.

Any information that you provide will be kept confidential, which means that you will not be identified or identifiable in the any written reports or publications.

Are there possible changes to the study once it gets started?

If during the course of this research study I learn about anything that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, I will inform you of these changes.

How can I get more information?

If you have any questions, you can ask them before you sign this form. You can also contact me, Rebecca Taylor Kipp, at 612.226.3706 or RMT0220@GMAIL.COM. If you have any additional questions later and would like to talk to the faculty advisor, please contact Sharon Radd, Ed.D., at SIRADD@STKATE.EDU. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or jsschmitt@stkate.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I consent to participate in the study **Female Executive Worldviews that Support Endurance as Professionals** and I agree to be audiotaped.

My signature indicates that I have read this information and my questions have been answered. I also know that even after signing this form, I may withdraw from the study by informing the researcher.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date