Kaleidoscope careers: An alternate explanation for the “opt-out” revolution

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Executive Overview

Recently, there has been considerable media attention granted to “the opt-out revolution,” a term coined to describe the alarming talent drain of highly trained women, largely working mothers, who choose not to aspire to the corporate executive suite. This article critically reviews explanations for this phenomenon, and posits an alternate explanation of the kaleidoscope career model that fits workers’ concerns for authenticity, balance, and challenge, vis-à-vis the demands of their careers in this new millennium.

In particular, the kaleidoscope model fits women’s careers well as a means of understanding how women operate relationally to others in both work and non-work realms. Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects in their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways. The article concludes with guidelines on how women executives can increase their career success and how organizations can create an improved workplace that will attract and retain talented women given the anticipated labor shortages beginning in 2012.

The media coverage on “the opt-out revolution,” a term coined to describe the alarming talent drain of highly trained women who choose not to aspire to the corporate executive suite, has been explosive and controversial. Twenty years ago, working women imagined they would pursue their careers, bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, split child care with their sensitive, understanding, feminist husbands, and have a relaxing glass of wine at the end of the day. But the complications of balancing work with non-work demands have led some women to voluntarily exit the corporate rat race.

Are women leaving corporations in droves because they find the balance between their work and non-work lives far too skewed? Or has the “opt-out revolution,” a term suggested by the New York Times Magazine, been overblown and exaggerated?

Executives who have read headlines profiling women such as Karen Hughes (White House Chief Strategist for President George W. Bush), Brenda Barnes (President and CEO of PepsiCo’s North America division), and Maureen Smith (President of the Fox Family Channel and the Fox Kids Network) who left their jobs to spend time with family, would believe that indeed this is the case. While analyzing last year’s media coverage, a reader would assume that women are failing to achieve the top posts in their Fortune 500 firms because: 1) highly educated women are leaving the workforce, thus reducing the number of female contenders for top positions; 2) women aren’t willing to work as hard as men for the top spots; 3) women are too timid or too passive to claim their reward; 4) women don’t want power; or 5) women find there are more psychological and social rewards for staying home. The thesis of the popular press is that work demands are incompatible with family needs; therefore, women leave the work force to concentrate on family.

But do these popular press accounts of women leaving the workforce tell the full story? We think not. The answer lies in more complex issues and trends resulting from a major paradigm shift in how careers are developed, created, and utilized - by women and by men - that is the real story magazine writers and news reporters have missed.
It Makes Great Copy, But What’s Really Going On?

To support the claim that women are not interested in the executive suite, the New York Times Magazine article focused on a small, elite sample of Princeton graduates who represented a socio-economic stratum that allowed them the privilege to leave their careers behind. The article reported that more than a third of women with MBAs are not working full time; merely 16 percent of women have made it to partner in the law field; only 16 percent of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies are women; and only 38 percent of Harvard MBA women from the classes of 1981, 1985, and 1991 work full time.\(^9\) Census data also reveal an increase in stay-at-home moms who hold graduate degrees, as 22 percent of mothers with graduate degrees are home full-time with their children.\(^10\) In addition, the article noted that fewer women with MBAs than men remained in the full-time work force through mid-career.\(^11\) Citing a Catalyst survey that suggested that 26 percent of the women within three levels of the upper echelon aren’t interested in the CEO position, it was conveniently omitted that 55 percent of those surveyed do want the top job, and an additional 19 percent are undecided.\(^12\)

While there is a trend indicating a drop off in workplace participation among working mothers, and statistics show some married mothers work only part of the year, part time, or stay home while their children are young,\(^13\) women are nonetheless making inroads into the executive suite. Fortune magazine, in addition to its 2003 article titled, “Power: Do Women Really Want It?”\(^14\) dutifully lists its yearly “Power 50 Women” of American and global businesses, highlighting women who have achieved executive positions in Fortune 500 firms. From these statistics, it is clear that women are making slow but sure inroads in various industries, even those characterized as “old-boys clubs.” For example, women in the entertainment industry now occupy almost 30 percent of all executive and production slots at senior vice president or higher at the major film studios,\(^15\) and the number of women in traditionally male-dominated fields of financial services, law, and insurance are increasing.\(^16\) There are more women in the pipeline for executive slots, but progress is slow.\(^17\)

Nonetheless, data from the Current Population Survey indicate that although working mothers are more likely to work full-time than 20 years ago, only 37 percent of them worked full-time year round compared to 54 percent of women without children and 66 percent of men.\(^18\) The percentage of women entrepreneurs and small business owners also is growing directly in proportion to the loss of qualified talent from major corporations.\(^19\) A recent Fortune-Yankelovich survey discovered an astonishing number of women were considering other career and personal options at mid-life, such as starting their own businesses, changing jobs, returning to school, taking time off, making major personal changes, or simply leaving their jobs.\(^20\)

This exodus of women from corporations demands answers – and solutions. The answer to the question: “Are women leaving organizations for non work or advancement reasons?” isn’t a simple “yes” or “no” but requires an examination of the complex interplay between non-work demands and lack of advancement opportunities for women. Three reasons have been suggested as underpinnings for this phenomenon: 1) generational differences and shifts in work values; 2) work-family balance issues; and 3) discrimination against women in the workforce.

### Turnover Rates: Family Reasons, Lack of Advancement, or Changing Values?

The most frequent assumption by members of the popular press is that women are leaving corporations because they need to resign for family reasons. Although it may be true that many women leave work to care for family, not all women are leaving corporations for that reason alone. Research has indicated that women’s turnover intentions were not predicted by family structure (e.g., dual earner status or number of children). Instead, women reported they were leaving for the same reasons as male managers: lack of career opportunities in their current company and other work-related predictors of turnover, such as job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment.\(^21\) A comprehensive review on turnover found the turnover rate for women is actually similar to that of men, with women being more likely than men to remain in the workforce as they age.\(^22\) Moreover, researchers have found that managers who had been promoted were less likely to resign than non-promoted managers, and promoted women were less likely to resign than promoted men.\(^23\) In general, when opportunities for career advancement are poor, managers – regardless of gender – leave, but when opportunities for career advancement exist, women remain loyal.

Lack of advancement opportunities may be the foremost reason why women leave corporations. According to Catalyst, women hold only 15.7 percent of the Fortune 500 corporate officer positions, and despite progress, men still dominate the exec-
utive suite\textsuperscript{24} in many industries, including higher education. Only 47 percent of women faculty have tenure compared to 65 percent for men and only 18 percent of full professors at doctoral universities are women.\textsuperscript{25} Karen Lyness and Donna Thompson, in a comparative study of 69 men and women executives, found women reported greater barriers to career advancement, citing roadblocks including: lack of general management or line experience (79 percent agreement), exclusion from informal networks (77 percent agreement), stereotypes about women’s roles and abilities (72 percent agreement), and failure of top leaders to assume accountability for women’s advancement (68 percent agreement).\textsuperscript{26} Sixty-seven percent agreed “commitment to personal /family responsibilities” was the most important challenge for women.

Finally, generational differences in values between GenXers and Baby Boomers may serve as one explanation for the “opt-out” phenomenon. Baby Boomers, typically defined as the generation born between 1946 and 1960, witnessed great political, religious, and social upheavals as they watched the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the advancement of feminism shape their generation. Gen Xers, born between 1961–1982, grew up with financial, family and social insecurity, rapid technological change, and increased diversity.\textsuperscript{27} Today’s GenX workers are the former latch-key kids who watched their Baby Boomer parents work long hours only to be downsized out of their jobs. Researchers posit such generational differences may have affected GenXers’ work ethic and their willingness to work long hours as the price for material success. Catalyst tested the assumption that GenXers bring different expectations to the workplace, finding that 76 percent want a compressed work week and 59 percent want to telecommute or have flexible working arrangements. GenXers also rated personal/family goals higher than career goals.\textsuperscript{28}

**The Research: Time for a New Model of Careers**

New trends in career research have articulated the concept of boundaryless careers, in which workers are no longer bound to the idea of traditional career with steady upward movement within one firm, and are motivated more by self-fulfillment and balancing work/nonwork than the stability and security of the past.\textsuperscript{29} Although the concept of the boundaryless career became a hallmark of research about careers only in the last decade, this model has been used by women for decades out of necessity. The needs of caring for children, coping with aging parents or ailing spouses, personal demands, trailing spouse issues, and outright discrimination in the workplace have led women to pursue discontinuous, interrupted, and even “sideways” careers.

While trends such as the generational differences between GenXers and Baby Boomers, issues of balance and work/nonwork conflict, and discrimination against women may have contributed to the drop off in workplace participation among women, we think the issues run much deeper and suggest a new career model for workers in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The career shifts, changes, transitions, and compromises employees are making in their careers provide interesting material for study. As researchers, we felt it was time to articulate a new model for careers in a way that deconstructs what employees are doing today: How do women’s careers unfold? What meaning does “career” have? And which factors are salient in the transitions they make in their careers?

For our research, we took a complex, multiple-pronged, three-study approach. First, we conducted an online survey of over 100 high achieving women, primarily professionals, managers, and business entrepreneurs. Participants were asked to explicate transitions they made in their careers and the reasons why. Second, we conducted a larger, more detailed online survey of professionals (837 men and 810 women) to compare differences in career motivations and transitions between men and women.\textsuperscript{30} This survey was quite large and offered us the opportunity to compare men and women at different points in their life span. In addition to the results of these two surveys, we wanted to gain insights into some of the transitions and setbacks associated with women’s and men’s careers. Therefore, we orchestrated a series of lengthy online “conversations” with 22 men and 5 women about their careers. Because we examined only women in the first study, we intentionally oversampled men for Study 2 (see Appendix A for further sample information). In contrast to the high-profile, senior-level women executives often featured in the popular press, our sample included women (and men) from different levels and backgrounds to more realistically capture the careers of most working professionals.

**Voices of Women: Defining Careers Differently**

In defining a new model of careers that includes career interruptions, employment gaps, top-outs, opt-outs, as well as the new values of the current generation, we were intrigued to find that women and men described their careers quite differently. Many women examined the opportunities, road-
blocks, and possibilities, then forged their own approach to a career without regard for traditional career models and standard measures of achievement. They rejected the concept of linear career progression, preferring instead to create non-traditional, self-crafted careers that suited their objectives, needs, and life criteria.

Consider Lynn’s career description. Lynn is a 43 year old mother of three who has an MBA. She describes the reasons she “opted out”:

I left college for a great career opportunity at a local phone company. I worked as a marketing manager for awhile, starting off as a staff assistant and moving up to the manager’s spot. I loved my work and did it well. But over time I realized there was no way I was going to be president of that company and started to think about other options. My husband had taken a job up in Hartford, CT, and I was pregnant – finally. I struggled getting pregnant and did not want to take any chances with this baby. So I left the dream job and stayed home while raising my three children, at least while they were young. I figured I would go back to work after the first one, and I did, part-time for awhile, but that didn’t work out. Then I returned to work, helping my husband in his consulting practice for awhile. I even took client assignments. But we got on each other’s nerves and the work wasn’t fulfilling enough. I needed a job where I could be home for the bus in the afternoon and still have a challenge. I found employment in my town as a Museum Curator – who would have thought. The job is not challenging but I can be close to home and available to my children. I am thinking of starting my own antique shop in town, because I love antiques, and that would be more fulfilling for me.

Lynn temporarily opted out for a combination of reasons, including the lack of advancement opportunities and the birth of a child. Contrast her description to that of Lori, a single professional with no children, who changed her career course because of a failed relationship. She forged a path in a male-dominated field by developing a childhood passion into a job that offered both challenge and the chance to fulfill a cherished dream:

First I was a photographer . . . then a concert promoter . . . but like many women I know, the most transforming career decision was motivated by the need to make a leap into the void at the ruination of a cherished love relation-

ship. I was devastated when the man I lived with and was crazy about dumped me for four or five other (and rather unremarkable) women, and I needed a life raft – something new and challenging to throw my energies into . . . . Since high school I had been fascinated by shipwrecks and sunken treasure. One day during the long post-love crisis period, I learned of a marine archaeological field school to be taught in the Netherlands Antilles by some of Mel Fisher’s crew, so I [went] and fell in love with historic shipwreck archaeological search and recovery and all of the research and learning that goes along with it . . . . Now more than a decade later I live in Key West, Florida, having created my own business as a professional in the field of historic shipwrecks. Though it is not a picnic carving a niche in a profession almost exclusively dominated by men, I am happy I made the leap because the work is fascinating beyond my imaginings!

Both Lynn’s and Lori’s career descriptions illustrate the interplay of work and nonwork factors on women’s career development. Lynn’s and Lori’s career descriptions are interesting because instead of emphasizing the negative outcomes of trying to balance work and nonwork that we often read about in the popular press, these women chose to blend their work and nonwork lives. Their career decisions were a natural outgrowth of the opportunities that were presented to them and the choices they made to fulfill their dreams within the context of the relationships around them. For example, Lynn was planning to transform her consulting experiences and her subsequent work experience into the foundation for her own business. Lori’s failed relationship was the trigger that caused her to seek new challenges and realize a long-time ambition.

Contrast Lynn’s and Lori’s careers with this career history from a male respondent, John, recounting his extraordinarily accomplished but quite linear career in banking:

I started with [my bank] over 25 years ago as a part-time teller. I have had the opportunity, over the course of my career with the bank, to be involved in various areas of the organization. These areas include Branch Management, Management of the Accounting and Proof areas, Director of Deposit Operations, Management of Consumer Loans, Management of the Mortgage Field Rep teams [names other areas, etc.]. I currently serve as First Vice
President and I am now responsible for the Bank’s 50-branch network and growth of our deposit portfolio, the Alternative Financial Services Area, the Trust Department, as well as departments that support branch operations and sales management. I have had the pleasure of having a one bank career. I grew up in the organization. Having been given the opportunity to work in various areas of the organization, I feel that I have a broad view of the bank and have interacted with a vast majority of the people in the organization. I now serve as a member of the Executive Management Team of the bank with responsibilities for the development and implementation of the organization’s strategic and business plans.

Not all men in our research demonstrated such extremely linear career paths, but men as a group were more likely to follow traditional career paths associated with one industry (though not necessarily one firm) than women. Our research asks: Is Lynn’s career any less valid because she took time off to be with her children? Is Lori’s career not a “career” because it is variable and disjointed? We think not. The fact that Lynn and Lori crafted together a series of job opportunities, some part-time, some full-time, constitutes a career as much as the linear career in a single institution as described by John. The difference is that these women created a career on their own terms, blending and integrating rather than segregating the work and non-work facets of their lives, while striving to obtain greater job challenge and personal fulfillment.

Our analysis of the women’s responses to the first survey, from which Lynn’s and Lori’s career descriptions are taken, helped us to understand the nature and character of women’s careers. The women surveyed indicated that they were more likely to have non-traditional careers, characterized by various career interruptions that required attention to non-work needs, than traditional linear careers as described by the men. These non-work needs went beyond childcare concerns and encompassed many needs including the quest for spiritual fulfillment and the need to be true to oneself, as illustrated by this comment from Ruth:

I left the corporate world at age 48 to start my own business fulfilling a long desire to be my own boss and be aligned with my spiritual belief and need to help others reach their full potential.

Similarly, other women discussed their career transitions being triggered by the need to care for themselves, especially after experiencing a serious illness. Consider the comments of Robin, a 53 year old attorney:

When I changed careers 4 years ago, I did so not only because I wanted to accept the challenge of a new career but also because I wanted to put more of a balance in my life, with adding more time for family and friends. In 1990, I collapsed during a trial and learned it was chronic fatigue syndrome. I was out of work for 18 months. I [was] determined to get back and [be] healthy and add more relaxation time into my life.

Others faced direct and indirect discrimination, as illustrated by the following comments:

... that as a woman I needed to be more credentialed than my male counterparts in order to be treated half as well. Always heard the excuse that men in my field were paid more because they were heads of households

"Most of the changes I have made were because of feelings of being underappreciated, undervalued, or underpaid. I have experienced sexism, harassment, and outright hostility."

When some of the women in our study found internal advancement opportunities blocked, like a growing number of women, they opted out and started their own businesses. Between 1997 and 2002, the Center for Women’s Business Research reported that the number of women-owned firms increased by 14 percent, for an estimated 6.2 million U.S. firms owned by women. Twenty-nine year old Laura is one of the growing number of women making the transition out of the corporate world:

I now manage my own career — I am in control of how much money I am able to make, rather than relying on a male dominated corporate world dictating when I will get promoted and how much I will get paid. I have flexible hours so can find the time to work out, travel, and spend time with family and friends. I am so much happier as a person.

In sharp contrast to the traditional model as illustrated by John, the careers of the women in our study were characterized by the need to seek chal-
lenges and learning opportunities but were cur- 
tailed by the lack of advancement opportunities, 
and outright discrimination. Their career interrup-
tions were shaped by non-work issues – including 
the need for personal fulfillment, balance, and to 
nurture oneself. The women in our studies didn’t 
ask for or want special treatment. They worked 
long hours and held themselves to high perform-
ance standards. They emphasized the intrinsic 
rewards of quality performance. But they were im-
mensely frustrated by the lack of job challenge, 
discrimination, and the exhaustion that comes 
from trying to do it all.

Kaleidoscope Careers: A New Model for a New 
Generation

Despite great changes in social and workplace 
norms as well as advances in gender equality, we 
were surprised to find such dramatic differences 
between the careers of men and women through-
out the research. In sharp contrast to men, the 
career histories of women are relational. Their ca-
reer decisions were normally part of a larger and 
intricate web of interconnected issues, people, and 
aspects that had to come together in a delicately 
balanced package. In our research, we saw women 
making decisions about their career options after 
considering the impact their decisions will have on 
others. Listen to the explanations of these two (typ-
ical) women:

Most of my career changes have been influ-
enced by family reasons. When I had my first 
child, the company for which I worked did not 
have options like flex-time or the ability to 
accept the fact that you can work from home. 
In my current position and company, I have a 
lot more say over my schedule and am able to 
delegate to several people in order to keep my 
work load reasonable. These benefits are 
keeping me in this position, although I have 
held that it is time for me to move on career 
wise. My family would be very disrupted by a 
position that required me to put in extensive 
over-time which any new job that paid my 
current salary would demand.

After I had put a number of years into the job, 
I looked at my husband - worn down from 
travel, working hard on weekends – and I 
said, “Something’s gotta give.” So it was me. 
How long were we going to go on like that? 
My husband had needs, my children were 
saying they needed me more, my parents 
needed someone to take them to the doctor’s 
appointments they made, my brother’s mar-
riage ended in divorce ... there was so much 
going on that I could not do the 9 to 5 any-
more. So I gave up the big job where I wasn’t 
going anywhere fast anyway and became a 
copy editor and now work from home, make 
my own hours, and work when I can.

As a means of understanding the “opt-out” or ca-
reer interruption phenomenon, we developed the 
kaleidoscope model. Like a kaleidoscope that 
produces changing patterns when the tube is ro-
tated and its glass chips fall into new arrange-
ments, women shift the pattern of their careers by 
rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange 
their roles and relationships in new ways. Wom-
en’s careers, like kaleidoscopes, are relational. 
Each action taken by a woman in her career is 
viewed as having profound and long lasting ef-
facts on others around her. Each career action, 
therefore, is evaluated in light of the impact such 
decisions may have on her relationships with oth-
ers, rather than based upon insulated actions as 
an independent actor on her own.

Although research has focused on “work/family 
conflict” – with family often narrowly defined as a 
husband and children-- non-work issues (e.g., a 
woman’s own physical and psychological well be-
ing, family issues, elder care, volunteerism) must 
be viewed as much more than a career constraint. 
For women, making career decisions while consid-
ering their impact on others may be inherent. Re-
searcher Shelley Taylor and associates discovered 
a biobehavioral stress response in females that 
describes a “tend and befriend” response, rather 
than a “fight or flight” response, demonstrating 
how ingrained attachments and caregiving may 
be in women. For women, we do not believe the 
concept of “career” can be summarily divorced 
from a larger understanding of “context.” In our 
kaleidoscope model, “family” and “context” are 
more broadly defined as the set of connections 
representing individuals who deserve consider-
ation as a weight in the decision, each with their 
own needs, wants, and desires that must be eval-
uated as parts of the whole.

The women in our research made career deci-
sions from a lens of relationalism – they factored in 
the needs of their children, spouses, aging parents, 
friends, and even coworkers and clients – as part of 
the total gestalt of their careers. Men, on the other 
hand, tended to examine career decisions from the 
perspective of goal orientation and independent 
action – acting first for the benefit of career. Men 
tended to keep their work and non-work lives sep-
ate – and often could do this because the women
in their lives managed the delicate interplay between work and non-work issues. For example, significantly more women than men (41.1 percent women, 24.4 percent men) stated, “I made changes in my career due to family demands,” while more men than women reported family demands were “not a factor” (40.2 percent men, 30.1 percent women). More women than men (42.7 percent women, 15.0 percent men) reported “My spouse moved to another geographical location and I followed.” In addition to family issues, women were more likely to make career transitions because of a yearning for self-improvement (30.1 percent women and 19.3 percent men) “I wanted to simplify and reduce stress.” and greater challenge (23.5 percent women, 17.3 percent men) “I was bored and wanted greater challenge.” On the other hand, significantly more men than women reported reasons associated with career achievements or goal-orientation: “An opportunity presented itself for more money, greater security” (30.7 percent men, 24.4 percent women), or “A risky opportunity presented greater long term payoff” (18.1 percent men, 11.8 percent women). Surprisingly, corporate politics was an equal opportunity player for both men and women; there was no difference by gender when corporate politics was nominated as the reason for career transitions. The reasons why men and women made career transitions are summarized in Figure 1 and Table 1.

Consider again the working of a kaleidoscope: as one part moves, the other parts change. Women, who utilize a relational model in attending to their worlds, understand that any decision they make for themselves creates changes in others’ lives. Women evaluate the choices and options available through the lens of the kaleidoscope to determine the best fit among their relationships, work
The kaleidoscope model shows how women move the facets of their lives around, to find the mosaic that best fits their life circumstances and their own wants and needs, even if those choices defy typical definitions of career success. For example, Joy Schneer and Frieda Reitman noted, with some puzzlement, that despite lesser organizational rewards, pay, and promotions, women MBAs were not dissatisfied with their careers. It may be that for these women, other facets of their lives combined to offset lower levels of organizational outcomes. The voices of the women in our research tell us that women are more interested in creating a career their way, through lateral but challenging assignments, opportunities that fit their lives, entrepreneurial activities, or flexible scheduling, rather than focusing on advancement for the sake of advancement. This is not to say that women are not interested in advancement; they are. Lots of women are. But the women in our research were more interested in making the career suit their lives, rather than allowing the career to overtake their lives.

**Parameters of the Kaleidoscope: The ABC Model**

The relational model is not new. When the ethic of care, connection, and relationalism concept was first introduced by Carol Gilligan, she wrote about the impact of relationships on moral development, not careers. Joan Gallos introduced relationalism as a concept for studying women’s careers, and researchers Gary Powell and Lisa Mainiero allowed an interpretation of relationalism in discussing the complexities of women’s careers as part of their “river of time” metaphor. Other researchers have discussed the need for a “dual agenda” that allows for an integration of work and family in the workplace. Our model goes beyond these original precepts, however, to examine the importance of three key career issues women must face: authenticity; balance; and challenge. The women in our study not only considered the impact of their decisions on others, but also whether their choices were true to who they are, their vision for their lives.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linear Career Items</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have pursued my career goals at several different firms all within the same industry</td>
<td>25.5*</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was promoted several times after working hard to achieve my goals</td>
<td>31.8*</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have developed a certain level of expertise in my field</td>
<td>42.9*</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy using my skills and talents in a variety of different ways</td>
<td>17.9*</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nonwork/Family Related Items:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing is more important to me than my family</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>18.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family needs necessitated that I change jobs or careers so that I could achieve a better balance for my work and family</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>29.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I took a break from work/career to care for family, children, or elders</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>27.7*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (*) denotes significance levels at the p < .05 level or higher.

Constraints, and opportunities. As one decision is made, it affects the outcome of the kaleidoscope pattern. Rather than singularly striving for career goals, the women in our research determined the set of options in that kaleidoscope that mark the best fit at the time, always considering the impact of their decisions on others in their lives.

Why is the kaleidoscope model a revolutionary new approach to the study of careers? The contribution of the kaleidoscope model is that it provides context to the study of careers and puts gender in the foreground. Researchers in the area of work-family-nonwork domains have long noted the bifurcation of “work” versus “family.” Yet the women in our studies saw work/family concerns as more of a gestalt in their lives – “I must find the fit that is right for me given my circumstances and context” rather than a division of “work” versus “family” with both concepts treated in isolation. A woman’s context – her family, relationships, caregiving needs – offers decision-making parameters for her in any decision about her career. She is relational. Her context does not exist in isolation; rather it is the difference between figure and ground in the complex decision-making interplay that is associated with careers.

We offer the kaleidoscope metaphor as a new way of thinking about careers emanating from gender issues, valuing gender and context rather than making it “invisible” in the study of careers. The kaleidoscope model shows how women move the foreground. Researchers in the area of work-family-nonwork domains have long noted the bifurcation of “work” versus “family.” Yet the women in our research determined the set of options in that kaleidoscope that mark the best fit at the time, always considering the impact of their decisions on others in their lives.

**Figure 2 illustrates how three key parameters shift over a typical woman professional’s life span. The three parameters that predominated choices about the “fit” of their lives and careers include questions about:**

**Authenticity:** Can I be myself in the midst of all of this and still be authentic?

**Balance:** If I make this career decision, can I balance the parts of my life well so that there can be a
coherent whole?

Challenge: Will I be sufficiently challenged if I accept this career option?

Each of these parameters, or decision-making questions, were active as signposts throughout a woman’s career. We found, however, that certain issues predominated at different points in the life span, becoming the parameter that caused a pivot in the woman’s decision making about her career. The remaining aspects, still active, are not irrelevant but take on a secondary role at that point in time. For example, most of the women in our samples discussed their needs for finding career challenges in early career. Issues of balance and authenticity were of secondary concern, but nonetheless important. A woman may make a career decision to take a position offering more responsibility, because challenge is the key pivot at that time, but the remaining issues (balance, authenticity) become secondary. In mid-career, women were predominately concerned about the issue of balance. It did not matter whether the woman had a husband or children or whether she was single. She was concerned about balancing her family needs as a priority, or, as in the case of single women, soliciting eldercare for aging parents, aiding the concerns and interests of various nephews and nieces, or searching for a companion with whom she could balance her life. Women may make adjustments to their career ambitions at that point to take on more flexible schedules. In late career, women in our research were asking the question, “Is that all there is?” Desire for authenticity, being true to herself, and making decisions that suited her above others predominated her career and life decisions. At this point, we found most women were interested in challenges, but on their own terms, making decisions in an authentic, meaningful way, and the issue of balance, while still active, had receded to the background.

We call this the “ABC Model of Kaleidoscope Careers.” Just as a kaleidoscope uses three mirrors to create infinite patterns, our kaleidoscope career model has three “mirrors” or parameters (authenticity, balance, and challenge) that combine in different ways throughout a woman’s life, reflecting the unique patterns of her career. To use an artistic metaphor, the colors of a woman’s kaleidoscope are reflected in these three parameters, shaping her decisions as one aspect of the kaleidoscope, or color, takes on greater intensity as a decision parameter at different points of the life span. Over the course of the life span, as a woman searches for the best fit that matches the character and context of her life, the colors of the kaleidoscope shift in response, with one color (parameter) moving to the foreground and intensifying in color as that parameter takes priority at that time in her life. The other two colors (parameters) lessen in intensity and recede to the background, but are still present and active since all aspects are necessary to create the current pattern of her life/career. For example, at one point, she may delay having children in order to devote more energy to her career. At another point, she may subjugate career ambitions for the sake of her family needs. Later in life, she may forge ahead, searching for meaning and spirituality in her life. Somewhere in the middle she may be most concerned about balance and relationships in her life. Her context shapes her choices. Therefore, “opting-out” becomes a natural decision based on the fit of the colors of her kaleidoscope at that point in time. Her career does not dictate her life. Instead, she shapes her career to fit her life as marked by her distinct and changing personal kaleidoscope patterns over her life span.

Do Men Value Family and Flexibility? Yes, But Their Timing Is Different

Our research also allowed for an opportunity to examine men’s careers as a counterpoint to women’s careers. Men’s careers had a linear, or sequential aspect—challenges first, concerns about the self, then a later focus on balance and others—that was far more straightforward than the complex kaleidoscope patterns and multiplicity of career/family decision making of women. Although previous research based on gender archetypes has focused on the influence of relationships on women and achievement for men, we do not believe such distinctions are quite that clear cut. Our research showed that men came to value relationships more once they had made progress in their careers. In the words of two men in the online sample (Study 3):

I have made many personal sacrifices for success. While I was a good provider, the time and dedication to my job left little time and energy to enjoy my family. This really hit home seven years ago when my mother passed away and I realized that certain things, like one’s success and accomplishments, are not as important as one’s family. [Since then] I have made conscious efforts to form relationships with my own family. (62-year-old male executive)
FIGURE 2
The ABC Model of Kaleidoscope Careers for Women

- In early career, one predominant life/career pattern for women is to be concerned with goal achievement and challenge in their careers.
- Issues of balance and authenticity remain active, but recede to the background while the woman pursues her career interests.

- In mid career, women must cope with issues of balance and family/relational demands. This issue moves to the forefront.
- Women also wish for challenge and authenticity, but these issues take on a secondary role as compromises are made for balance issues.

- In late career, women have been freed from balance issues, so questions of authenticity arise. This issue moves to the forefront.
- Women also wish for challenge and remain concerned about balance, but the kaleidoscope shifts according to the woman's choices and desires in each arena as dictated by her life pattern(s).
My wife chose the harder career and stayed home with our three sons while I went to work. Having worked for one firm my entire career, I grew up with the company and found the company has been very supportive when I needed time. The real issue was me. I did not ask for much time. We needed the money and I worked a lot of overtime in the early years. As time passed, the balancing issue became more of an issue. I knew there had to be tradeoffs. Supporting my family meant working hard, getting the promotions and increasing my pay. I found . . . balance means making choices. [So] I picked a few things I would participate with (soccer, scouts, vacation). (50-year-old male vice president)

The men in our sample focused on realizing career ambitions, challenge, and developing their skills first, but came to value personal relationships more over time. This difference in perspective, and of timing of the pivotal values of family relationships vis-à-vis career, marks a profound contrast between women and men and explains why women’s careers do not fit neatly into the traditional career stage models (developed with men’s careers in mind). It also explains why women’s career decisions may mystify corporate decision-makers and male executives, who are confounded by successful women jumping off the career ladder just as they were about to achieve a position of prominence in their careers. While men tend to follow a sequential pattern, focusing first on their careers and then on their families later in life, we found women tend to simultaneously focus on the context of relationships throughout their lives, considering all three parameters — authenticity, balance, and challenge — of the kaleidoscope model at each personal decision point before making any life-changing decisions.

Looking at the life span, we find that women and men are negotiating different time constraints associated with their career decisions, and these timing and life span issues impact turnover. Firms that fail to understand these differences, and try to force women into the cookie-cutter traditional corporate linear model of long hours, face-time, and extensive travel don’t realize that inflexible corporate policies contribute to women’s turnover and result in an immeasurable loss of human capital for the firm.43 Criteria based on the traditional linear career model work against women who are immersed in their relational context and may be saddled with more non-work responsibilities than men.

The Upcoming Labor Shortage: What Should Organizations Do?

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts an upcoming labor shortage in the year 2012 unless organizations effectively retain and utilize human capital.44 To answer the question about the talent drain that prefigured this article, executives must realize that a complex set of factors — lack of advancement options due to discrimination, blending work and relationships, and the need for authenticity, balance and challenge — have a great influence on women’s career decisions. To create workplaces that do not suffer from a talent drain of women — and GenX men, for that matter — it is imperative that firms urgently begin the process of initiating policies that improve retention now.

Many firms expect that providing “family-friendly” policies, such as allowing parental leave, subsidizing day care, and orthodontics coverage in benefits policies is sufficient to make their firms attractive to potential recruits. But what firms traditionally think is “family-friendly” simply isn’t. With the new GenX mentality, firms will need to do more than simply offer cosmetic benefits. Firms will need to undergo normative change, restructure their policies concerning careers, benefits, and pay, and re-examine central assumptions about how work gets done in a way that embraces kaleidoscope thinking.

There are two important caveats to implementing successful work/life programs. First, organizations must be truly committed to work/life programs and not use them solely for the purpose of publicity.45 If organizations have work/life policies but foster a hostile culture that makes use of these programs unacceptable, the policies become worthless and will fail to produce the positive intended.

Second, establishing work/life programs is not enough. Our research shows that women make career decisions based on a complex and interrelated set of factors, including job challenge and opportunities for advancement. While work/life programs are a beginning, they must be coupled with challenging jobs and advancement opportunities for women. Gender-based inequities in wages, job placements, and training opportunities must be eliminated. We offer recommendations, summarized in Table 2, that address what firms should do to re-structure the fabric, policies, and norms of organizations to provide true “kaleidoscope” environments.
Assumption #1:

What firms think is sufficient: “We offer flexible schedules where appropriate.”

What firms should do: Completely redesign the way work is done in a way that supports work/life integration.

Many firms, especially those commonly noted in publications such as Working Mother magazine, Fortune magazine, NAFE (the National Association of Female Executives) as well as those profiled in Catalyst publications, offer flexible schedules. However, flexible scheduling often is offered with caveats that include special circumstances or for certain types of work. A norm of flexible work, with rewards for those who effectively perform on such schedules, must be created throughout the workforce for firms to be truly family-friendly. For example, at Sun Microsystems, an overwhelming 95 percent of its workforce uses flexible schedules. But flexibility, on its own, is not enough.

Researchers from MIT’s Workplace Center, a think tank that examines work-life issues, suggest that basic assumptions about how work is designed must be challenged. Instead of assuming that employees should demonstrate their commitment and ambition through long hours, face-time and travel, firms need to recognize their employees have both work and personal obligations. Work should be redesigned around this “dual agenda.”

For example, one woman in our research, a security guard, requested flextime, the ability to dictate her own hours, and the opportunity to secure a laptop to work at home. Her request was initially met with a resounding “No.” Yet, as she explained her position, it turned out that the security guards, both men and women, had developed a flexible time schedule in which all hours were covered but were designed differently from the standard eight-hour corporate shift model. In addition, security guards were responsible for some paperwork that, if granted a laptop, could be done from home.

The moral to the story is that flexibility can exist...
beyond the boundaries of standard corporate assumptions. With the new technologies that are available, work can be redesigned around the concept of performance outcomes rather than hours logged sitting in an office – with rewards based on outcomes not hours worked. When employees can make recommendations for improved work schedules and see their valid suggestions implemented and rewarded, like the security guard, then work will be re-designed so that it is truly family-friendly.

Assumption #2:

What firms think is sufficient: “Linear career paths are the status quo.”

What firms should do: Adopt kaleidoscope thinking and create new, open-ended career paths for women and men.

Realizing that the kaleidoscope model suggests that women may need to take time off to handle various aspects of their lives, career pathways can be created so that women may do so without penalty of losing their jobs entirely. Corporations need to create better “on ramps” as well as “off ramps” – positions that allow for career interruptions or part-time downsizing of the work at hand. For example, Deloitte, Touche Tomatsu has created a five-year unpaid leave policy as a means of facilitating career interruptions for employees who wish to take time off to settle family or personal concerns. IBM has long been a leader in developing “alumni relations” networks, allowing for policies that re-admit employees in good standing to the firm. These so-called “boomerangs” may not return to jobs equivalent to their previous level, but they usually are placed within the former area of responsibility. Paid and unpaid corporate sabbaticals are slowly catching on, with some firms like General Mills offering one-year leaves to women on global assignments so that they can obtain international experience needed for corporate advancement.

HR professionals must identify innovative policies to create such options. One case example from our research concerned a woman who left her job at the Social Security Administration to rear twins and care for an elderly relative. Ten years later, feeling the pressure of college tuition upon her, she elected to return to her old job in the same area of responsibility. She was denied a management position and instead took basic pay as an assistant claims officer. Two years later, the HR office recommended she receive a promotion as manager of the unit. Five years later she earned the position of “administrative head.”

Firms wishing to retain talented women need to examine the level of challenge and support they are providing, and ensure that professional women gain critical field experience early in their careers – ahead of their child rearing years – and that training continues throughout their careers. Some activities that might support kaleidoscope thinking include: long term succession planning that allows for career interruptions; training programs that allow for re-acclimation to the workforce; alumni networks that keep former employees “in the know”; the opportunity to sign up for training workshops on new processes, equipment, and services for those who expect to return some day; job banks that allow alumni to have first priority when they are ready to return; and above all, the corporate expectation that employees will be welcomed back with open arms. While employees who leave may realize there is a career penalty to be paid when they return – that others may have already achieved goals they had once wished for – GenXers may readily accept such penalties in service of a more balanced lifestyle. By creating a corporate culture that allows for and respects all pathways – staying in, opting-out, stop-out, interrupted, boomerangs, returnees, alumni, laid-offs, part-timers – the kaleidoscope model will be realized not as a barrier, but as a natural process of career management.

Assumption #3:

What firms think is sufficient: “But we say we support the advancement of women.”

What firms should do: Make managers accountable for advancement goals.

Women have made great strides in gaining entrance to firms and cracking the glass ceiling. Despite these advances, women still largely remain stuck in middle management. Researchers have found there were significant differences in the criticality, visibility, and breadth of responsibility in management positions held by men and women.

Although some corporations are now making a concerted effort to improve the pipeline of women to executive positions in their firms, women in the largest U.S. firms still hold less than 10 percent of the profit-and-loss line jobs that eventually lead to the top organizational positions.
promote and retain women, firms must provide real advancement opportunities that allow for executive development. Companies can benchmark the practices of other firms to improve their own policies. For example, NAFE’s Top 30 companies focus on not only how many women hold senior profit and loss positions, but also how many women in middle management have experience to be viable pipeline candidates.55 Some activities that can help support the advancement of women include: monitoring the number of women and men rotating into operating roles; formal job rotation policies that identify and train high potential women; developing women’s networks; developing skill-based mentoring programs for women that focus on solving specific operating and management problems; developing a culture that is favorable to the development of informal mentoring relationships; on-the-job assignments designed to prepare women for leadership positions; and offering women leadership forums, conferences, and training programs that sharpen the type of bottom line skills that lead to career advancement.56

Further, managers must be held accountable for the promotion and advancement of women, and rewarded for doing so. Research has found that structured hiring and promotion procedures that hold managers accountable reduce decision-making biases.57 Structured procedures and specific measures should be used to determine whether managers are providing women with key learning and work experiences that will cultivate the skills necessary for advancement. Rewards should be based on the attainment of these goals and managers must be held accountable if these goals are not met.

Assumption #4:

What firms think is sufficient: “We have a traditional reward system, based on seniority, performance, and bonuses.”

What firms should do: Alter performance evaluation and reward systems to pay and promote employees fairly based on project work, the outcomes of their performance, and how they balance work/nonwork demands.

Evaluation and pay for performance systems have not kept pace with the changing workplace. Women who take advantage of flexibility discover their pay is disadvantaged, making it less attractive to remain employed. For example, 90 percent of U.S. legal firms offer part-time career options to employees but only about 4 percent choose this option because 33 percent of legal professionals believe it will hurt their careers and their pay.57 Gender discrimination in pay across the board is also tied to part-time pay and benefit discrimination. Nonetheless, the economic costs of leaving a firm are often overlooked. Ann Crittenden, in her book *The Price of Motherhood*59 detailed the large, and often hidden costs, to women who take time off to rear children. The “mommy tax” or the forgone income of a college-educated woman is usually greater than one million dollars, producing a bigger wage gap between mothers and women without children than the wage gap between young men and women. But not only mothers pay the price. One in four families provided care for an elderly relative, with women usually assuming the caregiver role. Women who provided this unpaid care pay a severe penalty of over $650,000 in lost wages, Social Security, and pension benefits over their lifetimes.

One method of rewarding employees for balancing their work and non-work demands is to expand 360 feedback evaluation systems to include family and friends. For example, Ford Motor Company’s total leadership program includes using evaluations of managers’ roles as parents, spouses, and community members as part of their overall evaluations as leaders.60 Including non-work aspects into evaluation methods and revamping pay systems so that workers are paid based on their project outcomes rather than the number of hours they work fits the kaleidoscope model. Additionally, organizations need to overhaul their benefit systems to recognize families beyond the traditional definition of husband as breadwinner with a wife at home with the children. Firms should extend family benefits to give employees an allowance to be spent on benefits of their choice rather than imposing “one size-fits all” programs that may be of little use to some workers (e.g., value of childcare programs to single employees without children); biases in reward systems that pay married employees, especially men, greater salaries regardless of performance; and permitting domestic partners life-insurance claim rights.

Assumption #5:

What firms think is sufficient: “We don’t need to offer any additional benefits beyond what other firms are offering to be considered family-friendly.”

What firms should do: Recognize flexible schedules and other work/life programs are not perks but necessities.

Many of the women we studied talked about forgoing career opportunities in order to care for...
ailing family members, to be near aging parents, and to care for small children. Likewise, many of
the men regretted not spending more time with family. But while the list of corporations that offer
favorable parental leave or work-life programs is increasing, stellar examples are still rare.\textsuperscript{61}

Corporations must adopt kaleidoscope-oriented job policies, such as time banks of paid parental
leave, reduced-hour careers, job-sharing opportunities, and options for career interruptions to retain
workers caught in a parental work bind. We further suggest that similar programs be developed to
help working women manage eldercare issues (e.g., paid leave, subsidized daycare for the elderly),
including expanding the definition of eldercare to include not only one’s parents but other
elderly relatives. Jobs of paid caregivers, whether of children or the elderly, should be professional-
ized so that caregivers are provided with training and sufficient compensation for their important
services.

Other possible initiatives to validate work outside the office, eliminate stress, and develop a
more holistic approach to work include: reducing the length of the paid workweek; increasing paid
vacation time; classifying childcare and eldercare as allowable business expense for tax purposes;
creating more quality part-time jobs, with prorated benefits and pension plans; providing tax breaks
for individuals re-entering the workforce; and providing paid tuition reimbursement programs for
loyal employees. Executive women and men should argue for policies within their own firms as
well as vote with their checkbooks and political ballots for governmental policies that enhance the
quality of life for working women. Some countries have initiated policies that provide considerable
support for working parents. Three international examples of note include:

- In the Netherlands, maternity benefits include four to six weeks of pre-birth leave and 16 weeks
  of after-birth leave with 100 percent salary. Parental leave laws allow parents, after twelve
  months on the job, to take up to thirteen weeks full-time or six months part-time unpaid leave to
care for children up to four years old. Surprisingly, these laws even cover those working less
  than 20 hours per week.

- In France, mothers receive a year-long paid maternity leave and can place their three-year-olds
  in public nursery school free of charge. In addition to free health care, mothers receive a cash
  allowance for each child to be used as she chooses, including paying a nanny or other
  household help.

- In Sweden, new mothers receive a year’s paid leave, the right to work a six-hour day with full
  benefits until their child enters primary school, and a government stipend to help pay childcare
  expenses. Married couples are taxed independently; women earning less than their husbands
  are taxed at a lower rate, making it economically worthwhile for her to work.\textsuperscript{62}

Until recently, programs to encourage work/life balance have been treated with a passing nod and
little real change. With the advantages of technology, firms can help reshape career paths to recog-
nize the increasing complexities of kaleidoscope careers. By creating more acceptable nontradi-
tional careers paths within the firm; by broadening compensation policies to encompass alternative
forms of work; by abolishing obsolete norms such as face time, long hours, or travel as a surrogate
measure for commitment and promotability; by rewarding managers who provide support to the
development of women; and by creating cultures that truly support work/life balance, corporations
will have an easier time recruiting, retaining, and shaping talent. The time is right for organizations
to create such kaleidoscope workplace options. Opting-out is not a revolution; it is part of the
evolution of careers in the new millennium.

Appendix A: Study Information

\textbf{Study 1:}

This study was an online survey of women members of a na-
tional organization of female professionals that has over 100,000
members. One hundred and nine women answered the 20 ques-
tion survey via email for a limited response rate of almost 10
percent. Participants were asked to describe their careers and
detail the reasons behind their career transitions. Questions
included: “Please rank order what motivates you in your ca-
"Please list the transitions you have made over the course
of your career”; “Please describe what motivated you for each
transition you have made”; and “How have issues regarding
balancing work and nonwork demands influenced your career
decisions?” In return for completing the survey, a donation to
each respondent’s choice of one of three charities was made.
The respondents ranged in age from 20 to 68, with an average
age of 41.5. Eighty percent were white, 71 percent had a spouse
or significant other, and 42 percent had children living at home.
Forty percent of the women had a college degree and 36 percent
had an advanced degree (e.g., Masters, MBA, Ph.D.). The respon-
dents worked in a variety of industries including banking, bio-
medical research, manufacturing, education, health care, and
law. Sixty-seven percent had children living at home. Partici-
pants’ work experience averaged 14.5 years.

\textbf{Study 2:}

This study, an online survey of 837 men and 810 women, was
conducted in partnership with an internet market research firm,
(GOI). GOI periodically surveys subjects of all ages, races, backgrounds, corporate industries, and titles on various subjects for market research. GOI holds lists of thousands of respondents who have agreed to participate for a fee. Respondents are guaranteed confidentiality and are required to participate in two surveys per month to maintain their status with the firm. They are not required to purchase products for market research purposes, but they are told their logins will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win a $100.00 cash prize. Survey results were checked, coded, and compiled by GOI from the period of March 15, 2002 through May 30, 2002. Respondents reflected the overall population of the GOI website: by race, 87 percent Caucasian (men 87 percent, women 88.8 percent), 3.6 percent African American (3.7 percent men, 3.6 percent women); 3 percent Asian (3.1 percent men, 3 percent women), 1.9 percent Latin American or Hispanic (1.7 percent men, 2.1 percent women), 4 percent Other or prefer not to say. Seventy-six percent worked full time (84.9 percent men, 66.7 percent women); 13.9 percent worked part-time (6.3 percent men, 21.7 percent women), and 10.1 percent were self-employed (8.7 percent men, 11.6 percent women). A wide variety of industries were represented, ranging from education (12.2 percent), healthcare (9.5 percent), government (10.1 percent), manufacturing (7.6 percent), retail (8.9 percent), telecommunications (2.5 percent), internet/computer/hardware (5.6 percent), financial services/banking (4.4 percent), media/publishing (1.3 percent), market research (0.3 percent), public relations (0.2 percent), real estate (2.1 percent) and other occupations (40.1 percent). Only 6.7 percent of the sample ranged in age from 18–24; 23.1 percent were 25–34, 30.4 percent were 35–44, 28.6 percent were 45–54, and 0.9 percent were age 65 or older. Income categories: Under $20,000, 5.8 percent; $20,000–29.999: 27.3 percent, (men 24.3 percent, women 30.3 percent); $30,000–49,999: 27.3 percent, (men 24.3 percent, women 30.3 percent); $50,000–74,999: 29.9 percent, (men 32.8 percent, women 16.8 percent); $75,000–99,999: 13.2 percent, (men 13.6 percent, women 12.7 percent); $100,000–199,999: 10.9 percent (men 12.5 percent, women 9.3 percent), and $200,000 or more: 1.3 percent, (men 1.4 percent, women 1.7 percent). Income levels were tested for bias and found a p < .05 significant difference in income; means - 67.7 for men, 60.1 for women. Education: Less than 4-year college degree for the total sample: 58.3 percent (men 57 percent, women 60.1 percent); 4-year college or more for the total sample: 41.5 percent (men 42.9 percent, 40 percent women). Forty-six percent of the sample had children (men: 41 percent, women: 51 percent). Forty questions were asked of respondents, of which ten were demographic profile questions, including questions on race, income, education level, industry affiliation, and age. Responses to the primary items used in the study (see Table 1, and Figure 1) were prompted by the question, “Select the statement that best describes your career now.” Response categories were 1 (does not describe my career), 3 (partially describes my career) to 5 (directly describes my career). Respondents were also asked to respond on a 1 - 5 scale (1, do not agree to 5, agree strongly) to the following prompt: “Using a scale, please tell us which of these transitions and changes have happened in your career.” Participants were told this survey was for research purposes only, not for market research purposes. Participants made the choice to answer the questions in the survey; if they preferred not to answer, they could click on an alternate GOI survey to fulfill their monthly obligation for market research. GOI does not track how many individuals click to an alternate survey, therefore the exact response rate for any of their surveys cannot be determined. However, because GOI’s response rates normally range from 20 – 30 percent, the response rate for our survey was considered “Good,” since over 33 percent of individuals available chose this survey for participation.

Study 3:

This study describes a series of online conversations conducted with 5 women and 22 men enrolled in an Executive MBA program. Participants ranged in age from 25 - 55, had achieved income levels from $60,000 - $200,000 approximately, and worked in various locations all across the country. This study was undertaken to learn more about men, as considerable data had been collected regarding women in Study 1, and to attempt an online interactive format for discussion purposes on the topic. Participation was voluntary and respondents were assured of confidentiality. Six percent of the individuals were under the age of 30, 44 percent were ages 30 – 45, and 40 percent were 45 or older. Questions asked included: “Tell me about your career to date”; “What changes and transitions have you experienced in your career?”; “How have you handled issues of corporate politics at your firm?”; “Can you describe some of your experiences in early career?”; “Are you satisfied with the way in which your career has progressed?”; “How do you handle issues of life, career and family balance?”; “Have gender issues affected your career in any way?”; “Tell me about your future plans.” Online conversations occurred in response to question prompts offered each week and in response to comments made by others. Responses were in a conversational tone; they were checked for variable status and coded by an independent coder for responses concerning “authenticity, balance, and challenge” and as well as descriptions of career histories and paths for purposes of illustration in this article.

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Endnotes

4 Belkin, L. 2003, op. cit.
5 Tischler, L. 2004, op. cit.
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[23] See Appendix A for complete survey information on Study

1 (N = 109 women), Study 2 (N = 837 men, 810 women), and Study

3 (N = 27 men and women).

[24] Based on Study 2 results.


[26] The term, “kaleidoscope model,” has evolved through research analysis and has been presented in paper/symposium format numerous times. First cited by one of the authors in 1996: Kaleidoscope careers: A new direction in career theory. Southern Management Association Proceedings, New Orleans, 177–179, it was used as the focus of annual symposium presenta-

tions by both authors jointly at the National Academy of Management and regional meetings during 2000 (Toronto, Na-

tional Academy of Management), 2001 (New York City, Eastern Academy of Management), 2002 (Denver, National Academy of Management), and 2003 (Clearwater, FL, Southern Management Association) as the theory was being developed. The authors have written a book, Kaleidoscope Careers, to be published by Davies-Black Publishing (forthcoming), that details the full program of research.


[28] In Study 2, regression analysis was completed on these data specifically examining reasons for career transitions for women and men. For the model for transition 1, pursued career goals at different firms, men were more likely than women to change jobs due to family demands, r-square for the full model = .10; for transition 4, took break to care for family, women were more likely than men to change jobs due to family demands, r-square for the full model = .24. Factor analysis on these data showed distinct clusters for early and mid career: an organizational/challenge factor (.66), a self/creative/authenticity factor (.57), and a single-loading family factor, which dropped out in late career.

[29] The percentages for the following two items, “I have pursed my career goals at several firms all within the same industry” and “I took a break from work/career to care for family, children, or elders” are based on a 1 - 5 point scale whereby answers of (4) and (5) were combined.


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41 We found it helpful to consult Ruderman, M. and Ohlott, P. 2002. *Standing at the crossroads: Next steps for high achieving women*. Center for Creative Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, in determining a definition for “authenticity” as: values driven, truth-seeking, and defining priorities. Items were coded with this definition.


44 Bureau of Labor statistics, 2003, op.cit. For example, in 2012, the Bureau projects a labor force of 162.3 million with an economy requiring that 165.3 million jobs be filled. Firms must choose how to manage this difference, possibly using methods including increased productivity and working hours per U.S. worker or increased immigration and offshore outsourcing. Horrigan, M.W. 2004. Employment projections to 2012: Concepts and context. *Monthly Labor Review*, 3–22.


50 Catalyst, op. cit.

51 *Working Mother*, op. cit.

52 Cited in *NAFE Magazine*, 2004, op. cit.


54 Ragins, Townsen, & Mattis, op. cit.


56 These examples and others are found in Cleaver, J., & Spence, B. 2004.

57 Powell, G., op. cit.

58 Bailyn, L., & Fletcher, J. K, op. cit


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