Executive Women:

Creating a Good Life in a World of Social Saturation

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EXECUTIVE WOMEN:

CREATING A GOOD LIFE

IN A WORLD OF SOCIAL SATURATION

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In pursuing their good life, American executive women today enjoy more choices than at any other time in history, yet they encounter continuing challenges living and working in a world of social saturation. This relational overload makes it difficult to manage their multiple roles, and for many, the experience of social saturation creates impossible expectations as a surround sound of unhelpful, mixed messages vie to shape their lives: Be a Man—Have It All, Superwoman—Don't Be a Man—Be Consistent—Never Mind, Opt-Out. Executive women are in need of a viable script for successfully navigating a relationally demanding world.

In my research, I attempt to address this need by asking: How can executive women create a good life in a world of social saturation? Using autoethnography, I conducted a reflexive examination of five performances in my life—as business leader, daughter, mother, wife, and creative being. In so doing, I surfaced a new, generative story about one's self as relational performances thriving in a world of social saturation, where the good life is embodied in action, or something we "do" in an ongoing way with others. I also identified eight relational practices that hold potential to create a good life: *1.) Emphasize Relational Resonance, 2.) Generate Prosocial Surroundings, 3.) Bring Family Out of the Shadows, 4.) Negotiate Velvet Ropes, 5.) Speak Truth to Power, 6.) Use Tools for Co-Planning, 7.) Co-Create Relational Rituals,* and *8.) Tap into Your Inner Network.*

The research findings may be useful for executive women looking to create their own good life, and for employers and work/family policy makers seeking improvements for members in their institutions. I offer that this dissertation impacts both prevailing theory and practice. It adds a fresh perspective to the limited body of research on executive women and the contemporary context of social saturation, offering scholars in leadership, organizational behavior, sociology, and women's studies potential new directions for study. It also challenges conventions in company policies and practice, including leadership development and flexible work programs, as well as in executive women's own approach to growth and betterment.

SUMMARY IN DUTCH

In het nastreven van een goed leven, hebben Amerikaanse leidinggevende vrouwen vandaag de dag meer keuzes dan ooit, maar toch lopen ze voortdurend tegen uitdagingen aan in het leven en werken in een wereld vol sociale verzadiging. Deze relationele overbelasting maakt het moeilijk om hun meervoudige rollen effectief in te vullen. Voor zoveel van hen creëert sociale verzadiging onmogelijke verwachtingen, als een doorlopende klank van hopeloos complexe berichten en/of beelden om hun leven vorm te geven: Wees een man—Neem het allemaal; Supervrouw-Wees geen man; Wees Consistent-Maak je niet druk; Stap er uit. Leidinggevende vrouwen hebben behoefte aan een werkbaar script om in een relationeel veeleisende wereld succesvol te navigeren. In mijn onderzoek, probeer ik deze behoefte aandacht te geven door de volgende vraag te stellen: Hoe kunnen leidinggevende vrouwen een goed leven creëren in een wereld van sociale verzadiging?

Door gebruik te maken van autoethnography, deed ik op reflexieve manieren onderzoek naar vijf gebieden in mijn eigen leven – zakenvrouw, dochter, moeder, echtgenote en creatief wezen. Daarover heb ik een betoog geschreven: over het zelf als maker van relationele prestaties in de huidige wereld van sociale verzadiging. Het goede leven ligt volgens mij besloten in acties die we uitvoeren met anderen. Daarbij identificeerde ik acht relationele praktijken die de potentie hebben om een goed leven te creëren: *1.) Het Benadrukken van Relationele Resonantie, 2.) Creatie van Prosociale Omgevingen, 3.) Het Gezin uit de Schaduw halen, 4.) Onderhandelen over Fluwelen Touwen, 5.) Laat Macht geen Belangrijke Waarden Onderdrukken, 6.) Gebruik Technieken voor Collectieve Planning, 7.) Co-Creëer Relationele Rituelen,* en *8.) Boor je Innerlijke Netwerk aan.*

De onderzoeksbevindingen zouden nuttig kunnen zijn voor leidinggevende vrouwen die proberen hun eigen goede leven te creëren, en voor werkgevers en beleidsmakers die op zoek zijn naar het verbeteren van condities voor de leden van hun instellingen. Dit proefschrift zal ook een effect kunnen hebben op vigerende theorieën en praktijken. Het voegt een eigen perspectief toe aan de beperkte hoeveelheid onderzoek naar het dagelijks leven van leidinggevende vrouwen in de hedendaagse context van sociale verzadiging, en hoopt nieuwe richtingen aan te dragen voor nieuwe wetenschappelijke studies naar het potentieel en gedrag van vrouwen in organisaties, de sociologie, en interdisciplinair onderzoek ernaar. De resultaten dagen conventionele praktijken uit op het gebied van leiderschapsontwikkeling en flexibel werken en benadrukt daarbij het faciliteren van eigen benaderingswijzen van groei en succes van leidinggevende vrouwen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Back around 2009, I was sitting in Carolina Bakery with my executive coach, Anita Bess, for a catch-up session. Anita and I had been working together on and off for a few years where she helped me navigate various challenging work and leadership situations and in the process, also helped me find ways to feel great about my socially saturated life. During our discussion on a crisp, grey morning, in a highly unusual fashion, Anita went "directive", asking me point blank when I was planning on going back to school for my Ph.D. I remember being stunned by her question. I had previously shared with her my teenage intent in getting my Ph.D., but after delays from paying for undergraduate student loans, then living abroad, and then starting a family, now—as a thirty-something adult working sixty plus hours a week in a corporate job—I had resigned myself to the fact that a doctorate was not going to happen. Anita's question awakened me, and sparked a slow but sure progression of small steps that led first to a Master's Degree, and then ultimately to here as a Ph.D. candidate. I am grateful for her ongoing wisdom and encouragement, and most of all, for this one conversation that changed the momentum on my life's path.

Anita also sparked my introduction to social construction. To support one of my critical leadership projects, Anita suggested that I take a course called "Appreciative Inquiry" and meet Dr. Diana Whitney. This encounter with Diana inspired me to take new approaches in my executive leadership interactions. When I started on my Ph.D. a number of years later, I was thrilled to learn that Diana was going to be my daily advisor. Working with her has elevated my thinking, research, and writing abilities in exciting ways I hadn't thought possible. What I really value is how our collaboration shifted my stance from individualistic to relational. I have found that experiencing the world as a relational being has opened up new potential for my good life. I am grateful you are a part of my circle, Diana.

A highlight of my Ph.D. experience came when I learned Prof. dr. Celeste Wilderom would be my Ph.D. supervisor. Connecting with Celeste's expertise in executives and organizations strengthened the value and usefulness of my research. Her guidance not only raised the

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Creating a good life has been a human pursuit since the beginning of recorded history. What a good life means, though, varies across time and topography. The recent discovery of a well-preserved, Bronze Age village in England suggests the value of the aesthetic, as it reveals a vibrant, thriving community with "jewelry,…giant food storage jars and delicate drinking cups, glass beads, textiles and a copper spindle with thread still wound around it" (Kennedy, 2016, online). In Chinese culture around 500 BCE, Confucius called for performing five virtues—benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity—to lead a happy and harmonious life (Wong, 2007). In his work, *Nichomachaen Ethics*, Greek philosopher Aristotle (340 BCE) contemplated the idea of a flourishing life, one of *eudaimonia*, or happiness, achieved through orderly social structure and political participation. More recently, some positive psychology scholars redefined Aristotle's flourishing life as "[life] within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience" (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, p. 678). The Japanese see the concept of *ikigi,* a value on hard work and social interactions, as a means to find purpose in life, whereas the Danish *hygge* and Swedish *lagom* reflect the ideal of contentment with a cozier, slower paced lifestyle (Gander, 2017, online). For one indigenous tribe in North America, the good life is synonymous with continuous rebirth, using a word called *Minobimaatisiiwin*, which implies a deep relationship between humans and their environment (Grim, 2001, online). Based on his experience in the Holocaust, Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1959/2006) concluded it is the search for meaning in one's life—not happiness—that is most significant. And, across the last two millennia, major world religions have encouraged followers to live their lives in relationship to a higher being, or for others, to end human suffering and achieve enlightenment. Beauty and pleasure, harmony,

societal participation, nature, well-being, meaning and purpose, spirituality—these are just but a few concepts for the good life. While across cultures, good life guidance may differ; nonetheless, humans share in its pursuit.

As an American woman living relationally as a wife, mother, business executive, and Ph.D. student, I, too, am in pursuit of a good life. What excites me are the multidimensional choices I have in this pursuit: I can decide which profession and function are best suited for my tastes, and I can aim for top levels in organizations; I can decide whether or not I want children, and if I want to get married in the first place; I can choose from an array of live and virtual communities around the globe or keep my involvement closer to home. For sure, I am not bound to one, prescribed path. I can write my own ticket.

In weighing these many options, however, I have come to realize that choosing involves more than me. My family, my co-workers, my friends, and my community at large are in dialogue with me as decisions are made. We wrestle with issues such as: *How will family get prioritized as I move up the career ladder? Am I able to 'have it all'? What can be invited into my life and what needs to drop off?* In turning to fellow executives for learning and inspiration, countless conversations across twenty years of work confirm that I am not alone in asking: **How do executive women create a good life?** My dissertation responds to this question through reflexive examination of my own relational life. It aims to uncover useful practices with the intent that the findings will be of help to others.

As with previous generations, culture continues to be an arbiter in creating a good life. Despite having multidimensional choices, executive women, like me, must navigate their lives within the context of social saturation, a relational overload accompanying contemporary times. The impact of social saturation is poignant for anyone living in society today, but even more so for those who hold multiple, leading roles in their lives. Executive women—that is, being female who works for pay in an administrative and/or leadership role within an organization—are a relatively recent phenomenon in American society. Their societal script for managing concurrent roles as worker, spouse, mother, sister, friend,

and community member is still under development, and unfortunately, subject to lingering misogynist pressures and inadequate support systems. Social saturation introduces perplexing issues in executive women's search for a good life. In this chapter, I introduce the concept of social saturation and share its unique intersection with executive women. From there, I establish the dissertation purpose and provide an overview of the paper.

A World of Social Saturation

In the 1991 book, *The Saturated Self*, social psychologist and philosopher Ken Gergen puts forth the idea of *social saturation*. Social saturation can be summarized as *the relational overload one experiences navigating in the world of today*. This relational overload can come in many forms: 1.) The expanding *range* of relationships, including the different types of relationships one has, and new communities one is exposed to and may become a part of, 2.) The sheer *number* of relationships that one is exposed to and may choose to participate in, 3.) The need to *learn the rules and expectations* of these new or changing communities and relationships, which because of the newness, are often times unclear and unfolding in the moment, and 4.) The actual *activity* associated with building, maintaining, and thriving in these communities and relationships.

Gergen (1991/2000) describes how contemporary life contains "a barrage of social stimulation" (p. ix) that "bombard[s us] with ever increasing intensity by the images and actions of others…[expanding] our range of social participation…exponentially" (p. 15). He explains that "Community solidarity [can no longer] be depended on...[as] the technologies of social saturation [create]…an array of fragile, symbolic communities, tied together primarily by electronic impulse" (Gergen, 1991/2000, p. 225). He gives two examples of this shift from fixed communities to more fluid ones: "*collage communities*…a community in which homogeneity in life patterns gives way to a multiplicity of disjunctive modes of living" (Gergen, 1991/2000, p. 212) and "*cardboard communities*…[where] all the trappings of face-to-face

interdependence is maintained but the participating bodies are absent" (Gergen, 1991/2000, p. 214). New and multiple identities are possible, as social saturation changes the nature of one's interactions with others in quantity, scope, and composition.

The consequences of social saturation are immense. Gergen (1991/2000) explains, "this massive movement in social stimulation—moving toward a state of saturation—sets the stage…for radical changes in our daily experiences of self and others" (p. ix). One of the main concerns is how these intense social interactions lead to exposure to a vast array of ideas that in turn, calls into doubt what one knows, believes, and does. Writes Gergen (1991/2000), "As we absorb the views, values, and vision of others, and live out the multiple plots in which we are enmeshed, we enter a postmodern consciousness. It is a world in which we no longer experience a secure sense of self…[and doubt] the very assumptions of a bounded identity" (p. 15). Rather than strengthening or anchoring to one's self, social saturation disrupts one's sense of self and direction in life. Asserts Gergen (1991/2000), "the fully saturated self becomes no self at all…[as social saturation] does not bring with it a new vocabulary for understanding ourselves…the very concept of personal essence is thrown into doubt" (p. 7). For Gergen (1991/2000), social saturation is the "continuous…ripp[ing[from the security of an essential or unified self" (p.148); there is "a sense of superficiality of one's actions…[and all that remains is] the strategic marketing of personality" (p. 148-149). Gergen (1991/2000) concludes, this loss for many people is "essentially…the collapse of anything meaningful in life" (Gergen, 1991/2000, p. 27). For anyone living in society, executive women included, social saturation stirs existential questions: I can't keep up—how do I make sense of this all? What do I really know for sure? Who am I? What is important? How do I create a good life for myself?

Debut: Day in the Life of an Executive Woman Living in a World of Social Saturation

As it will become apparent in this dissertation, I often use the metaphor of a "performance" as a useful way to illustrate and connect

key points. Here, to bring to life the impact of social saturation on executive women, this personal account is my first appearance, or debut, in the reflexive examination of my own life. In considering Gergen's description of social saturation, imagine a day in my life as an executive woman:

> *I wake up at 4am. Morning is my only opportunity for quality alone time, so though I'm exhausted, I get up early to collect my thoughts, and have quiet and stillness. I read the news on my iPhone, and it's also the time I do most of my schoolwork. But today, for the third day in a row, I find myself opening my computer before my first sip of coffee. I have a big strategic plan presentation to the senior leaders day after tomorrow, and with an all-day staff meeting on the books, I know there will be no time to tackle it today at the office.*

> *I struggle with getting the business issue framed up in the planning template. I can fill in the required boxes, but it doesn't seem to tell the real story. I'm concerned that if the senior leaders don't get the issue, there is no way they are going to agree with my recommendation or release the funds we need to turn the business around. I pride myself at being great at strategy, but here, I can't even think straight. I am getting further behind on my Ph.D. reading, and I haven't even started in on the writing deadline that my advisor and I agreed to weeks ago. I send her a quick "update email" with a revised date, and go back to my presentation.*

> *By now, it's 5:30 and I hear my daughter coming into my room. She likes to get up early. She grabs her coloring box and sits next to me at on the bench at my desk, pushing my computer over to make some room for her paper. We exchange a big hug, and she proceeds to tell me how excited she is about something coming up at school today. I can feel the muscles tense in my stomach, torn between wanting to engage in a long conversation*

with her, but knowing this is the last hour I have to work on this presentation. I nod to her, and continue to type on my computer, hoping my lack of response will get her to start coloring. From time to time, I look over and compliment her drawing in an attempt to alleviate my guilt in ignoring her. The second alarm on my phone goes off, a signal it's time to get in the shower. I make a detour to the laundry room to put the wet clothes in the dryer. I have to do this now before I forget—last night, I had to rerun the load as there was a moldy smell scolding me that I had waited too long to take them out. The sweats my son needs for soccer are in there, so hopefully they will dry quickly. I get out of the shower, put on my make-up, do my hair, and find a comfortable but powerful outfit for what will be a contentious meeting today at work. It's 6:30, and everyone is up, getting dressed. My husband gets breakfast for the kids while I make their lunches. My son is looking at his spelling list and I remind him to eat. My husband is putting my daughter's hair in a pony while I'm fishing boogers out of my son's nose. As we all head to the door, kissing each other goodbye, I say to my husband, "Oh, by the way, good morning!" asking him to be safe and to have a great day. He pulls out of the driveway to take them to school, and while in my car, I head in the opposite direction to the office.

Entering the building, I see a close colleague who stressing about the upcoming presentations. She says, "I know you have that 8:30 all day thing. Can I just walk and talk with you on the way to your desk?" She tells me how her business is in dire straights and she wants to do something different, but her boss is in denial about the situation and prefers a more conventional plan. The agency has his ear and he's not interested in sticking his neck out. I suggest that she keep the slides as he wants it, but once she's in front of the VPs, shift the conversation

by throwing out a few provocative questions. We give each other a parting, supportive hug, and I go to the stack of file drawers, grabbing my caddy of office supplies. My department switched from closed-door offices to an open seating plan last year, and I still can't adjust. All of my work life is encapsulated into one file drawer. Worse, at the end of the day, I'm not allowed to keep things out on the workspace, laid out and ready for the next morning. It's a constant packing-unpacking. I gather up the folders and juggle my coffee, my briefcase, my lunch bag, and the caddy as I scan for where I want to sit for the day. I notice the blabbermouth trio in one corner, so I beeline for the opposite one. I set down all my things, and start assembling my workspace, connecting up the wires on my computer. My meeting starts in thirty minutes and I want to organize a few things to help out my team while I'm booked for the day.

As I start to log on, my assistant comes by with some questions about upcoming travel. She is being asked to look at some cost savings, and wants to see what I think about the impact to my travel arrangements. She tells me how she is annoyed about the new procedures with the offshore group, and because of the extra work, they actually don't save money. Her daughter is coming to visit this weekend and she's really excited about the wedding planning. As she is talking with me, a junior team member comes over to us, asking if he can bother me for a minute. My assistant says she'll catch me later. This team member is not done yet with his slides that I need from him. He explained that he stayed late to finish them, but he still isn't done. We repeat the same conversation we had last week, in how he just doesn't get why we have to do it this way and how busy he is. He hasn't acted on the advice I gave him, and I wonder if he really wants to solve it or if he just wants to complain. I tell myself I need to be patient

and show that I am an approachable leader. My boss gave me feedback last week that I need to more sympathetic and flexible, as everyone is struggling with the layoff situation—not that he showed any sympathy to <u>my</u> challenges, I might add. After this team member walks away, I put my headphones on, signaling to others that I am on a conference call and can't be disturbed—it's how I close my office door these days. I work away uninterrupted in silence for twenty minutes, visually tuning out the morning bustle around me. I follow-up with a LinkedIn contact with some business information. I email my mom and wish her luck with her MRI. She responds immediately and we do a few back and forths before I head to my all day meeting.

About two hours in to the meeting, my husband texts me, "Going grocery. Need anything?" I discretely text back, "just usual." I add a few smiley-heart emojis in hopes that he still isn't pissed at me about the company leadership meeting I have to go to next week. Five days/four nights away with 900 other of my fellow leaders to hear Pollyanna rationalization on how good change is for the organization. My husband keeps texting me, but my boss has a "no multi-tasking" policy, so I reply "in mtg cant text". I plan to reconnect with him during a break, but the complexity of the meeting topic means we aren't moving forward on our agenda. We are video-conferencing with our sister HQ office in another city—half the staff sits there—and managing emotions over even a slight time delay is making a hard discussion even harder. From time to time, I jot ideas for my presentation tomorrow. We are so far behind, my boss decides we are doing a working lunch. By 4pm, I realize I haven't gone pee all day. Sitting in the bathroom stall, I sneak a look at my email on my phone, and respond to a few urgent things. The meeting runs over to 5:30. I head back to my

desk, wrap up a few things, and put my work paraphernalia in its drawer. I text my husband, "lets order pizza tonight?" At 6:05, I start my car, and as I pull out of the parking garage, I keep my fingers crossed that there are no surprise homework projects awaiting me when I arrive home.

This debut spotlights some of the challenges my colleagues and I face living in a world of social saturation. Indeed, the issues Gergen raises intersect specifically with executive women across work, home, and personal domains. Good life questions weigh heavily in daily consideration: Will my business be okay? Will my kids be okay? Will my parents be okay? Will my marriage be okay? Will I be okay? For executive women, the pursuit of a good life seems to involve a self embattled in social saturation.

From a Cult of Domesticity to Embattled in Social Saturation

Getting to the current state of things for executive women can be described as a "gradually, then suddenly" phenomenon. The advent of women in executive roles is relatively recent in the US, running counter to an entrenched tradition of misogyny and leaving the script for living good life in flux. For most of America's history, females were bound to more singular, home-based roles where the good life was limited to being a dutiful wife and a nurturing mother, what history professor Regina Blaszczyk (2002) calls a *cult of domesticity*. Women studies professors Rosalyn Barnett and Janet Hyde (2001) explain, the fact that men cannot perform child bearing created the case that men should "specialize in the instrumental realm of work" (p. 782), thus "Functional symmetry in marital roles was inevitable and attributable to [biology]" (p. 782). By the early 19th century, describes prominent labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris (2007), "motherhood rose to new heights, and children became the focus of womanly activity. Mothers were asked to give up wealth, frivolity, and fashion to prepare themselves for a great calling…Piety, purity, and submissiveness became the ideals" (p. 102). Blaszczyk (2002)

continues, "Good homes managed by loving mothers would function as havens from a hard world for sons and husbands and as training grounds for daughters who would perpetuate the tradition of responsible motherhood" (online). This cult of domesticity underpins a great deal of American culture. As most of my colleagues and I heard growing up, as do many American girls still hear today, "a woman's place is in the home".

Women's Work: Gender Bifurcation in American Society

Despite a cult of domesticity, economic necessity meant that oftentimes, women participated in paid work in conjunction with their roles as homemakers. Not only did households require additional sources of income, but population shortages and demands in expanding the American frontier led to an increasing need for services (Anderson, 1988, p. 25). Women, however, did not get a free pass to choose the work they engaged in. American society segregated work based on gender, and for the most part, women were limited to jobs that aligned with domestic and caregiving stereotypes, such as food service, seam stressing, and nursing (Blaszczyk, 2002). These jobs also tended to be located near or at home with flexible hours, allowing women to continue their homemaking duties (Anderson, 1988, p. 26). Later, with the new labor demands of the industrial revolution, women increasingly worked outside the home, primarily in textile mills and garment factories (Anderson, 1988, p. 32-33), and in "helping" roles, such as clerks, sales girls, and retail store supervisors; there were also a high number of women entrepreneurs in female-related arenas, most notably Estee Lauder (Blaszczyk, 2002, online).

Unfortunately, society had yet to embrace women as an ideal in the workforce. Sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1899/2013) shares the prevailing attitude at the turn of the century, writing that, "[the inferior class] includes slaves and…also all the women…The women of high rank are commonly exempt from industrial employment, or at least from the more vulgar kinds of manual labor" (p. 3). Exceptions to gendered work would be made in times of dire need, such as during World War II, when female workers became a stopgap for temporary male labor

shortages. Unfortunately, these exceptions did not result in sustainable change to work segregation; by the war's end, most women were swept swiftly back to the home (Anderson, 1988, p. 38). If women were to work, American society ensured that women's work and men's work were clearly demarcated.

Not only was women's paid work different, society held it in a secondary position, privileging the male worker. Women's work paid poorly relative to men's, and prominent, executive women were a rarity, limited to a handful of names including Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor, and Brownie Wise of Tupperware (Blaszczyk, 2002, online). Under the guise of morality, concerted efforts throughout the 1800s and 1900s among labor unions, company management, legislatures, and the courts sought to keep women—especially married women—from taking jobs meant for men (Anderson, 1988, p. 36-37; Reskin & Phipps, 1988, p. 192). As an example, in 1908, the Supreme Court upheld state restrictions on the number of hours and time of day women were allowed to work, declaring that it was in "the state's interest in women as future mothers to outweigh women's own right to freedom of contract" (Kessler-Harris, 2007, p. 79). Kessler-Harris (2007) describes how this "moral imperative that confined women to their homes served many purposes. It maintained social order by providing stable families. It kept married women out of the labor force…[and ensured] those women who did work would stay only briefly…satisfied with low-paid jobs" (p. 106).

Although post-World War II economic expansion called for more professional and service-based work—work in many areas traditionally deemed "appropriate" for women—career opportunity for women remained limited. Describes Kessler-Harris (2007), "While the spread of mass education and the demand for office workers…led women to enter the workforce, the concomitant need that these workers not seek advancement or high compensation has encouraged the belief that their work experience is and ought to be secondary to their home roles" (p.114). Kessler-Harris (2007) continues, "[this] ideology…explain[s] women's persistently disadvantaged position in the labor market…as explanations [continue] to come back to a deeply rooted set of expectations about how men and women should behave and what roles

they ought to perform" (p. 95). Historian Frank Stricker (1976) goes further, concluding, "American capitalism profited from sexual discrimination in the workplace and women's unpaid labor at home" (p. 13). Unfortunately, the impact has been substantial on American women, as Labor scholar Karen Anderson (1988) describes, "prejudice against professional and married women workers left a long-term legacy. Future generations of women were deprived of models of achievement in the male-dominated professions, while public hostility to nondomestic roles for women impeded the development of public polices…responsive to women's increasing labor force rates" (p. 37-38). Executive womanhood, let alone equal labor status for women, was not a feature in most of America's history.

The Rise of Career Women

Women throughout America's history did not readily accept their secondary status, and societal norms masked what was actually a high degree of careerism held by American women (Stricker, 1976, p. 4). The tension between the cult of domesticity and goals for gender equality has not been just a recent phenomenon, but it ran throughout most of America's history. Since the founding of America, local activists and efforts by notable women like First Lady Abigail Adams attempted to secure more status, rights, and respect for women, and by the mid-19th century, these efforts culminated into a formal movement called Women's Suffrage, lasting until women earned the right to vote in 1920 (MacLean, 2013, online). Stricker (1976) explains that for suffragists, more was at stake than the right to vote, "the demand for political equality [was accompanied by] the desire for a career" (p. 1).

Post suffrage, attitudes among younger women suggested continued disharmony with societal norms regarding home and career. For instance, a 1924 survey among 15-17 year old girls showed that "more than a third (35%) said they would choose a career even if it meant giving up the possibility of marrying and having a family" (Stricker, 1976, p. 3); Among Vassar College graduates in 1937, half of them "would combine career and family if they could earn enough to pay for child-care and have some time for their children" (Stricker, 1976, p. 4).

Describes Kessler-Harris (2007), for many women, "in its full flower in the 1920s, socially ordained roles at home gave way…to an unapologetic notion of work for individual satisfaction" (p. 119). Stricker (1976) acknowledges, "Women did receive strong pressures to marry, have a family, and follow a socially defined model of feminine beauty and submissiveness" (p. 3) but he argues, "many of them also felt pressures to achieve, prepare for a career, and be intellectually alive (if only for their husband's sake)" (p. 3).

Women's career aspirations finally broke through societal norms across the decades of the 20th century. Describes Stricker (1976), there was a "gradual progression in the spread of career impulses, proceeding despite many obstacles and finally erupting in one segment of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s" (p. 13). This eruption led to legislative reform, including new laws supporting equal treatment of women in the workplace, including the Equal Pay Act and the Civil Rights Act. These legal shifts encouraged women to prepare for and pursue executive roles. Explains sociologists Barbara Reskin and Polly Phipps (1988), "Because women who experienced discrimination now had recourse in the law, women were reassured that their professional education would not be wasted, and they flocked to professional schools" (p. 193). By 1990, one-third of MBAs were being earned by women and 50% of businesses were owned by women (Blaszczyk, 2002). Moreover, women enjoyed legally protected access to professional and managerial jobs dominated by men (Reskin & Phipps, 1988, p. 203). Role model, celebrity female executives such as Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart, Carly Fiorina, Carole Black, and Meg Whitman emerged in public life. To the everyday American, it seemed that equality in the executive suite was near, marked by a 1998 *Time Magazine* cover asking "Is Feminism Dead?"

Executive Women Today

This narrative of progress, however, disregards the current challenges of executive women in finding success and a good life. The glass ceiling has barely been cracked. Executive women have yet to realize full equality, and the script for the good life remains under

development. The Lean In organization's comprehensive study of women in workplace concludes that, with job progression, "In corporate America, women fall behind early and continue to lose ground with every step" (2016, online). Moreover, while at entry levels, female representation equals that of men, their proportion diminishes at every level after that: only 30% of Senior Directors and VPs are women, and less than 20% are in the C-suite (Lean In, 2016, online). At the very top, it is more dismal. In 2016, only 4.2% of CEOs in the Fortune 500 companies were women, representing a 0.5 point *drop* over the previous year (Zayra, 2016, online). These deficits are present even in more historically female professions. McKinsey and Company research (2015) found that women in leadership roles generally fall into three archetypes depending on their industry: Unable to Enter, Stuck at the Middle, and Locked Out at the Top. As these titles suggest, though, no archetype—no industry—gets anywhere close to parity. At the current rate of change, estimates suggest that to achieve gender parity, it will take 25 years for the Senior VP level, and over 100 years for the C-suite level (LeanIn, 2015, p. 3).

Unlike executive men, executive women must deal with disparity as they navigate choices to create their good life. As Kessler-Harris (2007) shares, "ideology about male and female roles orders the behaviors and expectations of work and family, influences the policies adopted by government and industry, and shapes perceptions of equity and justice" (p. 138). For example, American discourse does not inquire as to how the executive man manages his husband and father roles in conjunction with work. He is seen as the default primary breadwinner, absolved from primary obligations in running the home. This discourse, however, is front and center for executive women.

Women also need to fight for their career in response to the "Mommy Track"—the institutional myth that women deprioritize career over family life, justifying their placement in lackluster job roles and assignments that limit upward mobility (Feminist Majority Foundation website). As a result, the data show that executive women are participating less in marriage and parenting roles for the sake of their careers. A recent Harvard Business School study shows that 88% of

executive men are married, versus 70% of executive women (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014 online). Another large study shows that seventy-five percent of executive men have children, where only 51% of executive women do—twice the childless rate as men (Hewlett, 2002, online). For those women who choose to have a family, they are subjected to financial penalty. A National Bureau of Economic Research study by Wilde, Batchelder, and Ellwood (2010) concludes that highly skilled women "experience a net 8 percent reduction in pay during the first five years after giving birth, a penalty that reaches 24 percent a decade after birth" (online). Important to note, men do not experience this penalty and instead, according to Barbara Gault at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, men experience the reverse, with an *increase* for each additional child (Sherman, 2015, online).

Executive women's supporting arrangements at home also differ. Among married executive men, 60% have spouses who don't work outside the home, whereas only 10% of married executive women have the same benefit (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014, online). For dual-career couples—90% of married executive women—research from economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2002) found that "husbands have not picked up a significant share of women's traditional responsibilities on the home front. Even high-achieving women continue to carry the lion's share of domestic responsibility" (online). Research about effectiveness of executive's home support structures done by management scholars Joy Schneer and Frieda Reitman (2002) found that for women, there were no family structure types that resulted in the same career benefits that men realized through a traditional family structure (p. 25). As Lean In's research concludes, "[Working] women continue to do a disproportionate share of child care and housework, so they are more likely to be affected by the challenges of juggling home and work responsibilities" (2015, p. 17). In this disparity, executive women are uniquely situated at the intersection of work and family as they pursue a good life in a world of social saturation.

This disparity and its impact of navigating gender, work, and family without a viable script are leading to good life disillusionment among executive women. A recent major piece of research is telling.

Organizational management scholars Robin Ely, Pamela Stone, and Colleen Ammerman (2014) surveyed 12,000 Harvard Business School MBA alumnae and found a vast majority of these women were dissatisfied with their careers. Contrary to widespread belief, their research shows that it wasn't that women were leaving to prioritize family over career; in fact, they held enduring ambition and desire for a challenging and progressive career. They found that meeting family responsibilities left these women in "unfulfilling roles with dim prospects for advancement" (Ely, Stone, & Ammerman, 2014, online). For many women, they did not see opportunities with their job for advancement, and "expectations for career equality were disappointed" (Ely et al., 2014, online).

These limitations didn't stop with the employer; they extend to the spouse. Ely, Stone, and Ammerman (2014) describe that a "vast majority of women across racial groups and generations anticipated that their careers would rank equally with their spouse" (Ely et al., 2014, online) and in terms of childcare, only half of the female sample expected "to take primary responsibility for raising children" (Ely et al., 2014, online). But, in reality, these "expectations were dashed…[with] most graduates [going on]…to lead fairly traditional lives" (Ely et al., 2014, online). The authors found the "enduring cultural ideal wherein men's work is privileged" (Ely et al., 2014, online) and "in general, women tended to be less satisfied than men with their career growth—except for those [in the significant minority] whose careers and child care expectations were seen as equal to their partners'" (Ely et al., 2014, online). Ely, Stone, and Ammerman (2014) assert that "Women *are* leaning in" and reject the "premise…that women value career less than men do, or that mothers don't want high-profile, challenging work" (online). However, they are surprised that these alumnae "are finding themselves in relationships in which their careers are subordinate to their partners' more often than they anticipated" (Ely et al., 2014, online). In a similar vein, McKinsey research found that there is little empathy in the workplace for the challenges faced by female executives. In response to the statement, "even with equal skills and qualifications, women have much more difficulty reaching top management positions", 93% of

working women agreed, whereas only 58% of working men said the same (McKinsey & Company, 2015, online). (Among my circle of executive women, 100% agreed!) Thus, for a vast majority of executive women, the very possibility of a multidimensional good life comes into question as they find themselves embattled in social saturation.

Dissertation Purpose and Chapter Overview

Social saturation. Blatant inequality. Lingering misogynist pressures. Inadequate support systems. Lack of script. It's a three-ring circus out there for executive women. Executive women engage under the tent and along the sideshows in the chaos of multiple, parallel performances. They don't act alone, but are part of a diverse, interdependent troupe—co-workers, family, friends, community members, and unfortunately, a few clowns, too. Executive women are expected to juggle, walk the tightrope, and do acrobatics, while flaming knives of gender bias are being thrown at them. Skill, daring, and luck are all required, and no matter what, "the show must go on"—rain, shine, sickness, or health, it's a year-round endeavor. The circus may be "the greatest show on earth", but finding the good life among the theatrics can be difficult to discern.

So, how do executive women create a good life?

This dissertation seizes upon this significant question through an in-depth, reflexive examination of one executive woman's life: *my own.* The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experiences of an everyday, non-celebrity American executive woman living in multiplicity—something largely absent in the literature—and to identify what she does to create a good life. The research attempts to unravel the messy and exhilarating confluence of an executive woman's many performances across multiple and seemingly conflicting roles. The research examines what a good life means in the context of social saturation, and brings forth the relational processes by which it can be created. Important to note, there is no presumption that the voice arising

from this dissertation speaks for all, or will provide a complete answer. Rather, it is an attempt to put forth new perspectives and practices. At a minimum, my hope is that this voice results in new relational knowledge that others can consider as they create their own (or support others in) a good life, as well as serves as a launchpad for future research. Figure 1.1, below, provides a visual overview of how the dissertation is organized.

Figure 1.1: **Dissertation Chapter Overview**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Introduction	Literature Review	Methodology: Autoethnography	Study Design	Analysis: Performance Narratives	Findings & Conclusion
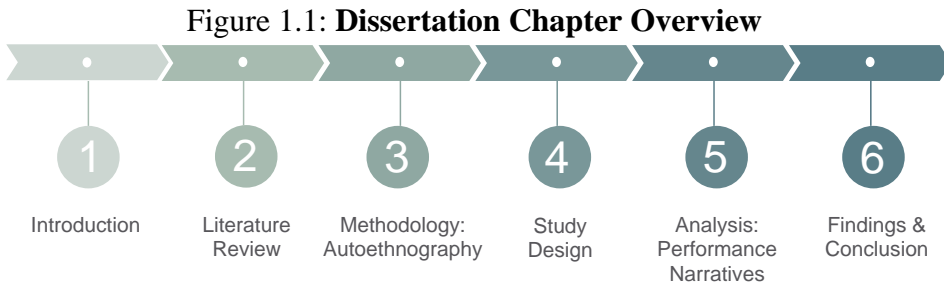
Herein—Chapter 1, *Introduction*—establishes the case for embarking on this research. In Chapter 2, *Literature Review: 'Good Life' Messages on the Marquee,* I review modernist literature on self and identity, as well as the literature on women and work. These literature show that as executive women try to create their good life in a world of social saturation, they live and work in a surround sound of conflicting messages 1.) Be a Man, 2.) Have It All, Superwoman, 3.) Don't Be a Man, 4.) Be Consistent, and 5.) Never Mind, Opt-out. These five messages exert significant pressure on executive women, resulting in a seemingly binary choice for a good life in social saturation: suck it up or get out of the workforce. This literature captures the frustration and challenges I—and so many of my colleagues—face as we go about our lives, and puts limits on the possibilities for women in creating a good life. In looking for alternatives, the relational nature of executive women's lives led me to examine the social constructionist literature. As I reviewed this literature, I found that social construction holds great promise, generating four new messages with potential for executive women: 1.) Co-create Your Good Life, 2.) Focus on Your Relations, 3.) Language is Your Friend, and 4.) Thrive in Inconsistency and

Multiplicity. In thinking about how executive women can make a good life, I got curious as to what practices go along with these four social construction messages, in effect, how do we "do" these four messages as we go about our lives. The social construction literature influenced me to refine my research question to: *What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation?*

In Chapter 3, *Research Methodology: Autoethnography,* I establish my research methodology. In considering how best to approach my research question, I identified four criteria for selecting my research methodology: 1.) Take a relational stance, 2.) Handle multiplicity, 3.) Account for context, and 4.) Be useful. These criteria led me to choose autoethnography, a method of writing self-narratives for generating data and insights. I provide background on the autoethnographic method and explain in detail how autoethnography meets each of the four research criteria to address my research question. I also put forth standards researchers are accountable for when using autoethnography, and discuss implications to my study design.

In Chapter 4, *Research Study Design,* I describe how my research was conducted. I explain the process for data collection and analysis encompassing four phases. In detail, I review how autoethnographic data were collected via 1.) Selecting role performances for study and mapping relational life across roles, and 2.) Holding co-researcher conversations for each performance, including the use of a relevant artifact. From there, I explain how these autoethnographic data were then analyzed by 3.) Writing self-narratives for each performance, and 4.) Looking across performance narratives to uncover findings and address the research question. The chapter concludes with an assessment of how my research complies with the standards for autoethnography, as established in Chapter 3.

From there, in Chapter 5, *Analysis: Narratives of a Saturated Self,* I present my autoethnography research analysis in the form of five Performance Narratives: 1.) Successful Business Leader, 2.) Infallible Daughter, 3.) Mother, 4.) Wife, and 5.) Creative Outsider. A brief reflection piece is provided at the end to synthesize key learning as being both the researcher and the subject in this study. By including this detail,

the chapter allows readers to experience an executive woman in contemporary times, inviting them to draw their own conclusions and implications from the research.

Finally, in Chapter 6, *Findings and Conclusion*, I share the outcomes from my autoethnography research. First, my research revealed a new, generative story about one's self as relational performances thriving in a world of social saturation, where the good life is action or something we "do" with others. Second, my research uncovered eight relational practices that hold potential to help executive women create a good life: 1.) Emphasize Relational Resonance, 2.) Generate Prosocial Surroundings, 3.) Bring Family Out of the Shadows, 4.) Negotiate Velvet Ropes, 5.) Speak Truth to Power, 6.) Use Tools for Co-Planning, 7.) Co-Create Relational Rituals, and 8.) Tap into Your Inner Network. The chapter also reviews implications for future research and practice, and offers final thoughts to wrap-up the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review:
'Good Life' Messages on the Marquee

Executive women are surrounded daily by messages from family members, teachers, community leaders, media, music, books, advertising, and so on. These messages advise them what to do, what to say, what to wear, what makes for success—in essence, how to create a good life. For many executive women, the experience of social saturation creates an impossible expectation, as a multitude of mixed messages vie to guide their social interactions, to define their relationships, and to determine who they are and what they can become.

To gain an understanding of these many messages influencing what it means to be a successful executive woman, I chose to review the literature in three areas: modernist perspectives on self and identity; women and work; and social constructionist perspectives on self and identity. I sought to uncover the guidance that executive women experience as they go about their lives and to determine its implications for my research. I completed these reviews in an iterative way, as described below.

Overview of Dissertation Literature Review

I began my literature review by examining self and identity from a modernist, Western perspective. The topic of self and identity takes on the question of "who am I?" and is related to how people come to know themselves and make their lives better, i.e., how they create a good life. It also considers the interplay of people's social life, such as the positions, roles, and groups they belong to, including biological, psychological, and cultural factors. Given its pervasiveness and widespread influence in American society, I focused on a modernist, positivist perspective. I also chose to focus on a Western perspective of self and identity. While the study of self goes back to early human history—spanning Ancient

Greece, India, and China, as well as early Buddhism (Leary & Tangney, 2012, p. 2)—this dissertation examines the American female executive and the forces shaping her, thus justifying a more limited scope.

Through this review, I was able to gain a foundation on the predominant theories and schools of thought related to how people find themselves and make a good life. I also located key Western cultural tenets and values, and uncovered the challenges in coming into one's self from a positivist, individualist point of view. Despite the value of this information, it appeared male oriented and led me to draw the conclusion that it was not sufficient. It left me wondering, what does this mean for executive women?

Seeking to uncover specific issues executive women face in creating their good life, I began to explore the literature on women and work. Through this literature, I was able to translate what modern self and identity ideas were prescribing for an ideal executive woman. What I found captures some of the many dilemmas executive women face as they seek to create a good life in a relationally demanding world. Together, the two bodies of literature suggest that executive women live and work a surround sound of five messages: 1.) *Be a Man; 2.) Have It All, Superwoman; 3.) Don't Be a Man; 4.) Be Consistent; 5.) Never Mind, Opt-out*. These five messages exert significant pressure on executive women, resulting in a seemingly binary choice for a good life in social saturation: suck it up or get out of the workforce.

These messages illustrate the frustration and challenges I—and so many of my colleagues—face as we go about our lives. I was also troubled how these messages limit the possibilities for women in creating a good life. "There has to be a better way", I said to myself. Thinking about the relational nature of my and other executive women's lives, I was curious if a relational paradigm, such as the one put forth in social construction, would have something different to add to the conversation. Therefore, I also chose to review the literature on social construction. Through this alternative, postmodern worldview, I uncovered four messages that offer new, more life-giving potential for executive women: *1.) Co-create Your Good Life, 2.) Focus on Your Relations, 3.) Language is Your Friend,* and *4.) Thrive in Inconsistency and Multiplicity*.

In the course of this literature review, I realized that I have spent most of my life suffering through the impact the five modern messages had as I made the choice to "suck it up" across the demands of my career, my family and my personal pursuits. I attempted to create a good life by listening to and applying these messages. And, it hasn't worked. The four social construction messages, however, enlivened me. I believe they hold promise for me, my colleagues, and other executive women. They warrant further exploration. Hearing them, I got curious as to what practices might go along with these messages—in effect, how do we "do" these four messages. As a result of reviewing this third body of literature, I refined my research question to be: *What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation?*

What follows is a summary of all of these messages I discovered: modernist and social constructionist. This review of the literature presents the five modernist messages, followed by the four the social construction messages. A synopsis is provided in Figure 2.1 below. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications for the dissertation research.

Figure 2.1: **Synopsis of Literature Review**

Section	Synopsis
Message 1: Be a Man	Examines the basis for why executive women's professional success hinges on displaying stereotypic male traits and eliminating female ones
Message 2: Have It All, Superwoman	Considers that a great deal of executive women continue in female roles as homemaker, wife, and mother, concurrent to their full-time work role. When managing these multiple demands, the Western premium on a self-determinate individual and a Protestant work ethic reinforce to executive women that, if they look inward and work hard enough, they can do it all on their own
Message 3: Don't Be a Man	Reminds of the importance of performing one's gender, and offers that executive women should embrace their unique female leadership preferences and style. However, women's dual performance as a female gender and an executive come up against a double bind, contradictory expectations that convolute what an ideal executive performance is for women. Executive women are punished for both acting like a man and acting like a woman
Message 4: Be Consistent	Shows that executive women are pushed to adhere to the Western ideal of being a coherent, unified self. Consistency and coherence are seen as essential to a good life. However, as executive women transverse multiple roles, their lives and performances are anything but consistent and coherent
Message 5: Never Mind, Opt-Out	Explores how as competing pressures mount, society offers executive women the choice to end participation in the workforce. This dominant societal narrative reassures executive women that the good life can be found by choosing to return to a more traditional role as homemaker and mother
Promise of Social Construction: Four New Messages	Takes a relational stance and offers four new ideas for executive women. First, it suggests that the good life is co-created as they go along in relational exchange for others and then, encourages them to focus on their relations as a means to navigate a good life. Next, it considers language and stories as a key resource. Finally, it extends an invitation to be inconsistent and thrive in multiplicity of life roles

Message 1: Be a Man

In the male-dominated, executive community, the path to success adheres to what society considers a stereotypical male formula: be tough, be direct, and never show emotion. At work, executive women encounter the lingering affects of mid-century management textbooks touting the optimal leader as "aggressive, authoritative, firm, and just…[but]…not feminine yielding, dependent, or intuitive" (Kaufman & Fetters, 1983, p. 204). Executive women are immersed in business language laden with sports and military metaphors, with terms such as goals, game plan and coaching, and strategy, tactics and scenario planning. They watch as heroes from these domains inspire their male counterparts with leadership lessons, winning athletic coaches like Vince Lombardi, John Wooden, and Phil Jackson, and four and five-star generals like Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, and Colin Powell. Executive women realize, as James Brown famously sings, "it's a man's man's man's world". As executive women assume traditionally male executive roles, they hear a message that fitting into this man's world is an imperative to being successful and having a good life.

The self and identity literature underpins this message. Social biology theories suppose that executive women not only *must* fit in to their work group in order to be effective, but that they are driven to do so by their very nature of being human. For most social biologists, fitting in is considered part of human DNA, a concept called inclusive fitness, or the possession of traits acquired via evolution that are beneficial within the social environment (Simonton, 1999, p. 15). Inclusive fitness goes beyond the idea of nurture, which attributes aspects of human behavior to one's culture and upbringing. Rather, inclusive fitness theory says that social group living directed the genetic make-up and biology of humans into the socially motivated creatures they are today (Simonton, 1999, p. 15). As humans evolved from species that preferred to live together in groups, scientists theorize that effective interaction with social groups was a beneficial "biological strategy", where social functioning ability and avoidance of social rejection appeared to influence individual survival and reproduction (Baumeister, Brewer, Tice, & Twenge, 1995, p. 506). While other *Homo* species became extinct, evolutionary

psychologist Lyda Moller (2000) explains, "*H. sapien*'s [sic] growing capacities responded by generating more precise social rules in response to intra- inter- group competition" (p. 197). Over millions of years of evolution, favorable social fitness traits eventually became imprinted in human physiology. For instance, evidence is seen in the dual processing abilities of the brain, with a left hemisphere specializing in individual competitive behaviors and strategies, such as control and power, and a right hemisphere specializing in inclusive behaviors and strategies, such as collaboration and perceiving others' emotions (Moller, 2000, p. 178-186).

In a similar vein, modern social psychologists see human behavior as being motivated by an intrinsic need for belonging. Belonging, or "the formation of social attachments" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 520), is characterized by two factors: 1.) The recurrent and enjoyable or beneficial exchanges with the same person or group that are 2.) Consistent over an extended period of time (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 520). Many social psychologists argue that belonging is more than a wish or desire; it's an inherent human need. Evidence shows that without belonging, a person is prone to significant emotional and physical health issues (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 520). Traditional social psychology theories hinge on the axiom that humans are psychologically motivated to seek and maintain relationships that support their ability to belong in social groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 521).

Evidence for the fundamental need to fit in is also seen via the elevated role cultural patterns play in human functioning. Prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973/2000) explains that humans biologically depend on the use of culture patterns—"systems of significant symbols (language, art, myth, ritual) [used] for orientation, communication, and self-control" (p. 48)—to function in a group living environment. Geertz (1973/2000) asserts, "Undirected by culture patterns…[human] behavior would be virtually ungovernable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his experience virtually shapeless" (p. 46). Key theories across social biology, social psychology,

and anthropology agree that for humans, being able to function effectively as a social creature is essential.

These theories would expect that like all humans, executive women are wired to avoid rejection from their social group, and are motivated to belong and be accepted. Per these theories, a key strategy for being accepted is adaptation. Adaptation means adhering to the expectations and associated culture patterns a group holds for its members. *Social groups*, also called human organizations, in many ways are a contrived notion (Katz & Kahn, 1968/1978, p. 187) in that they exist by consensus, whether that is awareness among the members or through some external designation (Tajfel, 1982, p. 2). According to social psychologists David Katz and Robert Kahn (1968/1978), social groups can be seen as "an open system of roles" (p. 187), where *role* is the "behavioral requirement…[or] 'what is expected'" (p. 45). Simultaneous to identifying with a group is an individual's acceptance of the associated role expectations (Katz & Kahn, 1968/1978, p. 190-191). Individuals attribute self-meaning when carrying out role behaviors competently, and depend on working in concert with others when carrying out their own role expectations; this process, in turn, continues to reinforce to one's self-meaning (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227). In line with these theories, executives can be considered a social group, and within its system of roles, there are specific requirements or expectations for behavior. As executive women seek membership in the executive leader group, they must adhere to the role expectations previously established, in this case, be like their male counterparts. Following these role expectations allows and perpetuates inclusion in the group, and also brings personal meaning and fulfillment as an executive.

The women and work literature appears to be in alignment with the theories on adaption. In the 1970s and 1980s, only a small number of women were in executive roles, causing them to standout from the group and subjecting them to exclusion and discrimination, despite their personal efforts to assimilate. Scholars surmised that over time, increasing the number of women in the workplace would eliminate executive women's status as an "out group" and minimize the need for further adaptation (Ely, 1995, p. 589; Zimmer, 1988, p. 64). Despite

increased numbers of executive women since then, though, this speculation has not played out. As discussed previously, since *executive* role expectations are anchored in *male gender* role expectations, executive women continue to face pressure to adopt stereotypical male scripts as the norm. As psychologists Alice Eagly and Blair Johnson (1990) explain, "normative expectations associated with being a good manager include more masculine than feminine qualities" (p. 235). These normative expectations have not changed over the last few decades. As a recent Catalyst report (2007) describes, "despite the numerous business contributions of women leaders, men are still largely seen as the leaders by default" (p. 1). The women and work literature shows that increased presence of executive women has not resulted in an alternative executive script for success as a female leader. Instead, as Ely (1995) concludes, for executive women, assimilation has become a key approach, "that is, to alter their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and expectations at work to mirror those typically associated with men" (p. 595).

Unfortunately, mirroring male thoughts, feelings, behaviors and expectations creates a dilemma for executive women: they know they need to fit in, but trying to do so comes at great personal cost. Assimilation implies that for success, executive women must deny traditional female gender constructs that, in turn, create role conflict. *Role conflict* can occur when one individual holds multiple roles that contain incompatible or contradictory expectations (Katz & Kahn, 1968/1978, p. 204). As executive women attempt two group memberships simultaneously—(male dominated) executives and the female gender—their different role expectations clash with each other. McKenna (1997) describes how executive females "compounded their lives by adding the male-defined success identity onto their female identities. For women to succeed, they had to learn to value themselves the way men did…[and i]n doing so…[saw a] subtle but consistent atrophying of the importance of other aspects of women's lives" (p. 5).

According to the literature, one area where executive women tend to experience role conflict is motherhood and work, where simply being a woman triggers the perception of being a less valuable employee. In a 1989 *Harvard Business Review* article, feminist Felice Schwartz

responded to the belief among business leaders that women were more expensive to employ versus men, primarily due to the impact of maternal leave and the demands of being a mother. She proposed that employers create two paths for employees, the traditional work-only focused path and an alternative path that accommodated both work and family needs. Her proposal, while favored by business leaders, inadvertently resulted in further entrenching the view that women are not able to contribute to work to the same degree as men (Lewin, 1989, online). The subsequent *New York Times* article dubbed Schwartz's proposal as the *Mommy Track* (Lewin, 1989, online), introducing a new term into the business community that appeared to legitimize some of the existing bias against female workers. Decades later, research from Lean In found this penalty of being a woman continues, as "Motherhood triggers assumptions that women are less competent and less committed to their careers. As a result, they are held to higher standards and presented with fewer opportunities" (2015, p. 24). Aware of this bias, savvy executive women know to keep their personal life out of the office and not reveal their interest in having children.

The literature shows that executive women also experience role conflict in being female, as they are advised to desexualize themselves to ensure acceptance and success. Organizational studies scholar Angela Tretheway (1999) explains that a "professional body is a fit body[,]…[and as it] emits signals and messages through bodily comportment, nonverbal behaviors, and performance[, it]…is positioned as excessively sexual…[thus requiring normalization and being] made docile in organizational contexts" (p. 423). Tretheway's point—being overtly female reduces the perception of competence—comes to life in the research. In one study, for example, psychology scholar Peter Glick found that in showing respondents videos of two women—one time wearing revealing but professional outfits and another time with conservative, professional outfits—"being more provocatively dressed had no effect on the perceived competence of the secretary, but it lowered the perceived competency of the executive dramatically" (Belkin, 2007, online). This perception influences the guidance executive women receive. A sampling of contemporary popular press shows that executive

women continue to be advised to wear clothing similar to men, making sure they don't show cleavage, avoiding clothing that is too tight or see through, and choosing conservative, subtle colors and patterns (Wolfe, 2017, online; Conrad, 2011, online). As Miscenko and Day (2015) concede, "women actively engage in identity negotiation to avoid marginalization" (p. 235). Rather than *celebrate* executive women's femaleness, instead, it appears that women hear the pathway to inclusion at work is to *minimize* femaleness.

Despite any "be a man" efforts by executive women, the literature suggests it still remains difficult for the executive community to overlook executive women's gender. At its root seems to be the culturally designated "other" status that women hold in society. Sociology professor Joan Acker (1988) identifies the prevailing tendency to attribute men as standard-bearers of normalcy. She argues, "What is typical, usual, or to be expected of human beings is equated with what is male…It can be intuitively grasped when we recognize the difficulty we have in using the term *woman* to refer to all human beings" (Acker, 1988, p. 12). Acker (1988) continues, "The term *woman* does not evoke images of men…[She is] the particular, the "other", the residual…[S]he is defined as socially and/or psychologically different from the male, [and] is something other than the general human being" (p. 12). Women's otherness position can also be illustrated in English language with the grammatical convention of using the male "he" or "him" when describing someone of unspecified gender. Otherness can also be found in academia; for instance, sociologist Judith Howard (2000) points out that social psychology research often treats gender as an identity category (p. 378-379), where women engage in "organizing a sense of self around the perception one is female…and internalizing…[expected appropriate] behaviors,…thought to be learned through early socialization and enacted and reinforced throughout the life span" (p. 378). In male gender-defined institutions such as executive leadership, being a female gendered "other" only becomes more pronounced, compounding the difficulty in executive women's ability to successfully assimilate.

The literature offers few effective remedies for addressing these difficulties. Unfortunately, a great deal of academia continues to privilege

the male, which has left executive women without a promising solution to navigating dual status as an executive and a woman. The female perspective and her needs have gotten lost in a majority of scholarly inquiry. In parallel with progress on the feminist social front in the late century, feminist scholars began to call out the inherent male bias in academic research. Acker (1988) explains, "Male bias has affected the study of women and work in specific ways, by defining concepts in terms of a male reality…by consigning women to the residual category, by defining central questions so that women are eliminated, or by failing to notice the operation of sex-differentiating processes" (p. 13). While there have been recent improvements, many scholarly paradigms continue with the subtext that it is normal that women hold less importance, power, and prominence than men (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 783). Women studies scholar Rosalind Barnett and psychologist Janet Hyde (2001) reviewed contemporary literature and found that key paradigms—functionalist, psychoanalytical, sociobiology, and evolutionary psychology—hinge on the view that women's biological difference justifies their secondary status. For example, functionalists see that division of labor at home as beneficial to the family unit and larger society as a whole (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 782). Likewise, the psychoanalytical tradition reinforces Freud's view that female identity is defined by the "major developmental milestone [of]…her discovery [that] she does not have a penis[,… with t]he only way to make up for this deficiency and gain a sense of wholeness is to marry and have a child,…much like her mother" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 782). Finally, sociobiology and evolutionary psychology consider "the highly differentiated gender roles typified in the American family in the post-World War II years…as genetically programmed—a result of human evolutionary history" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 783).

Important to note, these firm premises of female gender differences are not in line with the actual research coming out of these traditions, and in general, both academic and popular press have failed to bring this point to light. Barnett and Hyde (2001) found "These…theories presume the pervasiveness of large gender differences in personality, abilities and social behaviors, thus justifying a highly gender-segregated

division of labor in the family and the workplace. However, overall results from systematic studies have failed to support the claims" (p. 783-784). They acknowledge that these gender-segregated paradigms in academic study have lessened, but lament, "the development of new theory has not kept pace [with societal realities]" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 784).

Calling for alternative archetypes for leadership, communication expert Su Olsson (2000) contends that women face "the continuing pervasiveness of heroic masculinism, [and] the traditional and hierarchical form of management, which depicts executives as solitary (male) heroes engaged in unending trials of endurance" (p. 296). A cursory look at contemporary business leadership literature reinforces Olsson's point: *Harvard Business Review's* list of "11 Books Every Young Leader Must Read" (Coleman, 2012) is made up of only male authors, featuring male protagonists; CEO.com's "24 Leadership Books to Read Before You Die" (May 7, 2013) contained only one female author (who wrote about Abraham Lincoln); Amazon's 20 best selling Business Leadership books featured only three female authors and the 20 best selling Business Management books featured none (December 7, 2016). As a telling example, in creating the graphic for the end of this Chapter using Microsoft PowerPoint clip art gallery, I discovered when looking for people images, the image of a man in a suit is labeled as, "businessman standing" while a similar image of a woman in a suit is simply labeled as, "woman standing". It remains difficult for women to be seen as a typical executive leader. At best executive women are left in theoretical limbo, and at worst, continue to be held in their secondary, otherness position.

On the upside, one could argue that being a man provides an entry point for woman to partake in traditional male executive roles, and expands the possibility of a good life that includes intellectual satisfaction from engaging in complex situations, broader impact in leading others, and even attainment personal power. On the downside, however, being a man requires executive women to set aside the full possibility of life across other female roles or in line with their personal preferences. Eliminating the possibility of motherhood, or at least

minimizing the priority of children, may not be a welcome pathway for some women; one could ask, "Why don't men have to make this same sacrifice as the price of being successful in their careers?" Moreover, executive women's otherness accompanies a sense of *lesserness*; Mary Gergen (2001) uses the word "caste" to locate women's secondary position (p. 73), and describes how "[women] must bear the burden of shame that the androcentered culture assigns to their gender" (p. 59). Adopting the male script—being a man—neither allows women to utilize their full set of strengths, experiences, and preferences needed in by employers in the workplace, nor does it offer the full potential of a good life in world of social saturation.

Message 2: Have It All, Superwoman

Despite a strong "Be a Man" message, foregoing womanhood didn't happen for a many executive women. Rather than choose between being an executive *or* a homemaker, many women's lives morphed into roles as both executives *and* homemakers. Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz's (1984) book, *The Superwoman Syndrome*, popularized the notion of Superwoman, a woman with the ability to effectively maintain multiple roles including home, children, and full-time employment. Shaevitz provided time management strategies, efficiency techniques, and encouragement for women who sought to have it all—to be a wife, mom, homemaker, and contributor to the community, all while having a successful and meaningful career. Since then, countless self-help books and articles have seized on this phenomenon, often under the guise of "work-life balance". An entire time management and organization system industry emerged, catering to women with the disposable income and resources to keep their busy lives running on all gears. Today's Superwoman is the executive at work and the chief operating officer at home, keeping her spouse, her children, her community, and her own life together, or at least so it would seem. As an alternative to being a man, Superwoman doesn't have to make role sacrifices; instead, executive women are welcome to participate fully across multiple roles. "Yes, you can have it all", they say.

The literature points to two dominant societal values shaping a "Have It All, Superwoman" message: the premium Western culture places on being a self-determinant individual; and an entrenched Protestant work ethic. The prescription for a good life in America—*the American Dream*—embodies these values. Merriam-Webster defines the American Dream as "a happy way of living that is thought of by many Americans as something that can be achieved by anyone in the U.S. especially by working hard and becoming successful". The American Dream tells executive women that no matter the family one is born into, each person is in control of her own destiny. Set a goal, and with focus and hard work, it's possible for anyone to achieve a good life. For executive women, the two societal values in conjunction with the American Dream provide guidance when facing challenges across their many roles in a relationally demanding world. The literature suggests that they result in two cultural ideals for executive women to adhere to—1.) the self-determinant individual and 2.) the devoted worker. These cultural ideals exert tremendous pressure on executive women as they navigate social saturation, and introduce the question as for whom these values serve, challenging their usefulness to executive women in their pursuit of the good life.

Cultural Ideal 1: Self-Determinant Individual

The literature identifies a self-determinant individual as an influential, American cultural ideal. This ideal contains a number of facets that require unpacking. One facet is that the self is conceptualized as individualistic and independent. It is a privileged entity in its own right, and is something unique to a person and bounded within a person. Philosophy, psychology, and science underpin this conceptualization. Another facet is that the self is seen as inherently driven to be self-determinant. Since one is seen as in control of her life, coming into one's self and bettering one's self is seen as an indicator of being healthy, and is considered a basic requirement for attaining a good life. For executive women, the ideal of a self-determinate individual means herself is hero. To make a good life—for the hero to prevail—means making something of herself on her own.

The first facet of a self-determinate individual is how Western tradition treats self as a privileged entity, existing in its own right. The basic science of self creates a notion that self is a separate entity from the body. As one's body renews itself over time, scientists estimate that after about seven years, one's person is made up of entirely new cells (Johnson, 2014, p. 51). Likewise, as one grows physically and emotionally, it can be argued that for instance, the five-year-old person is markedly different from the one forty-five years later (Johnson, 2014, p. 52). Despite these bodily changes—literally, one is not the same physical person—one's sense of self is still retained, and therefore, having a self-aware, ongoing mental capacity seems to point to an existence of self (Johnson, 2014, p. 53). Nurse and philosophy professor Sally Gadow (1980) explains, "Body and self, though inseparable, are not identical" (p. 172) as the body exists in relation to the self (p. 172). While culture norms may include body image and physical appearance as *contributors* to the formation of self, the human body is not seen as *akin* to one's self (Bakhski, 2011, p. 374). History of science scholar Morris Berman (1990) goes further, offering evidence of how the human physical body has been overwhelmingly absent in Western history and in cultural importance, overlooked in favor of the more-important self (p. 22). Indeed, the treatment of the self in the West appears to be primarily one of *disembodiment*. One's self is supreme hero.

This distinct entity of self is treated as an individual phenomenon and independent from others. Modern psychologists, cognitive scientists, and neurologists alike consider the self as something that happens in the mind, something internal and bounded to an individual. Baumeister (1999) explains, "When adults in Western civilized countries speak about the self, they are generally referring to a psychological rather than physical being" (p. 2). Psychologists Daphne Oyserman, Kristin Elmore, and George Smith (2012) describe the common conceptualization of the self as a distinct, special entity, "[that] warm sense or warm feeling that something is 'about me'…and requir[ing] that there is an 'I' that can consider an object that is 'me'" (p. 71). As Descartes famously asserts, "I think, therefore I am".

The self is considered individualistic in nature even among the modernist social psychology community, which examines the self through the lens of social forces. One of the founding social psychology thought leaders, Floyd Allport (1924), established that "There is no psychology of groups which not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals…Psychology in all of its branches is a science of the individual" (p. 4). More recently, continuing in Allport's tradition, social psychologists Michael Hogg, Deborah Terry, and Katherine White (1995) explain the purpose of social psychological theory as to "address the social nature of self as constituted by society…[where] self…[is] independent of and prior to society" (p. 255).

Cognitive science and neurology also orient the self as an individual and independent entity. For most of these scientists, the self is explained as a series of complex brain events (Johnson, 2014, p. 35) represented by a term called *consciousness.* For them, consciousness is defined by "the experiences of the self that most specifically arise from the capability and awareness of simultaneously playing the role of the perceiver and the object of the person" (Beer, 2012, p. 638). Consciousness is a highly personal experience. This notion, sometimes referred to as the *minimal self,* is treated as "Phenomenologically…how one experiences it, a consciousness of oneself as an immediate subjective experience, unextended in time" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15). Central to the minimal self is that one's own being is distinct from others, where "I" am not the "other" (Humphrey, 2011, p. 148). The sense of agency (that "I" am the creator or the giver) as well as a sense of ownership (that "I" am the receiver or the participant) are the self's defining features (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15). Evolutionary psychologist Nicholas Humphrey (1992) describes the independent, bounded nature of self, writing, "sensations I feel are therefore inalienably mine: I have a proprietorial relationship to them—I own them—in a way nobody else does or could do" (p. 132). Normal brain activity, particularly internal memory functions, supports consciousness activity. It creates a sense of continuity of one's self, where one's consciousness is experienced as an unbroken, sequential phenomenon over one's life span (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith 2012, p.

75). These theories conclude that individuals experience this individualistic and independent conscious self as something "real".

Another facet to the self-determinant individual is that the self is seen as being inherently driven to create purpose for itself in life—to determine itself. Much of the literature treats the self as central to fulfilling one's life (Baumeister, 1999, p. 3). Modern evolution theories suggest a hereditary cause for being self-determinant. Scholars theorize that as consciousness began to emerge, it created new problems for human interaction with their environment. Biology scholars Liane Gabora and Stuart Kaufman (2010) explain that the "emergence of metacognition enabled our ancestors to reflect on and even override their own nature" (p. 293), giving them "the ability to map, explore and transform conceptual spaces" (p. 284). More significantly, this awareness created a cognitive crisis. Philosopher Denis Dutton explains, "The fact that human beings in the Pleistocene outgrew automatic animal instincts created problems of its own: confusion and uncertainty in choices available for action" (p. 120). Over time scientists theorize, consciousness sensations—called qualia—developed in a way that helped mitigate this confusion and uncertainty. In addition to helping navigate decisions and potential courses of action, Humphrey (2011) offers that qualia altered human thought processes (p. 72) by creating "a will to live" (p. 86) and a sense that "it is not just about the joy of living but also about the *point* of living too" (p. 121). For Humphrey (2011), consciousness serves a "role not to *enable* you to do something…but rather to *encourage* you to do something…to make you *take an interest* in things that would otherwise not interest you[, or]…to *set yourself goal*s" (p. 72), helping bring meaning and joy with "the novel sense of their own *metaphysical importance*" (p.75). These theories treat the need to be a self-determinate individual as an inherent drive in humans.

Coming into one's self —often called *self-actualization* in the literature—is essential to fulfill the inherent drive to be a self-determinate individual. As the ancient Greek proverb advises, one must first "know thyself". Self-actualization allows one to function as a normal, healthy human and is seen as an essential step to achieve the good life (Baumeister, 1999, p. 3-4). Father of American psychology William

James opposed Freud's view that the human psyche was at the mercy of a hidden unconscious; instead, James saw consciousness as a driver of human free will, enabling the self to make choices and own the consequences (Baker & Sperry, 2016, online). Later, Abraham Maslow's influential theory—known today as Maslow's hierarchy of needs—created a view that one's self is motivated toward a sequential series of goals (physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization) where coming into one's self is seen as fulfilling the ultimate human need (1943, p. 394). In more contemporary times, psychologist Carl Rogers (1961/1995) considered the good life as being "a fully functioning person" (p. 183) who reaches the point when "He approaches the realization that he no longer needs to fear what experience may hold, but can welcome it freely as part of his changing and developing self" (p. 185). Most recently, Oyserman et al. (2012) describe how "the self [is seen as]…both a product of situations and a shaper of behavior in situations…[thus m]aking sense of oneself—who one is, was, and may become, and…the path one should take in the world—is a core self-project" (p. 70).

Finally, despite the important role of self-actualization, the literature shows it's not enough just to come to know one's self. Rather, the good life depends on the self's betterment and progress. Alfred Adler (1924/1999) believed in an inner drive for betterment, asserting that "every psychic phenomenon, if it is to give us any understanding of a person, can only be grasped and understood if regarded as preparation for some goal (p. 4). For Adler, this goal was striving for perfection (1924/1999, p. 8), fueled by a desire "to fulfill our potentials [and] to come closer…to our ideal" (Boeree, 2006, p. 26). Similarly, Rogers (1961/1995) saw the good life as continual movement, "[it is not] the achievement of homeostasis or equilibrium…The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination" (p. 186). In his critique of contemporary Western adherence to an individualist view, Ken Gergen (1991/2000) describes the significance of betterment as a reflection of "the *grand narrative* of modernism…one of continuous upward movement—improvement, conquest, achievement—toward some

goal" (p. 30). For the self-determinate individual, achieving the good life requires both self-knowledge and perpetual effort for growth.

The cultural ideal of the self-determinate individual is an influential narrative for executive women in their search for the good life. The narrative tells them that the ability for one's self to prevail in the world is individual triumph in the human endeavor of "survival of the fittest". As such, the good life can be found in coming into and bettering one's self; it is about being a self-determinate individual. Most notably, the narrative advises that a good life is a moving target: never settle, keep pushing forward, and aim higher. The ideal of a self-determinate individual creates a latent pressure for executive women and feeds the "Have it all, Superwoman" message. Not only is life a reflection of her alone, but also any achievement isn't good enough, as there is always more that should be done.

Cultural Ideal 2: The Devoted Worker

The second cultural ideal found in the literature is the devoted worker. For Americans, being a devoted worker indicates a positive, moral quality of one's self, and helps the self-determinate individual earn the right to and achieve the good life. The devoted worker ideal follows what is commonly referred to as the Protestant work ethic, or the substantial value placed on working hard. Irish essayist Arthur Little S. J. (1948) captures the essence of Protestant work ethic, as he writes "[t]he first principle of the philosophy of work is that man by his nature is intended to be a worker as part of his natural purpose; idleness, therefore is against nature" (p. 58).

The roots of the Protestant work ethic appear to be found as far back as early Christianity, where according to Sennett (2009), "Early Church doctrine generally viewed free time as a temptation, leisure as an invitation to sloth" (p. 57). Strong work ethic was particularly significant for women, first, as their gender was viewed as interfering in men's ability to work hard, and second, as they were at increased risk themselves by their very nature of being female. Sennet (2009) explains, "Eve was the temptress, distracting men from his work…[And, women were] specifically prone to sexual license if they had nothing to occupy

their hands [thus]…the craft of the needle…[kept women's hands busy]" (Sennett, 2009, p. 57). Later, during the formation of America, work ethic played a central role in shaping American norms and expectations. Sociologist Max Weber (1930/2001) attributes the Founding Fathers' ascetic belief system as influencing the formation of a capitalist society (p. 14-19), noting that "the influence of Puritanism upon business activity in the United States…[is] particularly clear" (p. xxi-xxii). The literature points to work ethic as a central component in the development of American political, economic, and cultural systems.

A century later, work ethic took an elevated role during the industrial revolution, resulting in a devoted worker ideal that carries over to contemporary times. Rallying the Protestant work ethic value helped facilitate the increased capitalist demands for labor. Weber (1930/2001) explains that "rationalized capitalistic enterprise implies…a disciplined labour force" (p. xi) requiring an ethic based on "the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life…as an end to itself…Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs" (p. 18). Concludes Weber (1930/2001), "Labour must…be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself (p. 25). Elevating the significance of work ethic resulted in an archetype of a devoted worker, ideal to drive production (Schulte, 2014, p. 78). Cultural researcher Brigid Schulte (2014) describes, '[this] ideal worker, freed from all home duties, devotes himself completely to the workplace" (p. 77). The industrialist efforts to access labor appear to have entrenched the devoted worker as a cultural ideal in American society.

Since then, the devoted worker ideal has emerged a key leverage point for organizations interested in improving their profit and success. Via industrial psychology and organizational behavioral theories, companies attempt to foster a sense of work identity among their employees, and deploy deliberate efforts to connect employees' personal aspirations and needs to larger organizational goals (Brown, Kirpal, & Rauner, 2007, p. 2). Per management science, creating deeper organizational commitment has been shown to correlate to positive productivity performance outcomes (Brown et al., 2007, p. 2). Work

identity efforts start at the hire and continue through the employment process. Organization behavior experts Jane Dutton, Laura Roberts, and Jeffrey Bednar (2010) describe how new joiners to an organization, "are motivated to construct a new identity that incorporates their new organizational membership" (p. 273). From there, as Mats Alvesson, Karen Ashcraft, and Robyn Thomas (2008) explain, building worker identity continues through a "processes of induction, training and corporate education…[to enable workers to] embrace the notion of 'we' (e.g. the organization or team)" (p. 16). These efforts are designed for the benefit of the organization, as Alvesson et al. (2008) continue, "management-inspired discourses are seen here to reflect and facilitate social domination" (p. 16).

In this tradition, the literature is ripe with the significance of work and one's self, with work itself often framed in terms of a "calling". Philosophy professor Al Gini (1998) summarizes the significance of the ideal worker in self and identity, reflecting on how "We need work, and as adults we find identity and are identified by the work we do" (p. 707) and assuming so, warns that "we must be very careful about what we choose to do for a living, for what we do is what we'll become" (p. 707). Concludes work and labor professor Michael Doherty (2009), "work remains an important source of identity, meaning, and social affiliation" (p. 84). With the devoted worker ideal embedded in American society, it is reasonable to conclude that for American women, being an executive at work would be a major aspect to their sense of self and identity.

Unfortunately, the devoted worker ideal creates demands and adds pressures, particularly for executives. As labor scholars Joan Williams, Mary Blair-Loy, and Jennifer Berdahl (2013) assert, the "work devotion schema is both coercive—many workers feel forced to comply—and seductive—workers may also believe that a strong work ethic helps them form their sense of identity and self-worth" (p. 211). This work devotion schema is particularly strong for executives. Williams et al. (2013) continue, "among the upper-middle class [there is acceptance of its legitimacy]. This schema offers an implicit contract between the worker and the firm, assuring the worker that his or her sacrifices of time, talent, and energy will be honored" (p. 211). Executive

women engage in this implicit contract with work. They are inculcated in the belief that their work defines them as a person and is a requirement for their achievement of a good life. They take pride in being devoted, hard workers, even if it comes at personal cost.

It doesn't look like the cultural pressure to be a devoted worker will be lessening anytime soon. Schulte (2014) describes, "the notion of the ideal worker wields immense power in the American workplace. We are programmed to emulate him at all costs, or at least feel the sting of not measuring up" (p. 77). Even as the nature of work and life has changed since the industrial revolution, the ideal worker has remained steady, for instance, even as women entered the workforce in droves (Schulte, 2014, p. 78-79). The economic shift from manufacturing to knowledge workers only took the ideal worker persona to new heights, as shown in the emergence of the dot-com bubble in the 1990s (Schulte, 2014, p. 49-50). Being a devoted worker accompanies the executive women's pursuit for the good life.

More troubling, the devoted work ideal applies to more than work; it appears to have spilled over into other aspects of life. The literature demonstrates how America has become a culture of being busy, emphasizing a bravado or "'badge of honor' for living in fast-forward" (Schulte, 2014, p. 45). Communication scholars Ann Burnett, Denise Gorsline, Julie Semlak and Adam Tyma (2007), through an extensive analysis of language in annual holiday letters, found an American cultural premium on *being busy*. They concluded that "busy-ness is a badge of honor that must be earned and upheld in order to fit into society" (Burnett et al., 2007, online). Schulte (2014) describes how many scholars in this area "contend [that] busyness became not just a way of life, but *glamorous*, a sign of high social status" (p. 45). Schulte (2014) highlights columnist Daniel Gross' observation that "in the contemporary money culture…to be at leisure, to be idle, is to be irrelevant" (p. 49). In researching how people spend their time via time diaries, John Robinson found across studies that when recording where they spend their time, subjects tend to exaggerate work hours, presumably to show their importance (Schulte, 2014, p. 14). As Schulte (2014) describes, "the cultural imperative [is] not just to *have* it all, but to *fit* it all in on the fast

track, packing in a multitude of work, activities, and obligations" (p. 45). Concludes Schulte (2014), "leisure has been lost because work now answers the religious questions of who we are and how we find meaning…[T]he total work devotion of the ideal worker has become a religion itself" (p. 86).

For executive women, the literature suggests how work ethic remains strong in the workplace and carries over to their additional roles as homemaker, spouse, mother, etc. Women hear the message that to achieve the good life, they must work hard with full devotion across *all* their roles. In addition, from my interpretation of the literature, there also seems to be a moral subtext accompanying the devoted worker ideal, in that working hard and being busy means the good life is earned or deserved. Attaining success without struggle or pain violates the American Dream. For executive women, she hears that she *deserves* a good life only if she adheres to the societal contract to be devoted and busy.

The literature on how the devoted worker ideal came about in America made me challenge my own belief system surrounding the need for hard work and busy-ness to earn success. As someone who previously majored in Organizational Behavior/Industrial Relations in college, this new perspective jolted my sense of knowing—I had always taken work ethic and work identity as givens. As I began to consider work identity in new ways, I came to the conclusion that it seems more like a capitalist sham intended to benefit the employer. This realization made me wonder if there were other cultural examples of where success or a good life could come without having to work hard. I found a number of examples where leisure, not work, creates a good life. These examples call into question the usefulness the devoted worker ideal brings to executive women in pursuit of a good life.

As one example, a key anthropology theory considers work as having a utilitarian rather than psychological benefit, bucking conventional wisdom that humans are born wired to work. Whitehouse and Wilkins (1986) share anthropological research that concludes "the concept of 'work' as we know it does not exist" (p. 156) where the "Protestant work ethic"—work being something one should be doing and

subject to guilt if not—is a relatively new construct" (p. 156). Simple or primitive societies still in existence today reflect work performance consisting of subsistence only; in other words, work is done for the basic requirements of living, nothing more. Whitehouse and Wilkins (1986) describe that while people in "primitive societies…may work hard…they do so only for restricted periods of time and for specific purposes...[and] work of this kind is interspersed with periods when little is done except rest, [play, ritual, etc.]" (p. 156). For instance, the !Kung bushman (a more primitive society in Botswana) work less than twenty hours a week, rejecting regular agricultural, husbandry, and hunting practices, and prioritize socializing instead (Gladwell, p. 233-234). Another example comes in how work is defined; some Pacific Islander cultures use the same word for *work* and *ritual* and Australian aboriginal tribes use the same word for *work* and *play* (Whitehouse & Wilkins, 1986, p. 157). Whitehouse and Wilkins (1986) summarize that instead of work being a path to something one's identity, "[many of today's primitive societies] pursue…the 'Zen road to affluence', based on the assumption that human needs are few and easily satisfied" (p. 156).

The examples are not limited to remote or primitive cultures; there are a number of periods in Western society where *leisure* instead of hard work held societal value. For instance, Ancient Greeks viewed leisure "like school, consider[ing] it a time for learning and cultivating oneself and passions" (Schulte, 2014, p. 51); Aristotle is commonly quoted, "we work to have leisure, on which happiness depends". From 4th century Rome to the peasants and the serfs of the Middle Ages, evidence shows that up to 50% of time was allocated to leisure (Schulte, 2014, p. 51-52). Later, in 18th-century peasant life in France, intense harvest work was interspersed with long periods of low activity or hibernation as a means to conserve energy and required resources, where work deliberately was limited to specific periods of time to address practical needs (Gladwell, 2008, p. 234-235). In the 20th century, Bertrand Russell (1932), concerned about the rising impersonal focus on productivity, defended leisure, asserting that it "contributed nearly the whole of what we call civilization. It cultivated the arts and discovered the sciences; it wrote the books, invented the philosophies, and refined social

relations…Without the leisure class, mankind would never have emerged from barbarism" (online).

Paradoxically, during the industrial revolution leisure co-existed with work ethic as a separate, privileged value. Sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1899/2013) describes the societal importance in leisure, writing that "the whole of the life of the gentleman of leisure is not spent before the eyes of the spectators who are to be impressed with that spectacle of honorific leisure which in the ideal scheme makes up his life" (p. 16). Veblen (1899/2013) continues "For some part of the time his life is perforce withdrawn from the public eye, and of this portion which is spent in private the gentleman of leisure should, for the sake of his good name, be able to give a convincing account" (p. 17). In other words, work ethic is a working class thing. For Veblen (1899/2013), "The men of the upper classes are not only exempt, but by prescriptive custom they are debarred, from all industrial occupations" (p. 3). These cultural and historical examples invite executive women to question why they need to work so hard and to explore whom the devoted worker ideal serves.

Cultural Ideals: In Closing

The literature presents two ideals central to executive women's lives. Being a self-determinate individual and a devoted worker reinforce a concept of an independent, Superwoman hero, reminding women that they are on their own to make it in the world. These cultural ideals tell executive women that having a good life is a reflection upon herself—who she is as a person is determined by how hard she works and what she achieves, and her work is never done. These ideals reinforce that executive women can have it all and do it all through hard work and effort, and imply that working hard is a moral requirement to earn the right to a good life.

Unfortunately, the "Have It All, Superwoman" message is fraught with issues for executive women pursuing the good life. First, having it all is likely an untenable goal; explains Ken Gergen (1991/2000), as "the promise of progress thrusts…[one] into a lifetime struggle toward a summit never to be attained, evoking in the end a sense of failure, or having been unable to realize 'what I could have been', 'should have

been', or 'wanted to be'" (p. 236). Second, the individualist view of self ignores the relational nature of executive women's lives, and constricts opportunities for broader resources and support. Third, pursuing a devoted worker ideal across all life roles creates an endless cycle of exhaustion. No women possess superpowers, and the sacrifice of doing it all on her own comes at the sake of her own health and well-being. Finally, Superwoman misses out on the important inquiry that challenges if doing it all is even possible, equitable, or appropriate for executive women to take on. Summarizes Dr. Melinda Rae-Anderson, who has done proprietary ethnographic research on generational attitudes, "the Gen X woman, in particular, was indoctrinated that 'she could do it all', but there was no accompanying infrastructure to support this. So, unfortunately, for so many of these woman, it is utter chaos in their lives as they try to keep it all in balance on their own" (personal conversation, June 6, 2016). As an elegant close, management professor Natasha Josefowitz's poem ponders this impact (Schaevitz, 1984, p. 1):

> SUPERWOMAN
> She is a perfect mother
> the model wife
> the best housekeeper
> the greatest cook
> the most available daughter
> the most effective worker
> the most helpful friend.
> She is wonderful at
> juggling home and career
> with a constant smile
> and an even disposition.
> She is everything
> to everyone.
> But who is *she*?

Message 3: Don't Be a Man

As more American women came into leadership roles in the 1980s and 1990s, it appeared that they held preferences and used styles very different from their male counterparts. They did not become male clones, and for many, they continued to hold simultaneous roles as homemakers, spouses, and community members. Scholars began to propose theories to explain the differences executive women displayed when performing their work. *Feminine Leadership: How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys* by Marilyn Loden (1985) was one of the first to put forth a new concept for feminine leadership, a model based on a collaborative operating style, preference for a team rather than hierarchical structure, an intuitive/rational problem solving style, and a persona characterized by a need for lower control, more empathy, and high performance standards (p. 63). Deborah Tannen's (1990) landmark book, *You Just Don't Understand*, outlined the different vantage point women and men take—namely women's focus on connectivity and men's focus on status—and explained how these opposing perspectives lead to vastly different ways of communicating (p. 26). In *Men are from Mars Women are from Venus,* John Gray (1992) popularized the notion of substantial, psychological differences inherent between women and men that explain gender behavior and beliefs. Rosabeth Kantar's (1977/1993) study in *Men and Women of the Corporation* showed one of women's disadvantage in the workplace is a result of her token status, resulting in stressful pressures that accompany differing access to power. For executive women in search of the good life, theories like these offered an alternative to the "Be a Man" strategy of assimilation. A new, guiding message began to emerge: "Don't Be a Man", be yourself.

The literature points to two main components making up a "Don't be a Man" message. First, women and men have different gender expectations. The literature presents mixed views as to where these gender differences come from; one tradition sees these expectations as rooted in biology, whereas another tradition sees them as being shaped by acculturation. No matter the source, gender expectations limit women's possibilities for a good life. In America, female gender expectations

situate women in a lower power position to men, limiting the ability for them to use their voice and engage in certain behaviors essential for success.

Second, the literature points to how gender expectations are non-negotiable. Society expects women to act a certain way because of their gender. Gender expectations accompany living and working as a woman, and any attempts to behave in manner different from gender expectations—not doing what women should do—more often than not results in social penalty.

For executive women, the implications of "Don't be a Man" create an impossible standard in a work environment where male gender expectations are the norm. The literature shows that when performing their executive roles, executive women are expected to simultaneously adhere to both female and male gender expectations, leaving them in a quandary. As a result, executive women do not have an effective script for success and advancement when creating their good life in social saturation.

Women and Men Have Different Gender Expectations

Women's unique preferences, styles, and strengths have been the topic of countless books and articles, and as previously discussed in "Be a Man", adhering to male preferences and styles has proven problematic for women. In the literature, there appears to be two competing schools of thought as to the reasons driving these differences in gender norms and expectations. On one hand, some literature attributes these differences to nature, as shown in "Be a Man". While critics argue these differences are based on a historical male bias in research (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 782-783; Acker, 1988, p. 12), science continues to identify gender differences in brain processing, chemistry, structure, and activity (Jantz, 2014, online). As recently reported in Stanford Medicine, "new technologies have generated a growing pile of evidence that there are inherent differences in how men's and women's brains are wired and how they work" (Goldman, 2017, online). On the other hand, some literature attributes gender differences to nurture, or the result of being shaped by one's culture. "Gender is so pervasive," writes sociologist

Judith Lorber (2007), "that in our society we assume it is bred into our genes" (p. 54). Yet, studies across cultures overwhelming conclude that gender preferences and behaviors are culturally dictated (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p. 24, 49).

Under a nurture view, executive leadership preferences and styles for women would be attributable to cultural influences rather than biology. But, nature appears to be winning the debate for executive women, where gender differences tend to be seen as an immutable destiny. I found only one study in the literature that ascribes culture and socialization to women's preferred leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990, p. 233). Instead, most of the literature appears to treat women's differences as inevitability and their problem to solve. As an illustration, in *The Atlantic* article (2014), "The Confidence Gap", prominent investigative journalists Katty Kay and Claire Shipmen went to great lengths describing how women are less confident, based on extensive review with academics and practitioners. To be fair, the authors did briefly acknowledge a potential role culture plays in women's confidence gap, offering a few examples of how socialization is different between genders. However, following a comprehensive examination of the problem, their proposed remedy was directed toward the woman's biological tendencies: "to become more confident, women need to stop thinking so much and just act" (Kay & Shipman, 2014, online). The authors advise, "Almost daily, new evidence emerges of just how much our brains can change over the course of our lives…If we keep at it, if we channel our talent for hard work, we can make our brains more confidence-prone. What the neuroscientists call *plasticity*, we call *hope*" (Kay & Shipman, 2014, online). This distinction is critical, because when biology is seen as the cause of differences between sexes, it tends to be used to justify further discrimination. Ethel Sloan (2002) explains, "If it is believed, for example, that one race or sex is genetically superior in intelligence than another, there is certainly nothing to be gained by providing equal educational opportunity to the inferior group (p. 161). Sloan concludes, "sex role stereotyping tends to further the notions of a natural male superiority…[and] thus limits the full potential of all human beings by freezing them into traditional behaviors and attitudes" (2002, p.

163). Bringing to light the differences in women's preferences and styles versus men, unfortunately, has not resulted in equalizing these different preferences and styles with men's. In many cases, they seemed to perpetuate the myth that gender differences are biologically based, justifying a secondary status for women.

Nurture offers an alternative explanation for gender differences. A key theory, called *gender acculturation*, explains how gender preferences are culturally dictated. Gender acculturation theory attributes women's behaviors and attitudes—including their executive leadership preferences and styles—to societal factors rather than biology. This theory views gender assignment happening at birth, when sexual genitalia specify an individual's category—male or female in the case of Western society; then, through naming, clothing, and other socialization events, distinct gender role expectations are conveyed (Lorber, 2007, p. 55). Writes Lorber (2007), "Individuals are born sexed…[but] they have to be taught to be masculine or feminine" (p. 57). Over time, these teaching and expectations become reified into the self, where "the social order…holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations" (Lorber, 2007, p. 58). Lorber (2007) explains that gender "is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life" (p. 54), concluding that "there is no essential femaleness or maleness, …[no] womanhood or manhood" (p. 58).

Seeing culture as the source of female gender differences, however, doesn't necessarily give these gender differences an equal power position either. Under gender acculturation theory, being "less powerful" appears intractable from the essence of female gender norms. Gender acculturation theory says that gender norms come out of a hierarchical categorization of societal tasks, where in most cases, different does not presume equal. Lorber (2007) explains that the societal expectations of gender help "human beings organize their lives" (p. 55) and create a "predictable division of labor, a designated allocation of scarce goods, [and an] assigned responsibility for children,…[through] common values and their systematic transmission to new members, legitimate[ion of] leadership,…and other symbolic production" (p. 55). Most significant, these categories of societal tasks must be clearly

demarcated, which is usually accompanied by status or power indicators. Lorber (2007) describes that "[because of the pervasiveness of gender as a way of structuring social life…gender statuses [must] be clearly differentiated…[I]t does not even matter if [men and women] do exactly the same thing. The social institution of gender insists only that what they do is *perceived* as different" (p. 58). As an example, ancient Greeks made a distinction between being a craftsman and someone who was doing handiwork—*craftsmanship*, largely done by men, was something done outside of the home under an elevated status, whereas *handiwork*, largely done by women, were crafts done at home and relegated to a lower status (Sennett, 2009, p. 23). Schulte (2014) notes that, "as soon as [human] survival became assured, the value of work of men and women diverged. Women did the uneventful, industrious and boring work…while men became associated with…high status activities that required prowess and intelligence...and were fun" (p. 38). Unfortunately, the process of creating different gender structures relegates women to a lower power position relative to men.

Culturally derived gender expectations also limit the acceptance of women's voice in an equal way with men, also contributing to women's lower power status. Classics professor Mary Beard (2017) describes the Ancient Greek and Roman stories of women being excluded from power, in particular by being prohibited from speaking publicly in an authoritative way, with few exceptions (p. 8; 13-16). She recounts a passage in the Odyssey where the "wet-behind-the-ears [son, Telemacus shuts up] the savvy, middle-aged Penelope" (Beard, 2017, p. 4), reminding her that speaking out to the group is a privilege reserved for men. These limits on women's voice carry over to contemporary America, with numerous recent examples of powerful women being hushed or scolded by their male colleagues when speaking out. Sallie Krawchek, current CEO at Ellevest, recounts a time she was told to "Sit down and shut up" by a male colleague while an executive at CitiBank (2017, online). During the 2014 Senate intelligence committee hearings for Jeff Sessions, Senator Kamala Harris was cut off twice by Senators John McCain and Richard Burr, and later described as "hysterical" by a political analyst, despite her taking a similar approach as her male

Democrat colleague in the questioning of Sessions (Stafford & LoBianco, 2017, online; Vales, 2017, online). Across multiple studies in both public service and business settings, Yale professor Victoria Brescoll found that high powered women have lower amounts of speaking time, similar to the level of lower powered men, as a response to the perception that speaking too much makes them appear incompetent and unsuitable for leadership (2011, p. 622). No one wants a "Chatty Cathy" sitting around the conference room table. But these same constraints don't exist for men; there is no "Chatty Charlie" male equivalent. On the contrary, men are seen as more powerful when they increase their speaking time, and high-powered men have been shown to be consistently more talkative (Brescoll, 2011, p. 622). Research from Lean In (2015) concurs, "When a woman asserts herself, she is often called 'aggressive,' 'ambitious,' or 'out for herself.' When a man does the same, he is seen as 'confident' and 'strong'." (p. 23). Similarly, a number of studies show the term "bossy" is more often used in a negative way to describe strong women rather than men (Sterbenz, 2014, online). Don't be a man causes executive women to navigate outdated gender norms as to how much their voice matters and should be heard in the workplace.

Gender norms also result in different standards for performance, as women must perform better than their male counterparts in order to be perceived as competent. Lean In's (2015) own literature review found that "Male performance is often overestimated compared with female performance, especially in domains traditionally dominated by men" (p. 23); they found that "[w]omen are given less credit for successful outcomes and blamed more for failure" (p. 24), and that "women are typically hired and promoted based on what they have already accomplished while men are hired and promoted based on their potential" (p. 23). A Pew Research Center study saw similar results, also concluding that women are being held to a higher standard in order to achieve leadership roles (2015, online). To be sure, women and men experience different norms and expectations because of their gender.

Gender Expectations are Non-Negotiable

When it comes to gender expectations, women are expected to stay in their lane. Even when women meet or exceed performance standards, because they are following male gender norms, they encounter bias and social penalty. Numerous studies show that women's success often results in them "being less liked and more personally derogated as compared with equivalently successful men" (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004, p. 426), also referred to as *likeability bias*. The research of psychology scholars Madeline Heilman, Aaron Wallen, Daniella Fuchs and Melinda Tamkins (2004) found that in being successful at male-dominated tasks, executive women "violate gender-stereotypic prescriptions [for being female]" (Heilman et al., 2004, p. 417). They identified frequent negative characterizations of successful women, sharing that "terms such as *bitch*, *ice queen*, *iron maiden*, and *dragon lady* are invoked to describe women who have successfully climbed the organizational ladder" (Heilman et al., 2004, p. 426). They point out, "With her ability to handle 'man's work' demonstrated, it would seem that a women would be no longer susceptible to gender biased evaluation, but this conclusion may be unwarranted" (Heilman et al., 2004, p. 416).

Entrenched gender expectations leave executive women toggling between conflicting messages about what are acceptable behaviors as leaders (Catalyst, 2007, p. 1), as they must perform their role as an executive under two sets of expectations: gender and executive. As Eagly and Johnson (1990) explain, performance and likeability biases against executive women can be attributed to the "spillover of gender roles…to organizational roles" (p. 235). Violating either norm can subject executive women to personal penalty. Sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) describe, "If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangement…If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account" (p. 146). Executive women are expected to comply with female gender rules when they perform executive roles, while managing the fact that female preferences and styles are less valued in the executive community. As Catalyst (2007) studies found, "As 'atypical leaders,' women are often

perceived as going against the norms of leadership or those of femininity" (p. 1).

These conflicting expectations create an impossible standard—a *double bind*—for executive women. A *double bind*, refers to "[the] psychological impasse created when contradictory demands are made of an individual...so that no matter which directive is followed, the response will be construed as incorrect" (Catalyst, 2007, p. 1). A recent Catalyst (2007) report finds executive that women are, "Caught between impossible choices, [and] those who try to conform to traditional—i.e., masculine—leadership behaviors are damned if they do, doomed if they don't" (p. 1). Work-life scholar Joan Williams describes this conflict, "Women have to chose between being liked but not respected, or respected but not liked" (Belkin, 2007, online). Heilman et al. (2004) concede, "[successful executive women] seem to be cast in a light that not only is negative but also antiethical [*sic*] to the traditional stereotype of women and conceptions of how they should be" (p. 417). They attribute this likeability bias as a key factor keeping women from being perceived as a suitable fit for senior executive management teams and from advancing to the top levels of organizations (Heilman, 2004, p. 426). Despite a stronger demonstrated performance, research shows that a significant portion of American society is still unwilling to hire or elect women leaders (Pew Center, 2015, online). As psychology professor Susan Clancy recently reported in *Forbes*, her research suggests that men seem to be fine with women in charge in the bedroom, but not so much so in the office (2014, online).

In Closing

Unable to extract gender prescriptions from executive role expectations, executive women are left in a quandary, "To be an executive, I am told I need to be like a man, but when I do, I am told I need to be more like a woman. But when I'm a woman, I'm not seen as able to do man things. So, what should I be, in order to be successful and have a good life as an executive woman?" To be deemed competent, executive women must be stronger and more skilled than their male counterparts; but in doing so, simultaneously fail at meeting the

requirements of being female. They are punished for being a man and punished for being a woman.

This double bind leaves executive women searching for a viable script for the good life. Explains Mary Gergen (2001), "the cultural repertoire of heroic stories requires different qualities for each gender" (p. 58), as, in the process of growing up, unlike boys, "Girls are not cut away from their mothers and…forced to reidentify themselves. They remain embedded in their relations and do not learn the solitary hero role" (Gergen, 2001, p. 58-59). The impact is stark for executives women, describes Mary Gergen (2001), as "Even when women are leaders…it is difficult for them to tell their personal narrative according to the forms that would be suitable to their male colleagues. They are in a cultural hiatus, with a paucity of stories to tell" (p. 58). Work performance norms become confused for executive women. As Mary Gergen (2001) describes, "The Woman is clearly a fragmented person from the start. She is a hermaphrodite, a member of the male elite in drag" (p. 155). In fairness, more recently, a few attempts have been made by prominent executive women to offer an alternative script, most notably books such as *Lean In* by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg (2014), *Beyond the Label: Women, Leadership and Success on Our Own Terms* by Former Chanel CEO Maureen Chiquet (2017), and *Own It: The Power of Women* at Work by Sallie Krawcheck (2017). Yet, despite encouragement, helpful suggestions, and resources for women, from my analysis stories like these appear to continue in the solitary hero tradition and put the brunt of the burden back on the individual woman. Executive women are still left without an effective narrative to help make sense in their lives. Mary Gergen (2001) concludes rhetorically: "How does one become when no strong story can be found?" (p. 58).

Message 4: Be Consistent

Executive women juggle multiple roles at work and home, and face dueling performance messages—be a man, don't be a man—as they look for success and a good life. Adding pressure to these challenges is the importance Western culture places on a self that is consistent and

coherent across the settings of life. As executive women perform across their many relations, they hear the message that the good life hinges on living, working, and being in a consistent and coherent way. Yet, as executive women navigate multiplicity, their lives are often anything but consistent and coherent.

The modern literature indicates that a consistent self is viewed as a psychological imperative. Modern psychology generally considers the self as made up of discrete parts, but in its ideal, is a unified whole. Thus, a consistent, coherent self is seen as a requirement for positive mental functioning and to meet the ideal of a self-determinate individual, as discussed in "Have It All, Superwoman". For William James (1890), the self is seen as multidimensional and encompasses all facets of one's life; he describes, "Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account" (p. 291). James (1890) divided the self into four components—the material self (things one acquires), the social self (how one is with others), the spiritual self (one's inner fixed dispositions as personality and values), and the pure ego (the unifier of personal identity) (p. 292-298, 323-333). Some dimensions of James' self is seen as firmly fixed and specific to the individual, while other dimensions are able to change over time. Most important, though, James argued for unity, considering one's self-presentation as motivated by the need for consistency, working against any fragmentation or contradiction between the various components of self (Goethals, 2004/2007, p. 17). James' view of self influenced the principles for contemporary psychology research, underscoring the importance of integration, coherence, and consistency in a healthy concept of self (Morf & Mischel, 2012, p. 22).

The modern literature overwhelmingly identifies the significance of the goal of integration. Influential psychology thought leader Carl Jung considered one's ultimate life goal should be integration of one's self (Boeree, 2006, p. 23). Jung (1959/1980) saw the collective unconscious as containing a set of common archetypes or myths where "unconscious is an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama [that gets acted out

in conflict]" (p. 7). As this inner drama played against a backdrop of an external world, Jung saw an inclination for the "development of a balanced self" (Coward, 1996, p. 484) where "balance between the inner [psyche] and outer [world]… were essential" (Coward, 1996, p. 484). For Jung, allowing the *self* archetype to emerge "represents the transcendence of all opposites, so that every aspect of…personality [can be] expressed equally" (Boeree, 2006, p. 23). Psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2012) put forth a self-determination theory, where identity is shaped by "the degree to which a person's multiple identities have been integrated to the person's self" (p. 227); they continue, "identity formation is a dynamic process…[that contains a] struggle between attaining the contingent approval that identities often bestow and finding a fit between those identities and one's true self [,] represent[ing] a central dialectical tension in development and in societies" (Ryan & Deci, 2012, p. 242).

Social psychology also considers integration and coherence as key to normal human functioning. Howard (2000) describes that social psychology sees self as two-fold, "that individuals define their identities along two dimensions: social, defined by membership in various social groups; and personal, the idiosyncratic attributes that distinguish an individual from others" (p. 369). The individualistic aspect interacts with the social aspects, where social groups and identities also serve personal goals, such as enabling a positive self-evaluation of one's personal abilities and accomplishments (Goethals, 2003/2007, p. 16). Identity is formed via cognitive shortcuts or *schemas,* defined as "abstract and organized packages of information…[that become] the cognitive version of identities" (Howard, 2012, p. 368). There are *self-schemas*, "includ[ing] organized knowledge about one's self" (Howard, 2012, 368), as well as *group schemas*, "includ[ing] organized information about social positions and stratification statuses, such as gender, race, age, or class" (Howard, 2000, p. 368).

Integration and coherence arise out of both self and group schemas, and serves "not just [as] perceptual phenomena…[but] as explanatory devices and justifications of social relationships" (Howard, 2000, p. 368, citing Tajfel, 1981). Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010)

use the term *complementarity*, which "indicates that an identity structure contains both complexity and compatibility; individuals distinguish among different facets of their identities but also generate linkages among those facets" (p. 275) and to ensure a positive identity, "individuals organize their identities in ways that emphasize more complementarity (rather than conflict)" (p. 275). William Swann and Michael Buhrmester (2012) assert that the "allure of coherence will lay bare a host of phenomena that have…remained rather baffling and mysterious" (p. 405) and that our striving for coherence—the need for self-consistency—drives the construction of one's identity (p. 405). Stets and Burke (2000) conclude, "people largely feel *good* about themselves when they associate with particular groups, typically feel *confident* about themselves when enacting particular roles, and generally feel 'real' or *authentic* when their person identities are realized" (p. 234).

   To achieve a coherent, integrated self, the literature views the psyche as motivated to maintain consistency. Lee Ross, Mark Lepper, and Andrew Ward (2010) explain, "Within Western cultures in particular, people place a value on cross-situational consistency, and while they acknowledge that they respond adaptively to changes…[they see themselves as consistent] and do not subscribe to the notion of socially situated identities" (p. 27). Ross et al. (2010) cite a multitude of research that shows individuals tend "to see themselves as coherent, consistent, and rational, despite behavioral evidence that seemingly challenges that view" (p. 26). For example, the popular theory of cognitive dissonance asserts that individuals seek to resolve the tension one feels in becoming "aware of an inconsistency either between two attitudes or between an attitude and a behavior" (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959, p. 203).

   To resolve this tension, the literature shows that individuals take a number of different steps to maintain consistency. For one, individuals tend to perceive new data in a way that aligns with their current viewpoints. As Ross et al. (2010) explain, they do so, "in a way that shields them from the need to acknowledge error, when such acknowledgement would be painful or dissonant…[T]hey see and interpret events through the prism of their needs and motives in a manner that similarly shields them" (p. 27). Individuals also "engage in selective

investment of ego", in that one tends to identify or attribute value to things they have been successful at, while disregarding things that have been sources of failure (Ross, Lepper, & Ward, 2010, p. 27). As another example, research shows that individuals are motivated to present themselves in a way that maintains consistency with their own perceived identities. Social psychologist Barry Schlenker offers that, "[s]elf-presentation scripts can be cued automatically by specific features of the audience and situation, and actors are often unaware of the extent to which their behavior is influenced by the social context and their own interpersonal goals" (p. 545). Schlenker (2012) continues, when individuals find themselves in situations that threaten their performance, various self-presentation activities—such as "accountability, avoidance strategies, accounting strategies, and apology strategies" (p. 559, citing Schlenker, Weigold, & Doherty, 1991)—are used to avoid inconsistencies. As social psychologists Shelley Taylor and Jonathon Brown (1988) describe, "accurate perceptions of the self, the world, and the future are [seen as] essential for mental health. Yet considerable research evidence suggests that overly positive self-evaluations, exaggerated perceptions of control or mastery, and unrealistic optimism are characteristic of normal human thought" (p. 193). Psychologist Anthony Greenwald (1980) summarizes that self is akin to a totalitarian regime—it purports itself as all-knowing and the cause of any positive outcomes, and engages in propaganda, including making up and altering history, to explain its behavior and achieve its goals (p. 603).

Cognitive and brain science explain that the brain works in a way that enables consistency. For many in these fields, the phenomenon of self and consciousness is treated as a continuous, rather than a fragmented, experience (Gallagher, 2000, p. 18). In order to create this continuous experience, the brain functions with a high degree of distortion that enables consistency. One might assume that all cognitive data management—from input to processing to action—must be unadulterated, working as a straightforward operating system (Smith, 2001, p. 284) in order to ensure the individual gathers external stimuli accurately (Damasio, 1999, p. 24-25); However, this isn't the case. As Nobel-winning scholar Daniel Kahneman (2002) points out, for higher

level cognitive functioning, the brain often adulterates data. He explains that the human brain takes shortcuts to manage the heavy load of data coming in, operating in two types of thought processes: the intuitive (fast) and the deliberate (slow) (Kahneman, 2002, p. 449). In particular, the intuitive, fast process relies on shortcuts that have been formed through previous experiences and beliefs. These shortcuts interact with perception and memory operations in the brain.

With perception, the source of sensory data is external; it is coming from a range of places largely out of control of the organism (Debono, 2004, p. 245). Thus, its processing within the brain— perception—implies some level of concurrent sense making, requiring preconceptions or beliefs to act as intermediaries (Smith, 2001, p. 286, 292). As Howard (2000) explains, "human cognitive capacities are limited..[thus] we process information as cognitive misers, streamlining information to manage the demands of everyday interaction...[and, because of] this need for cognitive efficiency, we categorize information before we engage in memory or inferential processes" (p. 368). According to these theories, perception isn't an objective, literal understanding of external data; it's a real-time, subjective interpretation.

Distortion also occurs with memory. While it is commonly believed that memories are stored "as is" in one place ready for retrieval later, research suggests that instead, memories are recoded or scattered in fragments across the brain. As Morf and Mischel share (2012), "memories and concepts, including those about the self, personality and other people, are *constructed rather than retrieved* [emphasis added]" (p. 32). Thus, like perception, memory is highly subjective. Biologist Elisabet Sahtouris (2000) concludes, "the more complex the nervous system became, the more it developed its own patterns to come between the incoming sensory pattern and the outgoing behavioral patterns" (p. 202) where "The connections…are no longer direct and the creatures' worldviews are determined as much or more by their nervous system and life histories than by the new patterns actually coming in from the outside" (p. 202). These prevailing theories on brain functioning help explain why consistency becomes such a powerful interlocutor.

The distorted functioning of perception and memory spills over into the formation of one's self over time. For many cognitive scientists, a preferred view of self is as an extended self, sometimes referred to as the *narrative self*, that is, "A more or less coherent self (or self-image) that is constituted with a past and a future in the various stories we and others tell about ourselves" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15). Under this perspective, scientists see that humans rely on language in the formation of self. Neurological processing of perceptual experiences gets translated into mental stories over time, and a number of narratives about oneself emerges in the brain, for instance, "I am a spouse, I am a parent, I am a teacher, I am a sports fanatic, etc." and as well as conclusions from stories one tells about oneself and from what others say (Gallagher, 2000, p. 19). Sense making is processed in dedicated parts of the brain, interpreting meaning to create narratives (Gallagher, 2000, p. 19). Gallagher (2000) describes that, "with language we begin to make our experience relatively coherent over extended time periods. We use words to tell stories, and in these stories we create what we call our selves" (p. 19). Coherence and consistency become important, as this interpretation includes both "autobiographical fact and inventive fiction to produce a personal narrative that enables the sense of a continuous self" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 19).

The implications to the formation of self are significant. Gallagher (2000) explains, "we cannot prevent ourselves from 'inventing' our selves. We are hardwired to become language users, and once we are caught up in the web of language and begin spinning our own stories, we are not totally in control of the product" (p. 19). However, this product may help generate one's sense of a good life. As Gallagher (2000) continues, "[Through coherent stories, w]e extended our biological boundaries to encompass a life of meaningful experience" (p. 19). The self in abstract then operates as what philosopher Dan Dennett (1988) calls a "center of gravity" which holds these narratives together (p. 1016). Dennett (1988) asserts that the unification of everyday experiences is a critical human need and as a result, humans in effect become novelists of their lives, writing a convenient fiction (p. 1016). Humphrey (2011) concurs, "the infant has somehow to *learn* to be a

single Ego. He has—literally—to self-organize the parts of his mind into a single whole" (p. 145) and "[this involvement] in the common project of creating your singular life…steer[s] *you*—body and soul—through the physical and social world…where your sub-selves come co-conscious through collaboration" (Humphrey, 2011, p. 146). Per the literature, creating a integrated, coherent, and consistent self contributes heavily to the sense of a good life.

The message of "Be Consistent" holds significant implications for executive women seeking the good life. First, it underscores a requirement to be integrated and coherent in one's life. Having a good life means demonstrating that one has managed to integrate the various aspects of one's self and come into a coherent whole. For executive women who hold contradictory roles—working in male-typified workplace as women, and maintaining female-typified roles at home—integration and coherence may be difficult to find both in their own internal self-reflection and what is externally displayed to others. Management and self-help seminars as well as the popular press tell them that an integrated, coherent self leads to a good life, yet in a life of intense multiplicity, integration and coherence can be difficult to find.

Second, women are expected to be consistent with pre-defined societal role expectations, as discussed in "Don't Be a Man". As a critic of modernism, Ken Gergen (2011) explains that if one does not deliver a "well-performed expression…what then is taking place in these instances is *a partial performance.* You are engaged in 'doing the emotion', but simply without using the full array of words and gestures that are common to public performance" (p. 106). This partial performance—as evaluated by the receiver—may be judged or rejected implicating new action (p. 106). As Gergen (2011) shares, "we recognize the performances in which we are engaged…[and by] publically labeling our actions in one way…[we] simultaneously [suppress] an alternative definition" (p. 82); he continues, while "You may shout your sincerity, but unless affirmed by another, the shout is no more important than an echo" (p. 106). In addition to these partial performances, other issues of self exist, such as, "*inauthentication by perfection*" and "*inauthentication by humanization*" (Gergen, 2011, p. 203-204). Gergen (1991/2000)

explains, on one hand, "persons of substance cease to be believable…[as w]hen 'in my personal opinion' is polished for public consumption, then it ceases to be personal; and if all is stylized there is nothing left over to count as 'personal'" (p. 205); on the other hand, "We wish to feel confident in contact with the person *behind* the mask…[but] natural habits of expressions are replaced with demands for effective performance" (p. 203), thus sometimes resulting in losing credibility with others.

Third, with a cultural value on consistency, executive women as subject to societal judgment about their commitment level to any one role. As Gergen (1991/2000) explains, "To display alternative investments is to become suspect in the eyes of one's comrades, and thus, to oneself" (p. 220). Thus, as part of effective performance, "One must compensate for all the alternative investments by demonstrating either how little they mean, or how central the cause is to one's life" (Gergen, 1991/2000, p. 220). The fragmentation of roles and relationships "brings into question the sincerity of any single commitment" (Gergen, 1991/2000, p. 225). Indeed, society seems skeptical that executive women can be effective at work and effective at home at the same time. For executive women in search of the good life, they are told they must unify the totality of their multiple roles and their own sense of who they are and how they act. Being and living consistently are treated as table stakes for achieving the good life.

Message 5: Never Mind, Opt-Out
As an alternative to a frenzied life managing multiple roles as executives, wives, mothers, daughters and community members, and the pressures in meeting the varied social requirements for a good life, there is a body of academic and popular literature supporting women who step away from work to focus on their family. Describe sociologists Arielle Kuperberg and Pamela Stone (2008), this American societal phenomenon—sometimes called neotraditionalism, the new momism, or the opt-out revolution (p. 498; p. 515)—refers to "heterosexual women…forsaking the contemporary role of working mother, which is

associated with economic independence, self-reliance, and self-actualization, to return to the more traditional, economically dependent role of full-time stay-at-home mom" (p. 498). These highly educated, opt-out women receive prominent, celebratory media coverage, and, according to Kuperberg and Stone (2008), "are fast becoming "a recognizable culture type" (p. 498) in America society. For executive women, an encouraging message emerges: "Never Mind, Opt-out".

Modern literature overwhelmingly advocates for executive women to opt-out, as holding multiple roles in work and home are presumed to be unnecessary and potentially harmful for women and their family. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Barnett and Hyde (2001) found that a great deal of modern literature treats gender as biologically determined and thus, for effective life functioning, considers it important for women to adhere to stereotypical gender norms. Under this stance, at best, this literature would say that there is no benefit for women to hold multiple roles. For instance, Waldron, Weiss, and Hughes (1998) theorized that for women, "employment and marriage provide similar resources (e.g., income and social support), and consequently, employment and marriage can substitute for each other in their beneficial effects on health" (p. 216). In concluding their longitudinal study, "As predicted, we found that employment had beneficial effects on health for unmarried women, but little or no effect for married women. Similarly, marriage had beneficial effects on health only for women who were not employed" (Waldron, Weiss, & Hughes, 1998, p. 216). Once executive women assume roles as wives, this science says, there is no longer any additional health or resource benefit to them holding a paid work role.

At worst, though, modern literature asserts that women who don't adhere to their biological destiny risk harm to themselves and their family. Despite a lack of hard evidence, this literature starts with the assumption that "multiple roles…[are] 'bad' for women…[and that] trying to manage both sets of demands [from the separate spheres of work and home] would inevitably lead to conflict" (Barnett, 2001, p.1184). Just *being* a working woman—setting aside any risk from role conflict—is deemed dangerous in this literature, as "deviations from 'natural' [gender role] behavior are likely to result in negative mental

health [and other] consequences" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 783). Executive women, in particular, appear to be prone to an array of psychological and physical "syndromes", a specific term that suggests a disease or medical condition. For instance, clinical psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes (1978) found that high achieving women often suffered from the *Imposter Syndrome*, or the internal feeling of not being up to par despite one's external success. This syndrome continues to be of concern today, as evident in education scholar Valerie Young's (2011) recent book, *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*. Young explains, "women find it so hard to recognize their own competence while men feel unacknowledged for their brilliance by others" (p. 48).

As another example, psychologists Graham Staines, Carol Tavris, and Toby Jayaratne (1974) identified a reluctance of executive women to support other women in order to protect their power, labeling this mental deficit as the *Queen Bee Syndrome*. In more recent years, numerous articles in prominent publications—such as the *Wall Street Journal's* "The Tyranny of the Queen Bee" (Drexler, 2013) and *Forbes'* "The Queen Bee's Sting Keeps Women From Getting To The Top" (Restauri, 2015)—perpetuate a seeming truth that executive women possess abnormal interpersonal abilities in a professional setting, describing that "successful women scheme and connive to keep all the corporate honey for themselves [and away from other women]" (Groskop, 2015, online). Scholars cite evidence of this syndrome's impact, for example, when interpreting results from a survey of American workers as "Women who work with one male superior report less distress and fewer physical symptoms compared to women who work with one female superior or in gender-mixed superordinate contexts" (Schieman & McMullen, 2008, p. 286). Other studies attribute the Queen Bee syndrome as a main cause for female underrepresentation at top leadership levels (Ellemers, van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004; Derks,Van Laar, Ellemers, & DeGroot, 2011). This perception, however, seems based in stereotype and bias, as opposed to data. Yet-to-be published research out of the Columbia Business School and University of Maryland's business school debunks the Queen Bee Syndrome, seeing it as an artifact of sexism, and attributes "'implicit quotas' in which companies feel pressure to add

women to their uppermost ranks to improve their public image" as the real culprit holding women back (McGregor, 2015, online). McGregor (2015) cites data that "women actually 'pay it forward' to the next generation even more than men do" (online).

As a final example of the unfortunate ails of executive women, there is the *Hurried Woman Syndrome*, identified by Obstetrics and Gynecology physician Brent Bost (2005). Working women in particular suffer from physical and emotional symptoms from "the 'avoidable' stress…that comes from busy, hectic schedules and lifestyle choices" (p. x). This chronic but preventable syndrome leads to "fatigue…mood swings…problems controlling weight…[and] a lack of interest in physical intimacy" (Bost, 2005, p. x). If executive women would just give up their penis envy and stay home, the literature like Bost's implies, they can avoid these unnecessary risks to one's physical and emotional well-being. (Important to note, in the literature, no parallel medical syndromes seemed to be identified for men violating male gender norms.)

Not only do executive women risk their own health by working, but the traditional literature also asserts that their families are negatively impacted. Influential radio talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger's (2009) book, *In Praise of Stay-at-Home Moms*, reflects this sentiment. Schlessinger "urges mothers to stay at home instead of juggle a career and motherhood" (Kung, 2009, online). Schlessinger idealizes the devoted mother who is home "whenever your kid is at home" (Kung, 2009, online), and balks at the idea that a stay-at-home dad can be a viable caregiver, saying "I recommend that during the first three years, the mom should be at home because all of the research shows that the person whose body you come out of and whose breast you suck at…really needs to be the mom" (Kung, 2009, online). She discounts the importance of executive women's income, instead favoring the benefits of more simple life and in nurturing others. She explains, "Women go from making seven-figure salaries to staying at home, and things just start to be less important" (Kung, 2009, online). Schlessinger continues, "What [executive women] need to do is find value elsewhere. I tell these women to look in their children's eyes. When you husband comes home, wrap your body around him at the door…it's not about the drudgery of

housework" (Kung, 2009, online). If executive women won't stay home for the sake of themselves, this body of literature argues, they need to do it for the sake of their families.

Unfortunately, the academic presumptions about working women spill over into everyday life, and the case for women to return home is being made strongly in American society. First, executive women are subjected to a narrative of a motherhood ideal; the good life as a woman means being a full-time mother. Kuperberg and Stone's (2008) examination of mainstream media (targeting male and female audiences) between 1988 and 2003 found a prevalence of "[opt-out] imagery…[that] focuses exclusively on women as mothers…and on family rather than work" (p. 503). The media also remind women about the perils of working while trying reach a motherhood ideal. Kuperberg and Stone (2008) found that contemporary women's magazines in particular highlight the risks of rejecting traditional motherhood, and were "increasing [the] number of negative articles about working mothers and child care options, including several day care horror stories" (p. 499). Williams et al. (2013) identify that "mothers find that maintaining full-time careers is morally and emotionally untenable, since they so dramatically violate the family devotion schema mandate that mothers' primary focus should be to care for their children" (p. 214). They continue, "the ability to live up to the work devotion schema is part of the elite men's gender privilege. Elite women who do so actually suffer workplace penalities…because they tend to be disliked on the grounds that they are bad mothers" (Williams et al., 2013, p. 214). American society celebrates the dedicated mother, and shames those who prioritize their careers in balance with motherhood.

Second, executive women hear they are in a position to make the choice to return home, avoiding any hint of anti-feminist rhetoric. Kuperberg and Stone (2008) found that the public argument to return home is not about sending women back home where they belong; rather, the argument is framed under the guise of being a woman's empowered choice and personal preference (p. 500). Absent in media coverage is the lack of support executive women encounter daily, in particular "workplace obstacles, including long work hours and inflexible

schedules" (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008, p. 504). Rather, media coverage emphasizes the decision to return home being driven by executive women's emotional "longing and regret" when leaving their children for the workplace (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008, p. 504). A highly popularized article, "The Opt-Out Revolution", by *New York Times* life and work columnist Lisa Belkin (2003) reflects this positioning. Her reporting— based on over 10,000 emails and conversations and by following a set of opt-out women for four years—found that "a surprising amount of talk is not about how the workplace is unfair to women, but about how the relationship between work and life is different for women than for men" (Belkin, 2003, online). She suggests that the demands of juggling work and motherhood inspire executive women to reevaluate the virility of their career ambitions; Belkin (2003) ponders, "Why don't women run the world? Maybe it's because they don't want to" (online). She cites two data points: first, a Catalyst study revealing that over a quarter of the women close to top leadership levels report they did not want to be promoted further, and second, the fact that 20% of members across two decades of "Forbes' 50 Most Powerful Women" list at some point left their executive jobs to spend more time with the family (Belkin, 2003, online). Belkin challenges those who dismiss biological differences between men and women. She counters that feminism is pressuring women to discount their maternal instinct for executive pursuits; instead, motherhood allows for a gracious exit from an unfulfilling role as an executive (Belkin, 2003, online). For Kuperberg and Stone (2008), articles like Belkin's are "promulgating a new feminine mystique" (p. 512). They explain the progressive appeal of an opt-out choice, noting that "thanks to feminist gains, college-educated elite women today appear to have more options than women of earlier eras and are now able to *choose* to stay at home, free of overt patriarchal power and subjugation" (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008, p. 512). Despite significant feminist gains in the last four decades, executive women hear a strong counter narrative to return home; indeed, America's historic cult of domesticity, introduced in Chapter 1, continues today.

   Most disconcerting is that America's cult of domesticity and the societal idealization of motherhood appear to be immune from the body

of literature and data that are in support of executive women and their multiple roles in life. First, the data are limited and call into doubt the revolutionary level of opting-out. On one hand, one body of data show a high degree of opting out. An analysis by Sylvia Hewlett and Carolyn Luce (2005) found that highly educated women are disproportionately absent in the workforce. Various surveys about the current work status of Stanford and Harvard MBA alumni showed that about a third or more of graduate women were not employed full-time, versus only about 5% of male graduates (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, online). They also report that "37% [of highly qualified women]…have left work voluntarily at some point in their careers [compared to 24% of men]. Among women who have children, that statistic rises to 43%" (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, online). On the other hand, another body of data shows very low levels of opting-out. A recent Pew Research Center analysis estimates that opt out moms only "make up 10% of all highly educated mothers [Master's degree or higher]" (Livingston, 2014, online). Kuperberg and Stone (2008) cited numerous studies showing steady trends of women's participation in the labor force, and moreover, the fact that highly educated women with children were more likely than other educated groups to be working (p. 509). Considering the conflicting bodies of data, Kuperberg and Stone's analysis concluded that "despite the [media] articles' trumpeting of trends, even revolution, the rates at which mothers are staying home (or opting out) remain fairly constant, showing a decrease across all women between 1988 and 2003" (2008, p. 510). These data suggest that the purported prevalence of executive women opting out may be due more media hype than actual mass exodus.

Second, very little research has been done among executive women who opted out (Stone, 2007, p. 2). Any positive interpretations of executive women's opt-out decision seem to be conjecture rather than a reflection of hard evidence. Kuperberg and Stone's (2008) media analysis found that while at the surface, most articles portrayed the opt-out woman in a highly positive light, Kuperberg and Stone's "close read…[concluded that] half [of the women featured expressed] either exclusively negative or mixed sentiments about having given up their jobs" (2008, p. 507). Moreover, they found that that opting out was not a

permanent choice, as "a significant number [of women] actually engaged in [other] paid employment and others [were] contemplating returning to it" (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008, p. 508). In a similar vein, Hewlett and Luce (2005) identified the average time of voluntary departure, what they call "off-ramping", to be relatively short—approximately 2.2 years overall and 1.2 years among in corporate sectors (online). They also identified a passion for work present among opt-out women, noting "Many of these women find deep pleasure in their chosen careers and want to reconnect with something they love" (online). Stone's (2007) separate research came to similar conclusions; she found that that opt-out women were not secretly traditional and less ambitious (p. 5-6). Rather, many opt-out women were previously "on the fast track [in their workplace]" (Stone, 2007, p. 6) and "were surprised to be there [as a stay-at-home mom]" (Stone, 2007, p. 5). Most significant, Stone (2007) found that while many women conveyed to their employer and others that their desire to spend more time with the family was the reason for leaving, this explanation did not reflect their true intentions (p. 6). She shares, "Telling a little white lie in favor of family was the expected, gender-consistent, and unquestioned rationale that provided safe cover, left the door open to future employment and/or favorable references, and maintained good relations with valued former colleagues" (Stone, 2007, p. 5). These data suggest that opt-out executive women are ambitious, love their work, and yes, may in fact still want to rule the world even despite being mothers and wives.

With a love of the work, the decision to opt-out appears to driven more by the lack of support executive women receive in managing their multiple roles. Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that among women highly qualified women who left the "fast lane", almost half cited family demands, versus 12% of men's hiatus, with the predominant reason for men's hiatus being a career change or pursuit of a degree (online). Thus, for executive women with family demands, it may be less about maternal calling and more about ineffective employer support.

While employer flexibility programs have frequently been offered as the solution to support executive women's family demands, research reveals their inadequacy. Williams et al. (2013) assert that employer

work flexibility programs may be widespread—with nearly 80% of employers offering some form of flexible hours and scheduling, job sharing, or part time roles—however, employee use of these programs is very low (p. 209). They found that "even in organizations that have made sustained, long-term efforts to endorse and support flexibility programs, these programs have not come close to dislodging the norm of the ideal worker who receives the backstage support of a stay-at-home wife" (Williams et al., 2013, p. 210). For those who utilize workplace flexibility programs, numerous studies demonstrate that cultural stigma and negative employment impact accompanies their use, including "career repercussions…wage penalties…lower performance evaluations…and fewer promotions" (Williams et al., 2013, p. 210). Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that over a third of women report "their organizations' cultures…effectively penalize people who take advantage of work-life policies" and over one-fifth agree that "there is an unspoken rule in my workplace that people who use these options will not be promoted" (online). Flexibility programs, as Stone (2007) describes, are often "dispensed as a privately-brokered special favor, often positioned as a reward, and often cloaked in implicit secrecy…Being in the closet heightened the whiff of stigma attached to them" (p. 8). Hewlett and Luce (2005) conclude, "In environments where flexible work arrangements are tacitly deemed illegitimate, many women would rather resign than request them" (online). For many executive women, opting-out appears to be the better of two dismal options.

Once executive women leave full-time employment—opting-out or off-ramping even if for a short period of time—they often find it difficult to return without encountering some financial or social penalty. Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that upon on-ramping—returning back to work after an off-ramping hiatus—women lose 20 to 30% of their earning power, rising to almost 40% for those who take three or more years off (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, online). Unfortunately, the key years for career development typically coincide with the key years for starting a family. While women start in the workforce at similar salaries as their male counterparts, by the time they are in their 40s, executive women's earning power is 71% of men's (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, online). It

appears that executive women's previous decision to opt-out or off-ramp stains their reputation as a devoted worker. As Williams et al. describe, "taking a career break definitely is [a problem], as [it] is signaling the inability or unwillingness in working long hours" (p. 214). Williams et al. (2013) see executive women particularly impacted:

> Professional women's status as ideal workers is likely to be considered suspect, or temporary, as long as they are, or intend to be, mothers…These women who take time off, or shorten or alter their work schedules to care for their families are likely to be viewed as good mothers but failed professionals who will inevitably succumb to the forces of external family control, making them unreliable professionals undeserving of their elite jobs (p. 224)

Stone (2007) shared how opt-out executive women "talked of a constellation of factors that involved marginalization, stigmatization, and career plateauing or mommy-tracking" (p. 6). Hewlett and Luce (2005) offer, "A vicious cycle emerges: As women's [perceived] ambition stall, they are perceived as less committed, they no longer get the best assignments, and this lowers their ambitions further" (online). Their research found "disappointment—and discouragement—of women …[who] feel that they are languishing and have not been given the opportunities or the recognition that would allow them to realize their full potential" (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, online). They conclude, "When women feel hemmed in by rigid policies or a glass ceiling, for example, they are much more likely to respond to the pull of the family" (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, online).

Particularly absent from the public conversation is the body of literature pointing to the benefits of women holding multiple roles, or at a minimum, to the need for further study. Barnett and Hyde (2001) found an abundance of literature that concludes, "multiple roles are not harmful and are beneficial for women and men as reflected in mental health, physical health, and relationship health" (p. 785). Moreover, they found dual roles of family and work did not diminish either role, pointing to

how their findings "contradict the functionalist assumption that work commitment and family commitment are negatively correlated" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 786). More study is warranted, however. Miscenko and Day's (2015) literature review identified that scholars still do not understand how multiple identities interact, are amalgamated, or evolve over time relative to each other (p. 236). Livingston and Judge (2008) found that guilt, one of the emotions sometimes chosen by psychologists as a proxy for multiple role conflict, "is assumed in the literature…but rarely investigated" (p. 212). Human Resource scholars Souha Ezzedeen and Kristen Ritchey (2008) examined the very limited literature on highly successful businesswomen. They highlight "Social support…[as] a critical variable in the experience of work-life conflict" (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008, p. 1109), but see even for dual-career couples who have created new strategies for managing role conflicts, generally, "husbands' [hold an] enduring upper hand in marriage…[and] women still assume the lion's share of these responsibilities" (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008, p. 1109). They acknowledge further study is needed, as "little is known about the factors outside of work that sustain or hinder [women's]…progress" (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008, p. 1107).

Unfortunately, the women and work literature asserts that public and workplace policy do not reflect social reality, leaving executive women without the social support to navigate their multiple roles and subjecting them to intense social pressure to opt-out. Williams et al. (2013) identify a significant "failure of the American workplace to successfully adapt to the realities of the American workforce" (p. 228). Barnett and Hyde (2001) find that, "research and policies based on assumptions that work and family are in conflict and multiple roles are primarily stressful are not in step with current data or with the contemporary state of work and family in the United States" (p. 793).

The path forward is unclear. As alternatives to the opt-out narrative executive women are subjected to, Barnett and Hyde (2001) "propose an expansionist theory that is based on the notion that multiple roles, in general, are beneficial" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 793). They offer that multiplicity can help increase opportunities for social interaction and support, realization of feelings of success, expanded

frames of references and deepening of one's sense of self (p. 787-788). They argue that personality or gender differences are small, and instead, propose that future research examine processes such as role quality, social support, gender ideology, workplace behaviors, and family behaviors as enablers of multiplicity (p. 793). Hewlett and Luce (2005) advocate for "an imaginative set of policies…[targeted on] eliminating the stigma that is often attached to…nonstandard work arrangements (online). Stone (2007) proposes policies "that promote career continuity, not interruption…[and] enable women to opt in, not out" (p. 9).

Beyond these suggestions, though, there does not appear to be a social movement demanding altered policy. Conclude Williams et al. (2013), "Rather than questioning…cultural truisms [of work devotion, personal responsibility, and gender identity], professional women driven out of the workplace accepted extreme time norms as legitimate…[due to] distorted perceptions…as people misunderstood the gendered and status-based nature of access to flexibility" (p. 228). Instead of addressing the systematic causes in institutional systems, "Never Mind, Opt-Out" is a convenient solution that puts the burden on the executive woman, and benefits those who espouse to the cult of domesticity, nostalgic for traditional gender role designations.

The Promise of Social Construction: Four New Messages for Executive Women

In the search for clues on how executive women can find a good life in a world of social saturation, the modernist self and identity literature, as well as the women and work literature, come up short. In thinking about the tens of millions of executive women in the U.S., the findings from the literature review thus far deeply troubled me. Executive women face a double bind of expectations—a contradictory "be a man, don't be a man" message—limiting their ability to be seen as effective and making it near impossible to reach the top ranks of their profession. As a result of not following their biological destiny as a woman, society sees them at risk for an array of emotional and physical medical syndromes, and subjects them to social penalties when they deviate from

feminine or motherhood ideals. Furthermore, a vast majority of executive women deal with the heavy demands of multiple roles without equitable workplace and home support systems. While progressive scholars have proclaimed that public policy, the media, and societal sentiment are out of step with executive women's wants and contemporary workplace needs, the literature is sparse in offering specific solutions that are life giving for executive women. For executive women, the dominant good life proposal appears to be a binary choice: either suck it up, or if you can't handle it, opt out.

As an executive woman, I found this individualist, problem-oriented and in some instances, misogynist, literature discouraging. Having been introduced to social construction a number of years ago, I was curious if its relational stance may be more useful to executive women in search of the good life. As the third part of my literature review, I chose to examine social constructionist perspectives on self and identity. Through this review, I uncovered four messages that offer new, more life-giving potential for executive women: *1.) Co-create Your Good Life, 2.) Focus on Your Relations, 3.) Language is Your Friend,* and *4.) Thrive in Inconsistency and Multiplicity*. Before reviewing each of these messages, a brief introduction to social construction is warranted.

What is Social Construction?

Social construction is a way of seeing the world where truth and reality are treated as subjective and contextually based, as opposed to a modern view that treats truth and reality as *a priori,* objective, and absolute. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) introduce the idea that one's reality is developed out of an ongoing, lifelong socialization process. Berger and Luckmann (1967) reject notions of predetermined reality or scientific truth, and rather, they view "what is real" as a byproduct of the acculturation process that all humans encounter in life. For social constructionists, everything one knows as real is seen as culturally and relationally derived.

Understanding Berger and Luckmann's acculturation process is important for executive women, as it challenges the source of entrenched

societal beliefs and practices that impede their ability to find a good life. With social constructionism, there is no biological or gender destiny for executive women to be bound to; rather, gender expectations are a result of acculturation. Acculturation begins at birth with *habitualization*, or the acquisition of ideal behavioral patterns as conveyed and reinforced by others. Berger and Luckmann (1967) assert that "All human activity is subject to habitualization" (p. 53), as habitualization has survival benefits, "carr[ying] with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed" (p. 53). Out of the traditions of habitualization, institutions—religion, education, government, science, business, and gender, just to name a few—are born. These institutions, as Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain, "control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct [called 'roles']" (p. 55). Describe Berger and Luckmann (1967), "*All* institutionalized conduct involves roles. Thus roles share in the controlling character of institutionalization. As soon as actors are typified as role performers, their conduct is…susceptible to enforcement…and ceases to be optional…The roles *represent* the institutional order" (p. 74). Individuals perform the roles in compliance with expectations and by doing so, this role becomes embodied as normal and real; *reification* occurs as one takes for granted what one must do, it is, and *legitimation* and *maintenance* transforms one's role performance(s) in perpetuating one's reality, where an individual "can reassure himself that he is living 'correctly'" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 100). Language is also a key facilitator of the acculturation process. As Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe, "symbolism and symbolic language become essential constituents of the reality of everyday life and of the commensurate apprehension of this reality" (p. 40-41). Per Berger and Luckmann, executive women's lives can be seen as series of relational performances.

Berger and Luckmann's theory helps explain why it has been so difficult for executive women to break away from traditional expectations when they perform societal roles, and why these gender expectations still linger in American society, despite many waves of feminist and other progressive movements. Most notably, while social norms across institutions wield tremendous staying power, executive women and their

relational network are unknowing accomplices in perpetuating institutional power. Explains Kessler-Harris (2007), "socialization and culture influence perceptions of roles so that they appear to be inevitable and unchangeable" (p. 98).

This postmodern perspective offers new possibilities for executive women's own agency in resetting how they interact with work, home, and others. But that is not enough. Whereas individual efforts and outside movements create pressure on institutions, Berger and Luckmann's theory requires a large-scale movement from *within* the institution in order to alter its role expectations and performance norms. As social construction thought leader Diana Whitney (1998) concludes, "Organizations are social constructions—repetitive patterns of communication and story telling" (p. 315) and to change this institution means changing "the nature and quality of participation and interaction among the many organization stakeholders. It is to change who talks to whom" (p. 314). It changes the very nature of societal performance scripts. With this perspective, social construction offers four new, life-giving messages for executive women looking to create a good life in a world of social saturation.

Social Construction Message 1: Co-Create Your Good Life

Social construction suggests that executive women co-create the good life as they go along in relational exchange with others. It rejects the notion that the good life is an entity in its own right, out there to be discovered and attained. While countless books and articles have attempted to put forth a recipe for the good life, social construction principles keep the meaning of a good life open, subject to ongoing construction, and changeable over time and circumstance. Ken Gergen (2009) explains, "what we take to be in the world importantly depends on how we approach it and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part" (p. 2). Truth and reality are dependent on these social relations, as Ken and Mary Gergen (2008) point out, as "There is no 'Truth for all' but rather truth within the community" (p. 71). Social construction asserts that reality is "no longer…a singular fact of nature but [is] multiple and socially

constructed" (Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995, p. 8). The good life is a localized, relational, co-construction.

Social construction views components often associated with an American good life—for instance, displaying work ethic, finding one's calling or meaning through work, one's work identity, responsibility, doing it all, and gender fulfillment—as temporal concepts that are socially situated. Therefore, under social construction, executive women have no expectations or requirements to meet for their good life. In a world where executive women experience the pressures to be either superwoman or opt out, social construction offers that executive women need not be constricted to following a fixed performance script or in endless pursuit of an ideal. Executive women—through coordination and exchange with others—can craft their own script without apology or abandon. Moreover, executive women can benefit from the perspective of context; as executive women encounter tension and conflict as they buck institutional norms, they can consider it not as feedback indicating something wrong they are doing or some personal failing, but rather as merely institutional reaction to its power and authority being challenged. Social construction helps executive women make sense out of their lives.

Social Construction Message 2: Focus on Your Relations

To co-create a good life, social construction encourages executive women to focus their relations. Whereas modernist literature encourages executive women to look inward and "find themselves", social constructionists critique the ideal of a self-determinate, independent, individual. They offer an alternative view of an unbounded self, brought to life through relations. Explains Ken Gergen (2011), Western tradition "is grounded in the reality of the mind…[which creates] the reality of bounded being" (p. 61), and under this view, "we are fundamentally isolated in that 'my private world is unavailable to you' [and vise versa]" (p. 6). For a bounded being, Gergen (2011) continues, "primary value [is] on the self and its development" (p. 51).

In contrast, social construction considers self as relationally defined. As Ken Gergen (1991/2000) describes, "Relationships make possible the concept of the self. Previous possessions of the individual

self—autobiography, emotions, and morality—become possessions of relationships. We appear to stand alone, but we are manifestations of relatedness" (p. 170). Howard (2000) explains that social construction "does not do away with selves and identities" (p. 387), but rather *situates* selves and identities in context of one's interactions with others. Anthropologist and ethnographer Heewon Chang (2008), describes self as an "interactive agent" (p. 15) and a "group-oriented concept by which self is always connected with others" (p. 13). Similarly, communication scholar Zizi Papacharissi (2012) sees self as "the intersecting node where many relations meet...[and where t]he vantage point shifts, no longer focusing on the individual as the fundamental atom of social life, but on the relations as defining the complexion of the individual self" (p. 834). John Shotter (1985), one of the early thought leaders of social construction, shares the importance of this context, as "in our attempts to understand ourselves we have been somewhat blind…to the fact that in our everyday lives we are embedded within a social order…As a result, we have concentrated far too much attention upon the isolated individual" (p. 177). Shotter (1985) continues that we are missing the opportunity "to attribute sufficient significance to the second-person standpoint in life, the standpoint in which the meanings for first-person actors are perceived and understood as such" (p. 177). He rejects the pursuit or use of theories or models of self and instead, claims that self is simply "a scientific concept devised for scientific purposes…[and in] our attempts to understand ourselves, we have ignored the function of the second persons who are 'in contact' with us in a way in which third persons are not" (Shotter, 1985, p. 181). For Shotter (1997), the pursuit of self-knowledge and self-actualization is simply another relational form; he write, "the 'things' supposedly in our 'inner' lives are not to be found within us as individuals, but 'in' the momentary relational spaces occurring between ourselves and an other or otherness in our surroundings" (p. 9). Ken Gergen (2011) concludes, "There is no me and I separate from the world" (p. 133), rather "The word 'I'…[is] a relational achievement" (p. 133). A shift away from an individualist paradigm toward a relational paradigm allows executive women to reframe how to go about creating a good life as they go along with others.

With social construction, because the self is not associated with human biological functioning or the inner psyche—indeed, there is no "me" available for mechanistic dissection—self-knowledge and self-determination are no longer useful tools for executive women to find their good life. Notably, for social constructionists, what Western tradition would call self-examination or self-knowledge would instead be considered a relational endeavor. Social construction sees the inner reflection and thoughts as a relational exchange; even in one's most private and solo moments, one is in continual relational dialogue, always in "a process of relating" (Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995, p. 4). Ken Gergen (2011) offers that inner dialogue, self-reflection, and other mental activity are where "[one is] engaged in a relational action simply carried out in private" (p. 106). Social psychologist Edward Sampson illustrates that this private dialogue is still dialogue even if not an in-person exchange, explaining the inner dialogue can be had with "*imagined* others, including characters from our own past as well as from cultural narratives; *historical* others; and the *generalized* other [of assumptions and traditions]" (p. 106). Ken Gergen (2011) writes, "[i]n all that we say and do, we manifest conditions of relationship. In what ever we think, remember, create, and feel—in all that is meaningful to us—we participate in relationship" (p. 133). For executive women, shifting from view of a bounded, individualistic self toward a self that is relationally created may offer new perspectives in their pursuit of the good life. Executive women are not "out there on their own" to make their way in their world, but are part of a vibrant, living, relational community essential to the formation of themselves and a good life. Executive women can look outward for support.

Social Construction Message 3: Language is Your Friend

Social construction offers language as an important resource for executive women. Describing the significance of language, Berger and Luckman (1967) note how "language is capable of 'making present' a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally, and socially absent from the 'here and now…[and] through language an entire world can be actualized at any moment. [It has a] transcending and integrating power"

(p. 39). Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2005) assert that "Language is not the result of one's individual reality; rather language constructs one's subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific" (p. 961).

Language serves as the relational glue in the construction of one's reality. Ken Gergen (2009) explains, "meaning lies not within the private mind, but in the process of relating…[where] meaning is forever subject to the next turn in the conversation" (p. 98). Language helps bring alternative perspective for executive women navigating gender-based headwinds in the pursuit of their good life. Mary Gergen (2001) offers, "Reconstituting the body as socially constructed does not, however, deconstruct the possibility of its sexed or gendered nature…[as o]ne does not give up one's notion and practices of gender entirely. Rather, one recognizes oneself as 'put' into a position within a culturally-contrived frame" (p. 37). She continues, "Understanding one's past, interpreting one's actions, and evaluating future possibilities—each is filtered through these stories. Events make sense as they are placed in the proper story form [rather than the other way around]" (Gergen, 2001, p. 59).

Language, therefore, can help alter the direction of one's reality, as one's stories about herself can be both understood and rewritten; stories can help *maintain* role performance, and they can alter them as well, impacting one's reality. Executive women can challenge or rewrite their own stories that are less useful to them. Mary Gergen (20010 describes that women can "learn how to 'know' themselves, how to make themselves intelligible to others, and how to act [through stories]" (Gergen, 2001, p. 74). To be sure, stories do not recount one truth, but rather, each story produces it own contextualized truth (Gergen, 2001, p. 74), thus a story contains the *potential* for a new truth about one's self. Moreover, if there is not a story out there, executive women can claim one as their own. Language provides executive women with a flexible and valuable resource when creating a good life in a world of social saturation.

Social Construction Message 4: Thrive in Inconsistency and Multiplicity

Social construction extends an invitation for executive women to be inconsistent and thrive in the multiplicity of their life roles. Inconsistency is seen as normal in a world of social saturation. Ryan and Deci (2012) describe, "multiple identities are a salient feature of [times]…and [a]lthough identity struggles may have always existed in human groups, the fluidity and commodification of identities in the modern age leave individuals with a formidable task of selecting and engaging multiple identities" (p. 241). Gergen (1991/2000) explains, as "the process of social saturation is producing a profound change in our ways of understanding the self" (p. 6) including "a general loss in our assumptions of true and knowable selves…[and a]s we absorb multiple voices, we find that each 'truth' is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives" (p. 16).

In response, Gergen (1991/2000) extends an invitation to *incoherence* (p. 173), noting David Miller's vision of a "*new polytheism*…a matter of the radical experience of equally real, but mutually exclusive aspects of the self. Personal identity cannot seem to be fixed…The person experiences himself as many selves, each…with a life of its own" (p. 249, citing Miller, 1974). Rather than requiring each of these many selves to integrate into a coherent entity, Gergen (1991/2000) suggests to remove the burden of coherence and a "committed identity" (p. 73). His approach legitimizes each of the selves to engage together, providing "an open slate…on which persons may inscribe, erase, and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding, and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits" (p. 228). Gergen (2011) offers that the burden of coherence can be replaced by "synchrony in action" (p. 164), continuing that, "For the multi-being, coherence and integration may be valued, but only within particular relationships. Celebrated [instead] are the myriad potentials for effective co-action across a broad and disparate field of relationships" (p. 137). Papacharissi (2012) concludes, "A mutable self…emerges—a self that evolves beyond the fixity of the self as object to the liquidity of self as process" (p. 834).

Out of incoherence comes a concept of wholeness. Social construction suggests wholeness—without a requirement for consistency or coherence—as a possible concept in executive women's pursuit of a good life. Writes Whitney (2004), the new era "brings with it the realization that we are one planet…[and w]ith the help of technology we have discovered, as if for the first time, something that has always been and will always be: global connectivity and wholeness" (p. 126). Whitney (2006) describes that, "Organizations are still suffering under the modern fiction of fragmentation, functionalism, and division of labor" (p. 22). As an alternative to coherency, Whitney (2004) puts forth the idea of "narrative wholeness [such as that brought about by Appreciative Inquiry]" (p. 127) as an organizing principle. Says Whitney (2006), "With this sense of wholeness and connectedness comes a deep reverence for relationships…at the center of social organization" (p. 22). One's identities, sense of self, and life instead can be treated as relational, pluralistic, socially constructed and renewing (Whitney, 2001, p. 619-626).

In Closing

The four life-giving messages found in the social construction literature hold promise for executive women in search of the good life in a world of social saturation. They suggest to executive women to co-create your good life, focus on your relations, language is your friend and thrive in inconsistency and multiplicity. A social construction perspective may also be useful to support executive women's leadership in organizations, teams and as employees working in a world of social saturation. Traditional aspects of management theory—leadership, organizational design, and career management—can be viewed through a postmodern lens. Human resource scholar Joe Raelin (2011) proposes leadership as "a process of influence...that one person may help others see their potential to actualize their own agency" (p. 199); this view shifts from individual control to the idea of *mutual control* (p. 200), where leaders "serv[e] as agents of change [for their followers]" (p. 202). In terms of organizational design, top-down imposed job descriptions can be tossed aside in favor of an employee-defined scope of work. For instance,

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) suggest the idea of *job crafting,* or workers defining their own job, where "job boundaries, the meaning of work, and work identities are not fully determined by formal job requirements…[but instead, i]ndividuals have latitude to define and enact the job" (p. 179). This allows for changes over time or circumstance in response to changing worker needs, even within an occupation (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 184). In terms of career progression, psychology scholars Michael Litano and Debra Major (in press) propose organizations consider a "whole life" approach that allows for mobility within one organization while being flexible to a worker's changing needs over the course of her career. Similarly, Baruch and Cohen (2007) offer that because of the nature of organizations and careers, "the role of the organization as identity creator and the major recipient of commitment would appear less prominent that it was in the past" (p. 241) and suggest the broader term "professional identity…[as] one of the possible substitutes for organizational identity" (p. 241). The concept of a professional identity also allows for the range of different performances of gender, and factors in non-work aspects if appropriate. As Alvesson et al. (2008) summarize, postmodern work identity is more about "becoming, rather than being" (p. 15). Postmodern approaches like these generate new possibilities for success as executive leaders leading relational lives.

Summary and Implications for the Dissertation Research

Modernist self and identity literature, coupled with women and work literature, suggest that executive women live and work in a surround sound of five messages that guide them in their pursuit of the good life: 1.) *Be a Man; 2.) Have It All, Superwoman; 3.) Don't Be a Man; 4.) Be Consistent; 5.) Never Mind, Opt-out*. A visual presentation of these messages is found in Figure 2.2 on the next page. In the three-ring circus of executive women's lives, these messages are proclaimed boldly from the marquee. Unfortunately, not only are many of these messages contradictory, but also, each message limits the ability for executive women to create a good life.

Figure 2.2 **Summary: Good Life Messages from the Marquee**
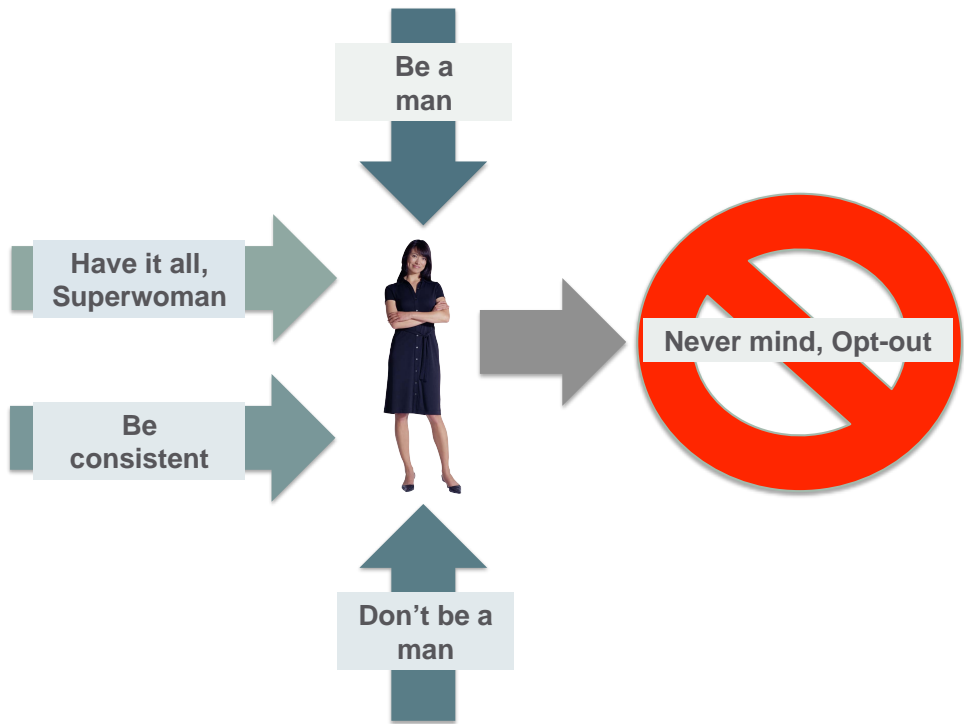
These messages reveal a number of disappointments in the study of executive women and offer little guidance in designing the dissertation research. First, limited study has been done among executive women; there is little to draw upon as a researcher. Except for the celebration of women who opted-out, few executive women stories are available in the academic and popular press. Second, most of the literature has taken a traditional viewpoint, reinforcing women's gender destiny and treating women's pursuit of multiple roles as "bad". This perspective tends to reinforce gender bias and ignores the realities of social saturation that executive women and their colleagues and families must deal with today. Third, most of the literature adheres to an individualist stance and neglects the relational life executive women operate in. This paradigm limits the resources and solutions executive women can access. Finally, the literature considers the good life as a set of seemingly non-negotiable

truths: e.g., work provides identity, meaning, and purpose to life; female fulfillment comes through womanly duties in the home; the need for consistency and coherence makes multiplicity untenable; and "you are on your own" to make it in the world. Absolutes like these box in executive women's potential and options for a good life.

Alternatively, the promise of social construction found in its literature generates four new, life-giving messages for executive women: *1.) Co-create Your Good Life, 2.) Focus on Your Relations, 3.) Language is Your Friend,* and *4.) Thrive in Inconsistency and Multiplicity.* Executive women's good life can shift from "what is" or "what must be" instead to "what's possible" and "what is suitable" for living in a world of social saturation. Executive women can move from what Ken Gergen (1991/2000) describes as a romanticist ideal of "having a calling" or a modernist "functional conception of a career" and rather consider the whole "multiplicity of potentials" (p. 183). Executive women can be inspired by Howard's assertion that one's identity no longer is a "stable core of self…[but becomes] a strategic, positional concept…that are points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (2000, p. 386, citing Hall & Du Gay, 1996). Executive women can embrace social saturation rather than attempt to thwart social saturation, where they and their communities can "'see people as a whole'" and "recognize that both our everyday lives and the larger cultures in which we operate shape our senses of who we are and what we could become" (Howard, 2000, p. 388). Indeed, the promise of social construction sets the stage for new voices and new perspectives that can be useful to executive women living and working in a relationally demanding world.

Through the course of the literature review, I realized that I spent most of my life suffering through the impact of the five modern messages as I managed social saturation across work, home, and personal roles. I listened to and applied these messages, and it hasn't worked. However, the four social construction messages enlivened me. I believe they hold promise for me, my colleagues, and other executive women, and warrant further exploration through this dissertation research. Ken Gergen (2014) sees research as holding "future forming potential" (p. 287) writing that,

"Given a valued vision of the possible, the challenge for research would be to explore how such a possibility could be realized. The aim of research would not be to illuminate *what is*, but to create *what is to become*" (p. 294). In thinking about how executive women can make a good life, I got curious as to what practices go along with these four social construction messages—in effect, how do we "do" these four messages—in order to help create what is to become for executive women. The social construction literature influenced me to refine my research question to: **What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation?** This dissertation will proceed under a social construction stance and embrace the four social construction messages as guidance in the research.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology:
Autoethnography

In considering how best to approach my research question—*What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation?*—I identified four criteria for selecting my research methodology. First and foremost, the method must take a relational stance. Living in a world of social saturation means interacting in relationally demanding, interdependent world. The method must treat executive women as part of a relational system, rather than as bounded individuals. Second, the method must be able to handle an examination of multiplicity—the many roles, relations, and conversations that executive women engage in every day—rather than be limited to just one or two facets of executive women's lives. Third, executive women's context must be accounted for, as opposed to controlled for, in the study design. As presented in Chapter 1, social saturation introduces salient and perplexing issues in executive women's search for a good life, thus considering its context is a crucial part of the research. Finally, the method must seek to produce something useful for executive women. This research needs to go beyond identifying problems, lamenting the sorry state of public and employer policy, and proclaiming the need for new theoretical frameworks. This research needs to be practical and provide executive women like me with something we can actually *do* as we interact with others in our lives.

In considering how best to approach my research, I found that most traditional research methods fell short in meeting these four criteria. I rejected quantitative methods immediately, as they seek to control, rather than account for, context (Creswell, 2014, p. 12-13, 155-166). Qualitative ethnographic approaches, on the other hand, seemed viable as they enabled a broader, contextual examination required by my research question (Creswell, 2014, p. 14), producing what Geertz (1973/2000) calls a "thick description" (p. 5) of social life. In determining how I might

go about ethnography with executive women, I also wondered how my own two decades of experience as an executive woman could be leveraged to help answer the research question—it seemed a shame to set that all aside. In skimming through various handbooks of research, I stumbled upon a chapter entitled, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity" by Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (2000). Intrigued, I began to learn more. It soon became clear that autoethnography was going to propel my dissertation. What follows is a brief introduction to autoethnography, then a discussion of how autoethnography meets the four criteria needed to address the research question: *1.) Take a relational stance, 2.) Handle multiplicity, 3.) Account for context,* and *4.) Be useful.* The chapter continues with a review of the areas scholars should be accountable for when using autoethnography. It concludes with a brief summary and discussion on implications for study design.

Introducing Autoethnography

The specific term *autoethnography,* first used in the 1970s by anthropologist David Hayano, originally referred to a research strategy of studying one's own culture or people from the vantage point of an insider (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Since then, social scientists across varied disciplines have deployed a range of insider-inclusive research practices, techniques, and forms under the umbrella term of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739-740; Chang, 2008, p. 43-46). In considering my research question, I found three definitions helpful in bringing dimension to the concept of autoethnography. Narrative thought leader Carolyn Ellis (2004) considers autoethnography as "a research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (p. xix). For qualitative expert Andrew Sparkes (2000), autoethnography is seen as "highly personalized accounts that draw upon the [author's] experiences…for the purposes of extending sociological understanding" (p. 21). Educational anthropologist Heewon Chang (2008) defines autoethnography as a type of social scientific inquiry that "utilizes the

researchers' autobiographical data to analyze and interpret… assumptions" (p. 9).

The literature suggests that the many variations of autoethnography share two commonalities: First, autoethnography is presented in a first person voice; and second, it uses writing as the mode of inquiry. A first person voice—where the researcher is the speaker—is essential to autoethnography. Autoethnography anchors in the researcher's ability to "self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 742). Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain that while writing in the third person "gives weight to abstract and categorical knowledge" (p. 734), it often lacks the persuasive power found by writing in the first person (p. 734). They offer that personal narratives can bring forth voice and authority by celebrating, rather than ignoring, the inherent researcher relationship that is present (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 735-736). Qualitative scholar Sarah Wall (2006) concurs, "If a researcher's voice is omitted from the text, the writing is reduced to a mere summary and interpretation of the works of others" (p. 3). As such, thought leaders Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2005) encourage "putting yourself into your text and putting your text into the literatures and traditions of social science" (p. 974). The use of "I" enables relevance in the research. Autoethnographer Teresa Muncey (2005) concludes with a reminder, "When people are buried within the hazy world of the randomized controlled trial, distance seems to protect us from the grim reality of their lives" (p. 10). A first person voice is fundamental when using autoethnography as a method.

Second, autoethnography uses writing as the primary means for conducting research. In "Writing: A Method of Inquiry", Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) view the process of writing as central to sense making. Calling this *nomadic inquiry*, they share how writing enables quality research, as "a great part of that inquiry is accomplished in the writing because…writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled *method* of discovery" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967). Chang (2008) describes that the process of

autoethnography centers on written texts about oneself, called *self-narratives* (p. 33-34), which link the self and the social (p. 46). These self-narratives follow the ancient human tradition of storytelling, and can vary in genre, tone, topic, and style of writing used (Chang, 2008, p, 31, 35-41). In support of the writing, Muncey (2005) offers that autoethnography can incorporate visual and physical objects such as photos, drawings, and artifacts (p. 10). No matter the approach, emphasis is placed on writing in an engaging way. For instance, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) dedicate a portion of their chapter to describing practice exercises to help improve one's writing. They note the importance of an engaging style "as a bulwark against the censorious voice of science" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 974). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) recommend that autoethnographers "using facets of storytelling…and alterations of authorial voice" (online) to bring to life the cultural data. The written self-narratives can be incorporated in a variety of ways in research. They can be used as autobiographical data against which further analysis is done, and they can function as data interpretation and analysis (Chang, 2008, p. 31). They can also become the research end product, such as the chapter referenced earlier about autoethnography by Ellis and Bochner (2000) or the seminal memoir by Arthur Bochner (2008), *Coming into Narrative*. In these instances, the research is presented in totality as an autoethnographic story, with any literature review, academic citations, and findings woven in. The fluidity in the meaning and use of autoethnography provides a researcher with great flexibility in pursuit of her research goals.

Research Criterion 1: Take a Relational Stance

As a key requirement for the dissertation research, the chosen method must take a relational stance. Living in a world of social saturation means interacting in relationally demanding, interdependent world. As such, the method must treat executive women as part of a relational system, rather than as bounded individuals. As presented in Chapter 2, this dissertation takes a social construction worldview, and in accordance with its relational philosophy, it is important to ensure the

chosen method embodies social construction's major premise: reality is created through the relational action between people. This relational stance gives way to many forms and methods of study. Social construction thought leaders Shelia McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking (2012) explain that the social construction paradigm enables researchers to use a variety of approaches in research (p. 63), and rather than needing to follow prescribed rules, it is the social construction assumptions themselves that "guide the questions we [as researchers] ask, how we try to answer them, what we count as fact, what we recognize as rigor, [and] the language tools we employ" (p. 64).

Autoethnography embraces a relational stance, as it examines the self as socially embedded and as a construct of a community of relations. McNamee (2014) describes that, in relational research, "the 'thing' (or entity) we are examining is the interactive processes of people in relation with each other and their environments" (p. 74), seeking to understand the "relational processes that *construct* our worlds" (p. 74-75). Chang's description of autoethnography illustrates how it follows McNamee's guidance. For Chang (2008), autoethnography is inherently relational, where self is studied as a "web of self and others" (p. 65). Chang (2008) describes, "At the end of a thorough self-examination in its cultural context, autoethnographers hope to gain a cultural understanding of self and others directly and indirectly connected to self" (p. 49). Garance Marechal (2009) shares the significance of relational life, describing autoethnography as "reflexive investigation…[of] a group to which one belongs…[as well as] the narrator's subjective experience" (p. 43). To be sure, Ellingson and Ellis (2008) position autoethnography as a relational, "constructionist project" (p. 445). While self may be prominent in the method, the larger social reality emerges from the self-narrative process. The use of autoethnography for this dissertation allows me to take a relational stance, as my relational self becomes the focus of inquiry, with the goal of fostering relational knowledge creation.

Autoethnography is also uniquely poised to examine inner relational life. While other qualitative methods can allow for the study of self or seek out self-reflexivity, they are restricted to data the subject shares outwardly with the researcher. What intrigued me the most about

autoethnography is how it allows for an examination of one's inner self, a perspective not typically available in more traditional qualitative research. Autoethnography can examine self-dialogue, self-reflection, and other mental activity—inner performances, or what Ken Gergen (2011) calls "relational action simply carried out in private" (p. 106)—more so than if the researcher and participant are different people. In autoethnography, the data generated and examined is as unfiltered as possible, as it is in direct exchange with the researcher herself. Autoethnography also allows me to leverage my inner performances as someone "in the know" in the execution of the research. My duality as both a member of the executive woman community and the social constructionist research community—as a businesswoman and an academic—can benefit the research process.

Research Criterion 2: Handle Multiplicity

The chosen research method must be able to handle an examination of multiplicity—the many roles, relations, and conversations that executive women engage in every day. In considering the research goal—to identify relational practices that executive women can use—I am curious about language, that is, the stories women hear and tell about the good life, the way women talk to each other and with their many relations, and even how they converse within themselves. As McNamee (2014) describes, "language is seen as constructing reality. What we do together actually *makes* our social worlds" (p. 74). Because of the consequential role of language in autoethnography, it is well positioned to handle multiplicity. As Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) describe, language is seen "as a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the Self" (p. 960) where "writing is validated as a method of knowing" (p. 962).

Language allows researchers to examine how relationships are done, as writing self-narratives requires the researcher to position herself in the context of others. While at the surface it may seem that self-narratives focus on a singular self, this is not the case—autoethnography requires interaction between the self and others. Chang (2008) describes

how autoethnography treats the self as "an extension of community rather than…an independent, self-sufficient being" (p. 26), and thus, self-narratives contain the "self but not self alone" (p. 33) as "Others [in the family, local and national communities]…enter self-narratives as persons intimately and remotely connected to self" (p. 33). For Chang (2008), writing self-narratives includes "investigating yourself as a main character and others as supporting actors in your life story" or "includ[ing] others as co-participants or co-informants in your study" (p. 65). As Chang asserts, autoethnography relies on "Others personally or conceptually connected to self".

Ellis and Bochner's (2000) chapter, mentioned earlier, illustrates Chang's point. In this chapter, conversational exchange and correspondence is brought forth, e.g., between Ellis and Bochner; between Ellis and a student and published academic writings; between Bocher and the student's doctoral committee; between Bochner, an audience and a facilitator; etc. Different life roles that Ellis plays—as researcher and lecturer, as co-author, as student advisor, as wife, as person concerned about her own health and not getting cancer, etc.—are included, reflecting the multiplicity in her life. In addition, the conversation topics are not limited to one domain. For example, as part of an engaging story, Ellis and Bochner's converse about the chapter topic but also about their own relationship as husband and wife in an authentic way that makes the story more plausible, for example, Ellis asks Bochner, "How's everything at home? Are the dogs okay?" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 733). In her conversation with Sylvia, the Ph.D. student who is researching the impact of cancer, Ellis' inner dialogue about her own health concerns enhances the value of the text, "But I do self-examinations every month, I argue back from inside my head" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737). Autoethnography allows for a rich and varied examination of the multiple roles and conversations executive women have across their relational lives.

Multiplicity can be complex to address in research. Living in multiplicity in a world of social saturation is messy; there are so many roles, relationships and conversations that executive women engage in. Autoethnographic data collection is suited to address this complexity. In

autoethnographic research, personal memory serves a "building block", as it "taps into the wealth of information...as textual data" (Chang, 2008, p. 71-72). Chang (2008) advocates for a number of devices to "build the database for…cultural analysis and interpretation" (p. 72), including chronicling, inventorying, and visualizing data (p. 72). These devices can be using a timeline or time cycle, taking stock and cataloging around a particular theme, or creating an image such as an organized kinship tree, a map, or a representative free drawing (Chang, 2008, p. 72-87). Ellis sees an iterative writing approach as a means to explore the many layers of life, describing, "I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737). She continues, "Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). She advises her Ph.D. student "Why don't you start by writing a draft of your story. Think of it as making retrospective field notes on your life…I find it helpful to organize my writing chronologically first, using the main events to structure the tale. I try to write daily, rereading what I wrote the day before, then filling in new memories" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). Through its data collection techniques, autoethnography acknowledges the complexity of life, allowing for multiplicity to be examined.

The complexities found in examining multiplicity can also be addressed in autoethnography's use of symbolic language. McNamee and Hosking (2012) describe the richness of language and how its embodied meaning can be examined "in many forms other than conceptual language…and includes the constructions and use of artifacts together with other bodies, sentient or not" (p. 67). In autoethnography, data collection is not limited to the written word; language and meaning are also studied via objects and visual arrangements. Muncey (2005) evaluated four different approaches to using objects: the use of the snapshot, the metaphor, the journey, and the artifact (p. 1). She shares:

> These snapshots, metaphors, artifacts, and journeys
> makeup a patchwork of feelings, experiences,

> emotions, and behaviors that portray a more complete view of my life. They are useful in constructing a meaningful whole that is consistent and coherent to contribute a truth to a world that needs to hear it. (Muncey, 2005, p. 10)

Similarly, Chang (2008) favors the use of cultural trigger objects such as important sayings or key value statements, rituals and celebrations, or physical artifacts (p. 76-81), as well as the use of maps, pictures, or collages (p. 81-88). By incorporating objects into the autoethnography, the ability to handle multiplicity is enhanced.

Research Criterion 3: Account for Context

As presented in Chapter 1, social saturation introduces perplexing issues in executive women's search for a good life. What they know and what they believe as real are by-products of their social interactions. As Harlene Anderson (2012) explains, knowledge is "always context bound and developed and influenced by the background of dominant discourses and narratives in which it is embedded" (p. 11). To uncover relational practices that create a good life, executive women's context must be accounted for, as opposed to controlled for, in the study design.

The literature describes how autoethnography examines knowledge and meaning within a social context. For the autoethnographer, context matters, and through her research she seeks to make sense of her local reality through an examination of her own experiences. Ellingson and Ellis (2008) describe that autoethnography is a "study of culture of which one is a part, integrated with one's relational and inward experiences" (p. 448) and being a "space in which an individual's passion can bridge individual and collective experiences to enable richness…[and] complexity of understanding" (p. 448). For them, autoethnography "points to the self as embedded in cultural meaning" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 454). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) describe how autoethnographic writing "honor[s] the location of self" (p. 965) and becomes a "method of inquiry [that] coheres with the

development of ethical selves engaged in social action" (p. 959). In the very premise of autoethnography is context.

Seeking localized meaning is a fundamental goal of autoethnography research. Ellis and Bochner (2000) see autoethnography as less about recounting the "*facts* of what happened…but instead convey[ing] the *meanings*…attached in the experience" (p. 751). Chang (2008) agrees, "I expect the stories of autoethnographers to be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context" (p. 46). In particular, she describes how quality autoethnography should not "overemphas[ize]… narration…[over] analysis and cultural [or social] interpretation" (Chang, 2008, p. 54) and instead, should prioritize the understanding behind the story. Chang (2008) reinforces the need to focus on context, writing that "the methodological focus on self is sometimes misconstrued as a license to dig deeper in personal experiences without digging wider in the cultural context of the individual stories comingled with others" (p. 54). She warns autoethnographers, "self-indulgent introspection is likely to produce a self-exposing story but not autoethnography" (Chang, 2008, p. 54). Similarly, Ellingson and Ellis (2008) note the vital role of context, as "Autoethnography intentionally blurs the lines between self and others, between the author's particular experiences and the universality of those same experiences…[and through the connections made when examining this local knowledge]" (p. 456). Due to the autoethnographer's insider stance, insights and practices that come forth in the research are naturally relevant because they emerged from that particular local reality. Autoethnography allows for the context of social saturation of executive women to be accounted for, as I examine my socially embedded self.

Research Criterion 4: Be Useful

As a final research criterion, the method must seek to produce something useful for executive women. As shown in the literature review, existing research has not offered many viable solutions useful for executive women in search of a good life living in a world of social saturation: the options appear to be "suck it up" or opt-out. At best, a

small body of literature has identified a number of problems executive women face, lamented the sorry state of public and employer policy, and proclaimed the need for new theoretical frameworks. Among executive women, there is a significant need for useful, practical knowledge that can be applied as they interact with others in their lives. In choosing a methodology, I find it important to consider McNamee's (2014) challenge to researchers, "In what ways is this inquiry useful?" (p. 93).

The literature shows that autoethnography holds the potential to result in something useful for executive women. According to Richardson (2000), quality autoethnography is able to "express a reality" (p. 254) in a way that makes a "substantive contribution…in our understanding of social-life…[and with a] deeply grounded human-world understanding and perspective" (p. 254). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) assert that in order to be considered of quality, autoethnography should make a substantive contribution to communal understanding and successfully generate new practices or action (p. 964). Ellingson and Ellis (2008) also sees the potential for new, useful knowledge coming out of the research, viewing autoethnography as a "social constructionist approach that enables critical reflection on taken-for-granted aspects of society, groups, relationships, and the self" (p. 448). As Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) eloquently share, "[autoethnography is] humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, and bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings" (p. 964).

The research conditions of autoethnography—how the socially embedded self engages in the research process—also suggests that autoethnography holds the potential for a generative, useful outcome. As McNamee (2010) explains, research itself can be considered a relational performance. She writes, "as we engage with each other in inquiry, we not only create a sense of who we are but also a sense of what is valued. We create—we perform *together*—a world, a lived reality" (McNamee, 2010, p. 15). She offers, "what counts as evidence…[is] the [recognized] creation of new forms of understanding that allow people…to move beyond identified problems" (McNamee, 2014, p. 88). In particular, autoethnography honors the critical perspective and potential contribution

that "being in the know" offers. Bochner explains, as he describes the importance of family and caregivers being included as part of the study about aging, "They occupy a unique, dynamic, holistic, and engaged perspective…[and] their private lives are deeply affected…As storyteller and autoethnographers, they have as much, if not more, to teach us about the concrete, every day details associated with aging as do scholars of aging" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 760-761).

In addition, the flexible nature of autoethnography study design allows for adjustments along the way to ensure useful outcomes can be achieved in the research. Chang (2008) identifies that "autoethnographic research design defies a rigid and linear model" (p. 61) describing that, for example, "Research steps often overlap and mix…even after a research focus is set, it is possible for the focus to be modified and refined while the data are being collected; collected data are used to validate the research focus or alter your research direction" (p. 61). This flexible approach, describes Chang (2008), "allows the research focus to be sharpened, relevant data to be collected, and in-depth interpretation be applied along the way" (p. 62). Autoethnography follows McNamee and Hosking's (2012) recommendation for "minimal structures and improvisation [that are favored over design and method]" (p. 68). It also adheres to Bodiford and Camargo-Borges (2014) suggestion that "researchers hold plans lightly and are flexible and attentive to change" (p. 6) adopting a "curious stance…[that] creates spaces for new conversation, new possibilities, and therefore, new actions" (p. 7). The research conditions found in autoethnography hold the potential to be useful to executive women seeking to create a good life in a world of social saturation.

Accountability When Using Autoethnography

The previous discussion establishes how autoethnography is suited to address my dissertation research question across four key criteria: *1.) Take a relational stance, 2.) Handle multiplicity, 3.) Account for context,* and *4.) Be useful*. In addition to choosing an appropriate method, researchers must also adhere to academic standards when

performing research. Scholars employing positivist, empirical paradigms often challenge the use of autoethnography, particularly regarding differences in requirements for objectivity, validity, and reliability in study design. While these requirements may not apply to autoethnography, the literature suggests there is a number of areas autoethnographers should be held accountable for when using autoethnography as a research method. In this section, I explain these differences and present crucial factors autoethnographers are accountable for when doing research.

From Objectivity to Researcher Entanglement

The requirement for objectivity is rooted in the worldview of its research community. Traditional, empirically based, positivist paradigms see reality and truth as *a priori* and absolute. This worldview holds the "ontological notion…that realities exist outside the mind" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10) and that "meaning exists in objects independently of any consciousness" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Because reality is believed to exist independent of others, positivist scholars seek to uncover reality without contaminating it. Creswell (2014) explains that with traditional paradigms, "Data, evidence, and rational consideration shape knowledge" (p. 7) and through "the accepted approach [called the scientific method]…a researcher begins with a theory, collects data that either supports or refutes the theory, and then makes necessary revisions and conducts additional tests" (p. 7). Given this view, objectivity becomes a key requirement in study design.

Objectivity translates into two considerations in study design. First, the study design must seek to minimize entanglement between the researcher and study participant. It situates the researcher in a privileged position relative to the participant, where the participant is "subjected" to being studied by an authoritative expert. A researcher's relation or emotion with the participant, as well as any introduction of his own personal views, is seen as an impediment to gathering and assessing evidence in a value-free way. Advises Creswell (2014), "Being objective is an essential aspect of competent inquiry" (p. 8); he writes, "*Avoid going native*. It is easy to support and embrace the perspectives of

participants in the study" (p. 99). Second, traditional study designs favor laboratory conditions, so that control over the stated variables can be managed and studied. Introducing additional factors or variables in an inconsistent way can bias the data, thus interfering with the ability to analyze results (Creswell, 2014, p. 176).

Performing research under a social construction paradigm—as I am doing in this dissertation via autoethnography—holds no requirement for objectivity. As Creswell (2014) explains, "in planning a study, researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions…and the specific...procedures of research that is related to this worldview" (p. 5). Different from positivists, social constructionists consider reality and truth as relationally constructed and context-bound, as discussed in the literature review. Social constructionists reject the requirement for objectivity, as it violates their relational, contextual view of reality. McNamee (2014) critiques the positivist goal of research to "produce knowledge, facts, and evidence about the world *as it is*" (p.75). She sees limits in trying to create theories that generalize, categorize, and predict a future world, in effect, "*discovering* how the world is" (p. 75). As McNamee (2010) points out, "There is not value-free space from which to stand" (p. 17).

Social constructionists hold no requirement for distance between the researcher and subject. Ellingson and Ellis (2008) explain, "Claiming objectivity does not make it so but rather signifies the power and authority of a person or group to assert their particular perspective over that of other persons or groups" (p. 452). In particular with autoethnography, the researcher-subject entanglement is celebrated and leveraged as a methodological strength. The autoethnographic self serves as the quintessential co-researcher, what Ellis and Bochner (2000) call the "vulnerable observer" (p. 752), playing the roles of the participant and researcher in a relationship together. The co-creative, relational stance of the researcher and participant helps support the gathering, analyzing, and creating of contextually bound knowledge. Moreover, the autoethnographer's own experience contributes to the ongoing construction of relational knowledge, as discussed earlier. In my research, this entanglement allows me to as the researcher to examine

executive women's relational processes in the context of social saturation. My insider stance also increases the potential for the research to result in a useful outcome for executive women, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Thus, under a social construction paradigm, any attempts to build objectivity into the study design constrict the ability to realize the useful and generative benefit of research. Objectivity is an impossible and inappropriate feat in autoethnography.

From Validity to Credible Accounts

Positivist researchers seek validity, or assurances that the sampled data and associated findings accurately represent reality, often using statistical measures as proof. Validity becomes an important requirement to ensure the research method and instruments measure what they were supposed to measure and are predictive to the question at hand (Creswell, 2014, p. 160). Social constructionists also seek data and findings that reflect reality, but do so under the premise there is no reality "out there" the data needs to represent. In social construction research, validity is replaced by the need to ensure credible accounts of socially situated knowledge and meaning (McNamee, 2010, p. 17). Ellis and Bochner (2000) discuss validity using the term *verisimilitude*, "To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 751).

Autoethnographers are held accountable to ensure their self-narratives reflect local reality via credible accounts. To ensure credible accounts, according to Chang (2008), self-narratives should be based on one or both of the two main sources of data in autoethnography: one's past and one's present (p. 71). The main source of past data is typically personal memory, defined as the "systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737). Chang (2008) describes how "the past gives context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past" (p. 71). For data on the present, self-observation and self-reflection are typical sources (Chang, 2008, p. 89). The assembling and writing of self-narratives also require adhering to the notion of credible accounts. Richardson (2000) expects that the

researcher hold herself "accountable to the standards of knowing and telling…[and is] a credible account" (p. 254) where the research product contains "a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience" (p. 254). For Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), quality autoethnography means the autoethnographer provides a "credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the 'real'" (p. 964) as well as works in relation with herself via being "both a producer and a product of [the research]…[with] adequate self-awareness and self-exposure" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964).

The nature of autoethnography poses a risk in being able to create credible accounts of local knowledge. The potential for bias is introduced, as the self-narratives are written from the autoethnographer's point of view. Ellis and Bochner (2000) remind that the autoethnographer's "narrative is always a *story* about the past and not the past itself" (p. 745). Chang (2008) agrees, explaining that autoethnographers bring their own "cultural baggage" (p. 63) to the research table; she writes, "Memory is not always a friend to autoethnography; it is sometimes a foe. It often reveals partial truth and is sometimes unreliable and unpredictable" (p. 72). In autoethnography expert Jin Young Shin's recent article, she discusses the "crisis of position as an insider and outsider" when using autoethnography (2018, p. 7). She describes that despite the value of autoethnography, it is important to recognize that "It does not mean the 'story' is real because of the characteristics of memory that reflect an event, and the language of the researcher cannot exactly represent how the event was or has been lived" (p. 9). The research conditions of autoethnography introduce inherent bias when attempting to create credible accounts.

This literature suggests that employing critical reflexivity can help manage this potential bias and should be used by autoethnographers to help ensure the research reflects a credible account. Critical reflexivity's use as a research practice is not limited to autoethnography (Creswell, 2014, p. 186), but it certainly plays a central role in autoethnography. Critical reflexivity can be conceptualized as "the attempt to place one's premises into question, to suspend the 'obvious', to listen to alternative framing of reality, and to grapple with the

comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints" (Gergen, 2009, p. 12). Ellis and Bochner (2000) offer, "[the] dual identities of academic and personal selves" (p. 740) require the autoethnographer to use her "own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on [the] self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). They recommend autoethnographers consider not only their "experiences and interactions …but ideally use all of their senses, their bodies, movement, feeling, and their whole being (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741). Richardson (2000) proposes some questions the autoethnographer can ask of herself to assess critical reflexivity: "How did the author come to write about this text?...How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text?...Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?" (p. 254). Critical reflexivity helps autoethnographers produce credible accounts in research.

In addition, to help generate credible accounts, autoethnographers can also include co-researchers or co-participants in their study design. Social construction embraces the use of co-researchers, viewing research as a "collaborative endeavor...[with] a movement of the researcher-as-expert to the researcher-as-offering-expertise…[and] a shift from researcher and subjects toward research co-designers and co-participants" (Bodiford & Camargo-Borges, 2014, p. 6). As part of autoethnography data collection strategies, Chang (2008) suggests that interviewing others can be helpful "to stimulate your memory, to fill gaps in information, to gather new information about you and other topics, to validate your personal data, and to gain others' perspectives on you" (p. 106). In the Ellis and Bochner (2000) chapter, Ellis' student advisee and aspiring autoethnographer appears to serve as one of Ellis' co-researchers, helping Ellis elicit the misperceptions when using autoethnography in an academic setting. In addition, the collaborative contributions from both researchers, Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, strengthen the substantive value in the chapter, as evident through their conversational exchange. While the use of autoethnography can introduce bias, the use of critical reflexivity and ensuring cultural context is taken into account can help mitigate bias in research. Incorporating additional participants as co-

researchers can also be an effective strategy that autoethnographers can use to ensure they produce credible accounts.

From Reliability to Resonance

Finally, in considering *reliability,* positivist research depends on study results that are repeatable and projectable, as this criterion allows the establishment of generalizable theories. Therefore, these studies are designed using fixed protocols to ensure other scientists can replicate them (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). In addition, for quantitative studies, statistics verify that findings in the studied sample can be applied to a wider group not studied, and for qualitative studies, attention is paid to narrowing the data examined as well as coding standards (Creswell, 2014, p. 195, 203).

Under a social construction paradigm, reliability is not an expectation for research. Constructionists recognize that contextually bound knowledge and meaning may not be transferable to other communities. In lieu of reliability, social construction research prioritizes local knowledge and meaning making, with the aim to be useful and generative. McNamee (2010) suggests that questions such as "for whom is this information/knowledge useful?...[and] how will this information/knowledge help this community 'go on together'" (p. 17) are better suited. Autoethnography aligns with McNamee's view, seeking to be useful and to contribute in a substantive way, per Richardson (2000, and Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) as established earlier.

In the literature, the notion of resonance appears to accompany how autoethnography can result in something useful and substantive. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) suggest the need for autoethnographers to produce "accessible texts…[which try to] reach wider and more diverse mass audiences" (online). As Ellis and Bochner (2000) share,

> Our lives are particular, but they also are typical and generalizable, since we all participate in a limited number of cultures and institutions. We want to convey both in our stories. A story 's generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about

> their experience or about the lives of others they know. Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives. (p. 751)

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that quality autoethnography resonate, in that it should contain "'naturalistic generalization'…[or a sense] that it brings 'felt' news from one world to another and provides opportunities for the reader to have vicarious experience of the things told" (p. 751). Richardson (2000) uses the term *aesthetic merit*, noting the importance that autoethnography is "artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring" (p. 254). She proposes assessing the resonance of a piece of autoethnography by answering, "Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Generate new questions?...Move me to action?" (Richardson, 2000, p. 254). As an illustration of what resonant autoethnography results in, Wall (2008) shares feedback about her autoethnographic research from a trusted mentor:

> What a gift. This is not what I am supposed to be reading right now, but I could not turn away from it and it helps me in more ways that I can explain…It is your story and you told it so beautifully. It is the [counter-narrative] that we all need to hear so much more of and by its telling, you highlight so many "accepted stories" about every kind of child that need to be challenged and questioned because they are stereotypes that parents have to struggle against in a cookie-cutter world. (p. 46)

The literature suggests that creative analytical practices can help autoethnography resonate, thereby resulting in something useful and substantive. Richardson (2000) notes that the "use of creative analytical practices open[s] up the text [and] invite[s] interpretive responses" (p. 254). Among the literature, the suggested creative analytical practices seem to involve some form of border or boundary crossing, implying Janusian thinking, a term put forth by creativity expert Albert Rothenberg. Janusian thinking is "the capacity to conceive and utilize two or more opposite or contradictory ideas…simultaneously"

(Rothenberg, 1971, p. 195). McNamee and Hosking (2012) encourage the researcher to be open to "multiple and perhaps contradictory themes rather than expecting or looking for a singular theme[,]…[seeking to understand] how [meaning is made,]…how that meaning constructs us[,]…[and how language maintains power relations]" (p. 78). Chang (2008) identifies the value of "border-crossing experiences" (p. 74) or those "'fish-out-of-water' sensation[s]…[from e]xtraordinary events…[that] disrupt daily routines and challenge familiar values, which can lead to a new level of understanding of self and others" (p. 74). Ellingson and Ellis (2008) focus on the dissolution of dichotomies. They describe how dichotomies "present as opposites…are actually interdependent" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 447) and this interdependency can be useful in understanding the multiple nature of our relational life (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 459). For them, high impact autoethnography "makes connections between seemingly polar opposites…operat[ing] as a bridge…in order to study the intersection of self and others, self and culture" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 446). Ellis and Bochner (2000) call for an *evocative narrative* (p. 744) that "fractures the boundaries that normally separate…[and] repositions the reader as a coparticipant in dialogue...activat[ing] subjectivity and compel[ling] emotional response" (p. 744). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) discuss the importance of addressing divides, and that within autoethnographic writing, some of these divides can include, for example, a "challenge [to the] grounds of authority…experimenting with different writing formats,…[and] locating oneself in multiple discourses simultaneously (p. 965). Finding new patterns within the data seems to increase the resonance, usefulness, and substantive impact of autoethnography.

General Research Standards

      As a final consideration, autoethnographers are held accountable for general research standards, including ethics. First, general academic standards require solid research administration (Creswell, 2014, p. 99-101). Scientific rigor calls for an *a priori* research plan (Creswell, 2014, p. 78-80). While autoethnography allow for study design modifications

along the way as established earlier, having a plan in place prior to research is still important. Chang (2008) describes that autoethnography "takes careful planning like any other research design" (p. 61), including the "why" or purpose of the research, the "what" specifically about the topic, and the "how" data will be collected, analyzed and reported upon (p. 61). Good organization, record keeping and maintenance are also commonly understood requirements.

Second, general research standards call for ethical considerations to remain paramount when designing and conducting studies (Creswell, 2014, p. 92-95). In autoethnography, confidentiality still applies despite the fact that the researcher provides her own stories. However, ensuring confidentiality may be difficult as the stories of others are woven into one's own stories. Says Chang (2008), "Since autoethnographer's personal stories are often linked to stories of others, no matter how explicit the linkage is, the principle of protecting confidentiality…is just as relevant to autoethnography" (p. 55-56). Autoethnographers must consider the unintended consequences and impact when including others within their stories. In addition to confidentiality, the researcher needs to consider whose story it is. Chang (2008) warns of "negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives" (p. 55) describing, "autoethnographers may be tempted to claim full authorship and responsibility for their stories without hesitation" (p. 55). She challenges autoethnographers to be mindful of this notion of ownership. Finally, ethics demand data accuracy through "credible accounts", as discussed previously. Good administration as well as strong ethical considerations is essential to autoethnography research.

Summary and Implications on Study Design

The research question—What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation?—calls for four criteria for choosing a research method: *1.) Take a relational stance, 2.) Handle multiplicity, 3.) Account for context,* and *4.) Be useful*. By examining the autoethnography literature based on these criteria, I have established that autoethnography is best suited to address my research

question. The literature also shows that when doing autoethnography research, I am accountable that the data collection and self-narratives be credible accounts and produced in a way that evokes resonance. I am also responsible for adhering to appropriate study administration as well as ethical standards when conducting the research.

In considering my research question and evaluating the various forms of autoethnography, I have chosen to align around Chang's definition of autoethnography, where written self-narratives serve as a means to generate data and insights. I based this decision on the desire to uncover relational practices that may be useful to the executive women community. While a socially-embedded self remains a constant in autoethnography, Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe that its focus can vary across three dimensions depending on the researcher's goals: 1.) An emphasis on self-discovery against a particular cultural or social backdrop; 2.) An emphasis on context, where the lens of a self-lived experience identifies broader cultural or social themes; or 3.) An emphasis on understanding autoethnography itself (p. 740). To address my research question, the emphasis is on number two, context, where my self-lived experience as an executive woman serves as a basis to answer a social research question. By using autoethnography as a data generation and analysis strategy, I can focus my study on the relational nature of executive womanhood and uncover specific relational practices used in creating a good life in a world of social saturation.

CHAPTER 4

Research Study Design

By using autoethnography, my research explores the experiences of an everyday, non-celebrity American executive woman living in multiplicity—something largely absent in the literature—and uncover the relational practices used to create a good life. The dissertation research question is:

> **What relational practices**
> **can executive women use to create a good life**
> **in a world of social saturation?**

The research seeks to examine what a good life means in the context of a relationally demanding, socially saturated world in which executive women live and work. The relational stance of the research explores the relational processes executive women engage in that enable a good life to be co-created. Important to note, there is no presumption that the voice arising from this dissertation speaks for all, or will provide a complete answer. Rather, it is an attempt to put forth new perspectives and practices with an aim to be useful and make a substantive contribution to the executive women community. At a minimum, my hope is that this research results in new relational knowledge that others can consider as they create their own (or support others in) a good life, as well as serves as a launchpad for future research.

What follows is a detailed presentation of how my autoethnography research was conducted. First, I provide an overview of the study design, encompassing four phases. From there, I explain each of the four phases in step-by-step detail. The chapter concludes with a

brief discussion on how my research met the accountability requirements for quality autoethnography, as established in Chapter 3.

## Overview of Autoethnography Study Design

As described at the end of Chapter 3, I chose to use autoethnography as a method for both data collection and data analysis. This research examines my socially embedded self, that is, an executive woman holding multiple roles, or performances, living in a world of social saturation. The data collection and analysis for the study encompassed four phases, in alignment with the need for a research plan, per Creswell (2014) and Chang (2008) as discussed in Chapter 3. Autoethnographic data were collected via 1.) Selecting role performances for study and mapping relational life across roles, and 2.) Holding co-researcher conversations for each performance, including the use of a relevant artifact. These autoethnographic data were then analyzed by 3.) Writing self-narratives for each performance, and 4.) Looking across performance narratives to uncover findings and address the research question. An overview of the dissertation study design is provided in Figure 4.1 on the next page.

In order to manage potential bias in the autoethnography, as highlighted in the previous chapter, I utilized co-researchers in data collection. As described above, for each performance narrative, I incorporated one to two co-researchers in the data collection, resulting in a total of eight co-researchers. In addition, ongoing consultation with my daily Ph.D. advisor enabled me to evaluate my research and check for bias at critical junctures in the research process.

For disclosure, it is important to mention that through the research process, I had made a shift in how I was considering "performances". Upon embarking on this research, I initially used the term "identity" to describe the facets of multiplicity in my life, and accordingly, planned to write "identity narratives" as part of the autoethnographic research. However, this view of self shifted for me through the course of conducting research. Revisions I was making to the literature review at the time, as well as my own personal reflection in the data analysis phase

sparked this shift and resulted in a new insight. It led me no longer to see my *self* as a series of fragmented identities. Rather, I came to see myself as living one life while engaging in different relational performances in concert with others. As such, I changed my use of identity and identity narratives to "performance" and "performance narratives" in the dissertation. This shift reflects my own growth as a social construction scholar, and speaks to the transformative, future-forming power of engaging as my ethnographic self in social construction research.

Figure 4.1 **Overview: Study Design**

Study Design
Autoethnography Method
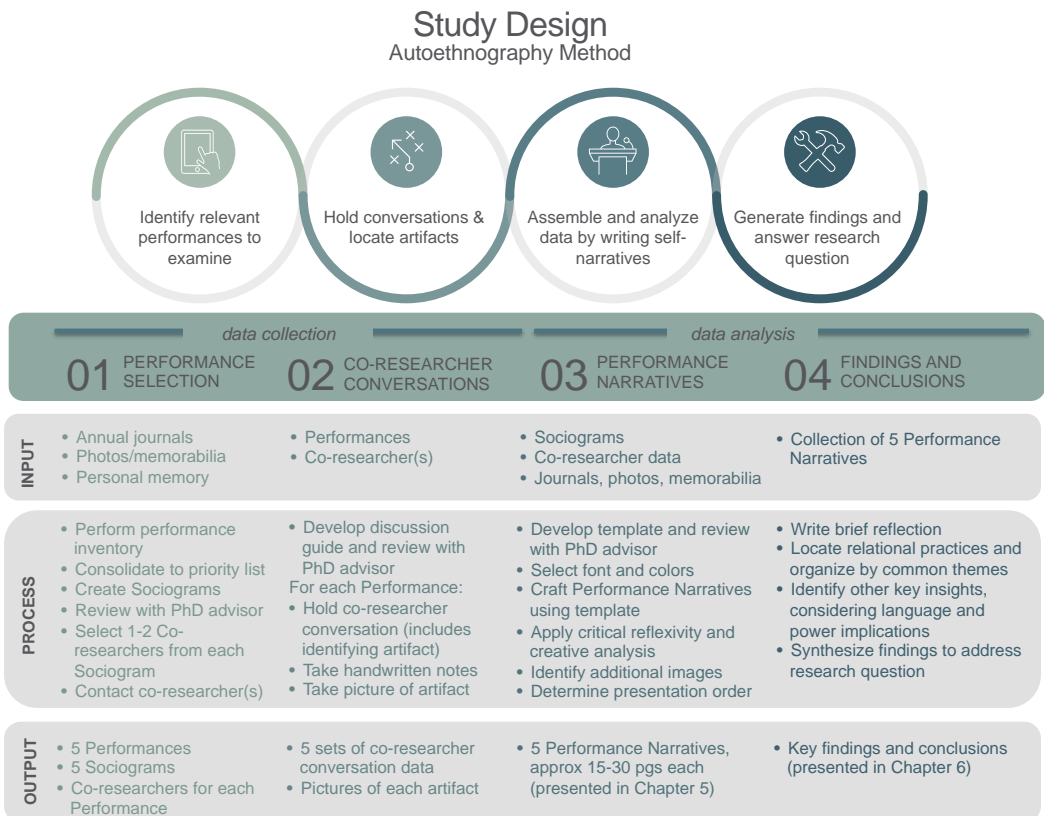
Research Phase 1: Performance Selection

The objectives of this first phase were two-fold: to generate a meaningful set of distinct and relevant performances on which to focus data collection efforts, and to identify appropriate co-researchers. To generate a meaningful set of distinct and relevant performances, I incorporated Chang's (2008) guidance in taking inventory as a data collection strategy (p. 75-76). First, I completed a performance inventory, generating a list of my various performances or roles over my lifespan. Three sources were used to generate this list: annual journal books (containing lists, activities, meetings and conversation notes significant at that particular day and week), personal photo albums/related memorabilia since birth that are in my possession, and personal memory.

From these sources, I created a list of potential performances, including real, imagined and future performances. To generate a list of relevant performances, I reviewed each source documents, such as a journal book, and reviewed its entries or content. From there, I assessed what a potential performances might be reflected in entries or content. See Figure 4. 2 on the next page for an illustration of this approach.

Figure 4.2 **Illustration: Locating Potential Performances**

Performance Inventory Drawn from Annual Journals:
Capturing the multiplicity of performances in any particular day

Meeting notes, key concepts, personal thoughts about a situation…

…goals, reminders, to-do lists work and home…

…personal notes, for instance, my son's spelling list so I can practice with him while traveling on business…etc.
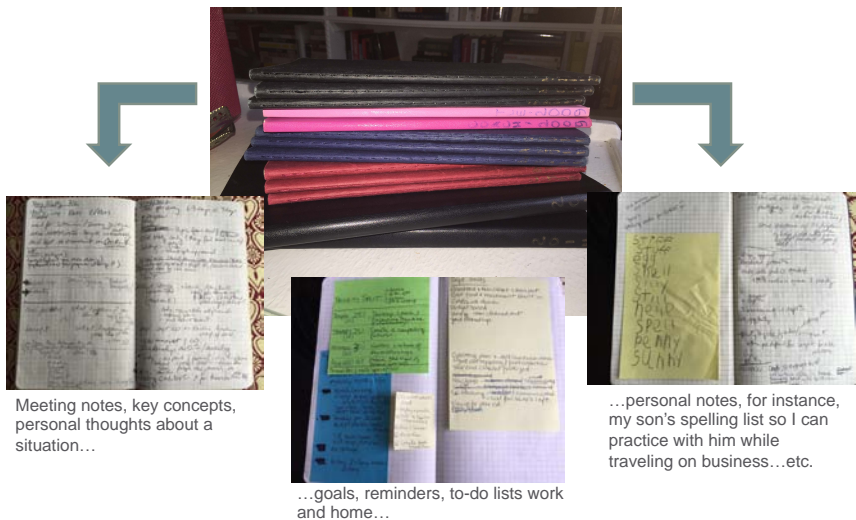
For example…
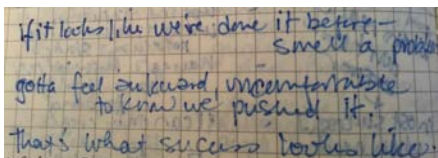
Entry: *If it looks like we've done it before— smell a problem; gotta feel awkward, uncomfortable to know we pushed it. That's what success looks like*

Potential Performance noted: "Change Leader"

Entry:
List of things the team needs to accomplish in the next two weeks (ranging from *phase II plan* to *thank you's*)
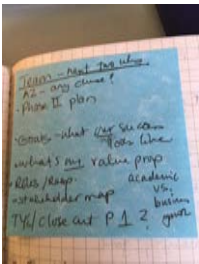
Potential Performance noted: "Logistics Manager"

Next, I consolidated the list down to a meaningful set of performances that was manageable for study. While there was no "magic number" of performances prescribed, I targeted a range of four to eight performances, based on my previous experience sizing focus groups and other types of ethnographic research, and to allow for a cognitively manageable number. From the list of potential performances, I looked for themes and clustered the items, paying attention to duplication and breadth. The consolidation was an iterative process. In the first-pass, I identified eight potential performances for study. I consulted with my daily Ph.D. advisor and we determined that further refinement could be done, so that each performance would be significant enough for study. From there, I did further consolidation, which resulted in five performances. Figure 4.3 below illustrates the results of consolidation.

Figure 4.3 **Performance Consolidation**

List of potential performances (formerly "identities")	First-pass Consolidation	Final Consolidation
Achiever Driver Struggling Command Crusader Visionary leader Systems level Endless stakeholder manager Change leader	Successful Business Leader	**Successful Business Leader**
Pleaser Smarty-pants Perfectionist Gritty and Tough A student Warrior	Infallible Daughter	**Infallible Daughter**
Mother Loving Healer, nurturer	Mother	**Mother**
Pusher Consumer Endless logistics manager Juggler	Chief Operating Officer	
Wife Loving Adventurer Wanderlust Internationalist	Wife	**Wife**
Outsider Agitator Differentiated Thinker Disruptor Architect	Creative Outsider	**Creative Outsider**
Connector Creative energy Healer Self-care Expert advisor Seasoned and experienced Knowledge Solver of problems	The Cosmologist, Sage, Healer	
Collector of knowledge Intellectual Professor and teacher Wanderlust Internationalist Brianiac	Professor	

The next step was to identify the relational life for each of the five selected "Performances"—Successful Business Leader, Infallible Daughter, Mother, Wife, and Creative Outsider. For my research question, I wanted to be able to understand the nature of my relational life. First, given my stance as a social constructionist, I was interested in examining both external and internal relations, both real and imagined. Second, given the potential for meaning to be embodied in objects, I wanted to allow for inanimate objects to be included. Chang's (2008) suggestion to visually map the self when collecting data (p. 81-87) provided a helpful start. Upon the suggestion of my daily Ph.D. advisor, I determined that sociograms would be best suited to examine my relational life. Sociograms are schematic representations that help understand social structures across key attributes (Huang, Hong, & Eades, 2006, p. 1), and often employ sociometric techniques, or "methods that qualitatively measure aspects of social relationships" (Burns & Erdley, 2011, online). Sociograms appeared useful, as they allowed for the multiplicity and complexity of social relations to be accounted for, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Before beginning to collect relational data, I followed guidance from Hollander (1978) to develop a sociogram framework for examining my relational life in a consistent way across Performances. There are no hard and fast rules for creating a sociogram framework, but they generally follow a five-step approach: criterion selection, matrix formation, charting, analysis, and application (Hollander, 1978, online). After a number of iterations, I selected two criteria for relationships: type and closeness. In terms of type of relationship, two factors were considered: presence ("actual" versus "imagined/inanimates") and where that relationship is located ("internal to me" versus "external to me"). These two factors served as a basis for forming a matrix, that is, a 2-by-2 grid with four quadrants of possible relationship categories: 1.) Active relations with actual people, 2.) Active relations with things or events, 3.) Voices of other people, and 4.) Voices of imagined others, things or events. For the other selected criterion, closeness, each relationship would be mapped from the distance from the center, to reflect its closeness relative to other relationships in that Performance. Figure 4.4

below shows the schematic used for organizing the relationship data via a sociogram:

Figure 4.4 **Schematic for Organizing Relationship Data**

Dimensions of the Sociogram

Quadrant placement denotes TYPE of relationship

Internal Relationships

External Relationships

Actual People

Voices of other people

Active relations with actual people

Proximity to center denotes CLOSENESS of relationship

Identity

Imagined or Inanimates

Voices of imagined others, things or events

Active relations with things or events

Separate sociograms were then charted for each of the five Performances. Within this schematic representation, relational life was identified and plotted onto one of four quadrants, with a respective distance from the center. To construct each sociogram, I used personal memory and consulted the other source documents I used in developing my initial performance inventory. Note that the charting of sociograms was a highly iterative process conducted over a number of months. Oftentimes, memory recall as well as the development of one sociogram triggered additions or modifications to another sociogram. I reviewed draft sociograms with my daily Ph.D. advisor to assess their appropriateness and value, and made some minor adjustments for clarity.

The use of sociograms was critical, as it allowed me to identify and manage the volume of relations present as a "self in a web of others".

From each completed sociogram, I selected one to two key relations to serve as co-researchers for that specific Performance. Given the importance of co-researchers in data collection, I took great consideration as to whom I selected. I considered people who were both most instrumental to that Performance, as well as capable in supporting me in collecting data that would allow for a credible account. Figure 4.5 below shows an example of a completed sociogram chart, with the selected co-researchers noted in bold. The final sociograms, their analysis, and the co-researchers are presented the Performance Narrative in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.5 **Example: Completed Sociogram**

Example: Sociogram

X - Fellow working mother friends

X – My Mom   X – My Auntie

X- My son (co-researcher)

X - My daughter (co-researcher)

My Grammie (deceased) - X

X - My husband

Michele as Mother

X – My daughter's art supplies

The Infallible Daughter - X

The Wife - X

X – My son's plastic ball

My need for order and organization - X

X – My kids' school calendar

The Creative Outsider - X

X – My kids' books, binders, and school bags

My determined rejection of any 'biological clock' in my youth - X

X – My personal mission statement and 10yr/2 yr plan

Next, I contacted each co-researcher to confirm interest in working with me, disclosing the nature of the study and explaining their role in the research. Following their agreement, we scheduled the

conversation and with that, Phase 1 of the research process was considered complete.

As a result of this first phase, five performances were selected for study: *Successful Business Leader*, *Infallible Daughter*, *Mother*, *Wife*, and *Creative Outsider*. By allowing for an iterative approach over time, these selected Performances accurately represent the multiplicity and make up of my relational life as best possible. This approach addressed the vital need to account for both the multiplicity and context of an executive woman living in a world of social saturation, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Research Phase 2: Co-Researcher Conversation

The objective of the second phase was to gather multi-dimensional relational data. I used two key techniques to help ensure I was crafting credible accounts. First, for each Performance, I incorporated one to two co-researchers who would help me, as Chang (2008) describes, to "draw out life experiences" (p. 106). Second, I had the co-researchers select an artifact that would to help gather relevant information as well as amplify the role of language and embodied meaning for that Performance.

In preparation for the co-researcher conversations, I developed a discussion guide using Appreciative Inquiry questions to uncover relational knowledge, as this approach is highly valuable in a social construction paradigm, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Prior to the first co-researcher conversation, I beta-tested the discussion guide with my daily Ph.D. advisor who is also an expert in Appreciative Inquiry. We identified some revisions to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the discussion guide. The final discussion guide is presented in Figure 4.6 on the next page.

Figure 4.6 **Discussion Guide for Co-Researcher Conversation**

Co-Researcher Conversation Discussion Guide	
A. Set-up	Thank you so much for agreeing to help me in my dissertation research. I want you to know that I am really interested in your views and in an open conversation. There are no right or wrong answers. I have a few questions, and would love to just hear what you think.
	Before we begin, I wanted to ask you about your preferences for confidentiality. This study is what is called an "autoethnography"—me writing about my life—and the relationships I have with others, like you, are really important in the research. However, that means that you—the stories you tell, your name—could appear in the dissertation document and any subsequent publications. Now, I am able to keep your name private as well as any specific details you prefer. How do you feel about that? What are your preferences for confidentiality? Note that at any point during this conversation, you can change your mind on the confidentiality and ask me to alter/remove information that you'd like to keep private.
B. Relationship	I am studying the multiple identities I hold in my life as an executive woman. For us today, I am looking at my role as a [Identity].
	• Tell me about a time you saw me performing at my best as a [Identity]; what was I doing, saying, acting, etc.".
	• Tell me about a time that best describes <u>our</u> relationship together.
C. Artifact	• This may sound a bit strange, but I am curious about an object that you think is meaningful to my identity as a [Identity]. If you think about me as a [Identity], what object comes to mind and why?
	• What makes the object meaningful to me? If the object could talk, how would the object describe me, and what would it say is most important to me?
	• What has been a life "highpoint" experience with this object?
	• What is the web of relations with this object? (Who are the people, animals, objects—actual and imagined—that are in relation to this object, and how do they interact?)
	• How does this object help me in a world of social saturation (today's 24/7, always on, unpredictable world)? What practices are embedded in this object? How does it help me deal with social saturation? How does it help me in creating a good life?
D. Close	Thank you so much for helping me in my research. I am going to use this information to write a narrative about my identity, and from there, it will be included with other narratives which forms the basis of my analysis. Let me know if you think of anything else you'd like to share, or if later, you have any concerns or questions. Thank you!

Co-researcher conversations, including discussion of the artifact, were held in November and December of 2015. I met with each co-researcher at a time and location that was mutually agreeable and conducive to an undisrupted conversation. I led the conversation using the discussion guide, and took handwritten notes archived in a research notebook. After the conversation, I located and took photos of the artifact. The data from the five co-researcher conversations as well as the photos of the artifacts provided the data to craft the Performance Narratives.

Research Phase 3: Performance Narratives

The objective of third phase of the study was to analyze the data by crafting a written self-narrative for each Performance. Using the autoethnographic data collected in phase 1 and 2—the sociogram, co-researcher conversation notes, the artifact, etc.—a rich ethnographic description for each Performance was developed in an effort to bring to life "what it is like" navigating through a world of social saturation in concert with others. Important to note, writing each narrative was more than an act of assembling the data. I followed the approach described in Chapter 3, where writing was used as a method of inquiry to allow for analysis and sense making. Writing helped generate useful knowledge about social saturation, the good life, and the important relational practices used for that particular Performance.

Initially, narratives were written in free prose in an attempt to tell a compelling story, but multiple prototypes resulted in a lackluster product, often without the necessary resonance as required by the autoethnography literature, as presented in Chapter 3. Upon the suggestion of my daily Ph.D. advisor, I developed a Performance Narrative Template to provide a consistent structure for the data presentation and analysis. Figure 4.7 on the next page provides the template used. The template served to foster more effective critical reflexivity and the examination of embodied language, both of which were identified as important to achieve study goals. In addition, considering Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) reminder on the importance of writing style, I reviewed some literature about writing and also took an 8-week class to refresh and improve my own writing skills.

Figure 4.7 **Performance Narrative Template**

Section	Purpose	How
Warm-up (no heading)	• Set the stage for the narrative • Pull the reader in	• Provide interesting and relevant backstory for the performance
Introduction	• Introduce the voice to the reader	• Describe the performance today—who is she and what does she do • Explain how the performance contributes to a saturated life • Briefly explain rationale for font and color choice
Sociogram	• Identify relational context, the "web of others" • Make social saturation meaningful in the local reality • Show how the performance is constructed through the relations	• Include the sociogram visual and reason for color choice • Discuss the relationships in each quadrant of the sociogram • Describe how the quadrants interact
Co-Researchers	• Share the lived experience • Generate language	• Introduce the co-researchers • Explain why I chose them • Share "highpoint" story about the performance
Artifact	• Engage in sense making • Generate embodied language	• Describe how artifact got chosen • Share "highpoint" story about artifact • Show how artifact helps with social saturation and the good life • Extend metaphor of artifact • Include picture(s) of the artifact
In Closing	• Engage in sense-making of social saturation and the good life • Conclude the narrative in a satisfying way	• Identify lessons learned • Provide an epilogue or resolution story as appropriate

Once I had the Performance Narrative Template developed, I began to write each narrative, one at a time. I followed the template and used the body of data collected for that Performance. I followed the guidance provided in the autoethnography literature, as described in Chapter 3. Each narrative was written in a first-person voice, and I paid attention to style and tone in order to bring to life each Performance in an engaging way. As a research practice, I wrote almost every day Monday through Friday for at least an hour or two—sometimes more—constantly revising and rewriting, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest (p. 751).

Moreover, I applied critical reflexivity and creative analysis techniques presented in Chapter 3. This meant I made deliberate attempts to be a vulnerable observer, as someone non-defensive in the data and its context. I challenged my own truth for other possibilities, as someone simply observing that particular performance. Rather than getting "hung up" on my own story, I sought to look at my self-other interactions and to incorporate the co-researchers' voice and perspective. To help with interpretation of the data, I used creative analysis techniques, as discussed in Chapter 3, in support of resonance. I looked for contradictory ideas and dichotomies in the data, and considered how I can help bridge these together in the narrative. In addition to "writing as a method", I followed Ellis and Bochner (2000) advice to use one's whole body, and employed meditation, heightened self-awareness, and physical and psychological space as key resources to enable effective data analysis. Finally, my daily Ph.D. advisor provided me with periodic feedback on draft versions of the narratives. Her background in communications and as a published author was invaluable to me. Our collaboration helped me in developing resonance in the narratives and ensuring that each piece resulted in a credible account relevant to the aim of the research.

To supplement the resonance and provide a credible account, I also paid attention to how the story would be visually presented. For each Performance, I selected a font for presenting the written narrative and identified a color choice for the sociogram. These two details were important, as typeface and color are different forms of language that also contain meaning. Explanation for each choice is included in the final Performance Narratives. I also used my own memory of items in journals, photos, and other personal memorabilia that could provide relevant imagery. Often times, as I was developing the narrative, certain images and other items would present themselves in my mind; I allowed this intuitive impulse to guide me. I took photos of these objects or items, and then these images, along with photos of the artifact(s), were included in the Performance Narrative. After all Performance Narratives were completed, I sequenced them as to what created a meaningful story flow.

The collection of the five Performance Narratives is the subject of the Chapter 5 entitled, *Analysis: Narratives of a Saturated Self*.

Research Phase 4: Findings and Conclusions

The objectives of final phase was to identify relational practices that executive women can use to create a good life in a world of social saturation, as well as uncover insight and other important learning coming out of the research. To accomplish this objective, first, I wrote a reflection piece to describe my observations and experience as I participated in the research process holding dual roles as researcher and subject. Using critical reflexivity, meditation, and self-reflection as well as using the process of writing, I uncovered four key insights. This reflection piece is provided at the end of Chapter 5.

Next, I sought to answer the research question: What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation? I began by locating relational practices present in the Performance Narratives. I did multiple "close reads" of the narratives, making note of conversations and collaborative actions that seemed to result in a positive or helpful outcome in my life. During this analysis, I also synthesized learning and key insights. I considered what I learned through the literature reviews as well as what was relevant for executive women. In alignment with social construction principles, I noticed language as well as power dynamics within relationships, and considered the context of social saturation. As a result, I uncovered a new story that might be useful to other executive women in search of a good life in social saturation. I found this new story helpful in setting the stage for any relational practices. This new story prompted me to re-review the Performance Narratives and further refine my list of relational practices.

From there, the list of relational practices were examined and grouped into common themes, and I drafted findings to describe each relational practice. Over a period of eight months, I reviewed, consolidated, and refined the themes and findings into eight relational practices. Attention was paid to being accurate to the data while ensuring each practice was presented in a way that was understandable and

accessible for others. The new story and eight relational practices are provided in Chapter 6.

Accountability in the Research

As presented in Chapter 3, autoethnographers are accountable for certain standards in their research: providing credible accounts; writing resonant narratives that result in something useful and substantive; adhering to organized and appropriate study administration; and ethics. The assessment below shares how each of the standards have been addressed in my research.

First, providing credible accounts is crucial in autoethnography. In the study design, great effort was taken to ensure the research reflected credible accounts. I used a rigorous, multiple step approach for data collection and analysis. I examined source documents and personal memory to inventory my Performances. I created visual maps, or sociograms, that identified my relational life across Performances. For each Performance, I engaged with co-researchers and used artifacts to supplement data collection. I used a template for analysis with the written self-narratives. And, I supplemented the Performance Narratives with font, color, and additional imagery to strengthen the content's credibility. Throughout the research, I was mindful of the need to ensure my research reflected a credible account.

Second, autoethnographers must ensure their written self-narratives resonate with others in a way that results in something useful and substantive with others. As described earlier, a number of steps were taken to ensure resonance, including collaboration with my daily Ph.D. advisor, the use of a template, and additional work to improve my own writing skills. The final Performance Narratives were able to generate eight relational practices executive women can use to create a good life in a world of social saturation, as well as resulted in a new story that holds life-giving potential when previously, few stories could be found. These findings were of tremendous value in my own life, as described in the reflection at the end of Chapter 5. My hope is that other executive women also consider these findings useful and substantive to them.

Third, study administration is accounted for in the creation of an *a priori* research plan, as presented in this chapter. I conducted my research in an organized way and maintained notes and records appropriately. Social construction and autoethnography literature allow for study modifications along the way, as discussed in Chapter 3. For this research, any adjustments to the study, or aspects to the research that were iterative in nature, have been disclosed in this chapter.

Finally, confidentiality is of utmost consideration in this research. My story occurs in the context of personal and professional relations with others, and as a result, I have an ethical responsibility to respect information provided by my spouse, children, colleagues, and others, and hold it in confidence unless they agree otherwise. With each co-researcher, I disclosed the nature of the study, gained their agreement to participate, and determined their preferences for confidentiality, as shown in the discussion guide in Figure 4.6. Per their preference, names were removed or changed, and identifying data omitted or altered. In particular, as my minor age children were selected as co-researchers, as their parent I provided consent, and as the researcher, I monitored appropriateness for their inclusion throughout their participation in the study, and removed their names and any personally identifying information from the narratives. For those individuals who are present in the data but not identified as a co-researcher, I removed or changed their names unless I specifically agreed with them in advance that I could identify them in the research. In the writing of the data, I was mindful of personally identifying information, and also disclosed in the narratives when I withheld data due to a confidentiality agreement.

Summary

The dissertation sought to address the research question. What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation? Using autoethnography as the research method, the study examined my socially embedded self, that is, an executive woman holding multiple roles, or performances, living in a world of social saturation. The data collection and analysis for the study

encompassed four phases. Autoethnographic data were collected via 1.) Selecting role performances for study and mapping relational life across roles, and 2.) Holding co-researcher conversations for each performance, including the use of a relevant artifact. These autoethnographic data were then analyzed by 3.) Writing self-narratives for each performance, and 4.) Looking across performance narratives to uncover findings and address the research question. I complied with the standards for autoethnographers in their research, as established in Chapter 3: providing credible accounts; writing resonant narratives that result in something useful and substantive; adhering to organized and appropriate study administration; and ethics. The final Performance Narratives are presented in the next chapter, "Analysis: Narratives of a Saturated Self". The study resulted in the generation of a new story that might be more life-giving to executive women, as well as eight relational practices that executive women can use as the co-create the good life in a world of social saturation. These findings and conclusions are presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

Analysis: Narratives of a Saturated Self

This chapter presents the autoethnographic data analysis in the form of five Performance Narratives: *Successful Business Leader, Infallible Daughter, Mother, Wife,* and *Creative Outsider.* Each written self-narrative provides a rich description of a particular performance as an executive woman living in a world of social saturation. These narratives of a saturated self are outputs of the study design presented in the previous chapter, and each follow the structure of the Performance Narrative template: Warm-Up, Introduction, Sociogram, Co-Researcher Conversation, Artifact, and Closing. Photos and relevant imagery are peppered throughout the narratives to aid in the storytelling. The order of these narratives does not imply any particular importance; instead, I sequenced the collection based on what would make for a logical and compelling story, applying Gustav Freytag's classic narrative arc (1863) as my guide. Successful Business Leader serves as the exposition; Infallible Daughter introduces rising action that complicates matters for me; Climax of social saturation happens at Mother; Wife unfolds in falling action, and Creative Outsider serves as the resolution and revelation. At the end of the collection, a brief reflection is provided to share my learning and insight from participating as both the researcher and the subject of study in this research.

By including the autoethnographic data and analysis herein, the reader is invited to participate in the "experience of being" from the perspective of an executive woman living in a world of social saturation. Moreover, this participation allows the reader to draw her own conclusions, and consider implications of the research for her own local community. Mine will be shared in Chapter 6.

PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE:
Successful Business Leader

Growing up in a family filled with what some would typify as blue, grey, and pink collar workers, it is curious that, for as long back as I can remember, I imagined myself instead as a white-collar kinda gal. As a little girl, the concept of myself as a Successful Business Leader consumed my play and set the stage for a life that invited saturation. The small den next to my bedroom, with a large, grey metal office desk and a manual typewriter became my sanctuary. I would lose myself there for hours, banging out paperwork, arranging files in the two empty drawers, stamping documents with old rubber stamps that my Dad brought home from the discard pile at work, and mapping out imaginary long-term projects on my Mom's outdated calendar planners. I spent my small allowance on blank receipt pads, special pens, and desk organizers. I conceptualized company names, designed logos and letterheads, and fantasized about being President of my own company. Unable to convince my school friends and neighbors to play along, I asserted my status as "the oldest" and assigned my sister and my cousin to jobs like "Vice President" and "Secretary" whether they liked it or not. In fleeting

ID badge for my imaginary company "Parsec Enterprises"

snippets, I recall my exhilaration in creating, directing, transacting, managing and completing things—things I imagined business people must do. I equated *busy-ness* with being in *business*. Even more, I just loved being in charge.

As I teen, my joy in "playing business" shifted to an intense focus on pursuing my future, seeing business as my ticket to economic freedom and personal fulfillment, two destinations yet unvisited. With clarity of adult Michele in mind, I wrote away to colleges around the country to learn about their programs, information that in turn, fleshed out my dreams and heightened my planning activity. If anyone asked what I wanted to be when I grow up, without missing a beat I replied "an international business woman". Instead of jeans and sweats, most school days I dressed up in skirts that I sewed myself in honor of my professional attitude. I joined almost every club there was in school and held a leadership role in most of them. My teachers and relatives told me how impressed they were with my seriousness. My classmates called me a nerd. Both assessments were okay by me; after all, most people from Barker, New York (population 566), did not go to college, and for sure, no one I met shared *my* vision of a good life.

Introduction: Successful Business Leader

Today, I am marking nearly a quarter of a century as a Successful Business Leader. Right out of college, a Fortune 500 company chose me to be part of a small, selective management-training program, with rotational assignments, special mentoring, and senior leader access. Since then, I traveled to over 30 countries, and lived and worked in large, international cities—Luxembourg, Warsaw, Prague, Philadelphia, and London—launching new ventures, running businesses as large as $2 Billion, leading transformational change projects, and developing people and teams along the way. After nearly 23 years with this company, I made a career change, and now I am an independent consultant, growing my own practice based in Raleigh, North Carolina. My expertise is in strategy, innovation, and marketing excellence.

Looking back on my career to date, I can say that on balance, my work has been meaningful and rewarding in my life. It has allowed me to provide for my family, and to realize a certain level of material comfort and economic stability. However, these factors alone are not enough to craft a good life. Three key components—no matter the job title, function, or location—contribute to me living a good life as a Successful Business Leader: First, it is a good life at work when I can experience a high degree of intellectual stimulation, in particular, the challenge in making sense of a

larger system and finding new ways to navigate it. I thrive on discovery, creation, and achievement. Second, it is a good life when I am morally aligned, in that the products and services I am bringing to others are authentic and improve how people move through their lives. Moral alignment is also important in my work environment, including what I am being asked to do as well as how I see justice and fairness in how others and I are being treated. Third, it is a good life when I engage with people who help create a feeling of flow within me. Sometimes this phenomenon happens in working together, sometimes, it happens in leading or coaching, helping others connect to their passions. It is important to note, for certain not all roles at all times contained these three components. Some even contained none. However, these components became good life "waypoints"—points that I try to calibrate to, altering circumstances to get there.

Saturation is more complex to define, but nevertheless, intertwined with the notion of a good life as a Successful Business Leader. Early on in my career, I experienced saturation as managing the content of the work ecosystem, from competing demands, challenging markets, cultural differences, fickle bosses, cutthroat peers and personal ambitions. I embraced always being saturated, considering it as necessary and even definitive of being a success in business. I estimate that most of my cognitive thinking, effort, and emotional energy revolved around my job during this period of time. The good life was one where my job as a Successful Business Leader was my first, dominant priority—a good life that was to be inherently saturated.

Over time, the saturation mushroomed. For one, my job became increasingly complicated as I took on more responsibility moving up the career ladder. I led more people, needed to cultivate a broader stakeholder network, and was accountable for delivering more to the organization, all within the confines of the same workday. In addition, my other life roles expanded as I got married, had kids, and became more reflective with myself. That meant that the luxury of being able to devote myself to my work lessened as others outside of my work came into my life—I simply had less available cognitive space and energy to manage the saturation from work. Finally, technology and the emerging mobile society eliminated some of the "natural" boundaries of the workday that I previously took for

granted. I was now accessible—and often expected to engage—with others in the evenings and weekends via texts, online chats, email exchanges or videoconferences to keep things moving and catch up on things that didn't get accomplished during the day. Moreover, the sheer volume of information available to me as a leader exploded: from RSS feeds and websites redefining what it meant to "keep up with industry reading"; to enhanced data sources available for inclusion in business decisions; and social media opportunities to engage in a broader professional community. Saturation became infinite, rushing over, unbounded. On one hand, I saw this new saturation as a threat to the good life—saturation made it almost impossible for me to experience those three components I previously mentioned that contributed to a good life. On the other hand, I feared the consequences of rejecting saturation—stepping back from saturation sent a negative message to others about my ability or my temperament as a business leader: "you can't handle it". But, in my refined ideal of the good life, I needed both less and more saturation: *less* in that I wanted flexibility and reasonable hours, *more* in that I wanted very intellectually stimulating work that I could excel in, achieve in, and be credible in among my domain of peers. My experience with the institution of business thus far did not allow for both of these concepts of saturation to be held mutually.

It is from this vantage point that I embark on my research of the Successful Business Leader performance: a bit unsure how **my hesitation to accept full saturation** can be **integrated with my pursuit of the good life**. In this narrative, I describe the web of relations that shapes my performance as a Successful Business Leader. Then, I introduce whom I chose as my co-researchers and share our lived experience by recounting the co-researcher conversation. From there, I focus on the selected artifact, and engage in sense-making by generating embodied language and meaning that artifact holds. Finally, I close the narrative with lessons learned and personal reflection.

As an important note, I chose to capture this narrative in GARAMOND font. I fell in love with this font in college, when I was the Editor of the *Cornell Political Forum* and we used it throughout our publication. It evokes a timeless, classic mood in me. It is professional looking and formal—saying strength and competency—but it doesn't seem stiff; I am drawn to its elegance and expressive quality.

Sociogram: Successful Business Leader

One's self is a by-product of the many relations, both real and imagined. Below is the sociogram I developed for my performance as a Successful Business Leader. In comparison to other sociograms, this performance appears to be the most congested with relations across all quadrants:

I chose the green color as a backdrop of the sociogram as it has been my favorite color since I can remember; likewise, being a Successful Business Leader has been important to me since I can remember. It says growth, life, and constant renewal, and makes me think about lush, healthy, dewy vegetation. I also used green as the primary color for my logo I recently developed for my consulting business. As an interesting note, making this choice for my business wasn't something I spent a great deal of time thinking about; it was a last minute addition that came from impulse, something to help me stand out from the crowd. I was showing my design to a former colleague, who just launched her own business, and we both talked about how we chose our favorite color for our logos—no special or hidden meaning intended—more of what just seemed right.

In starting in the upper right quadrant of the sociogram—*active relations with actual people*—there are two main segments of people I engage with as a Successful Business Leader. First, there is a small core of close colleagues that I have worked with over time and who I have a natural chemistry with: those that I trust, confide in, and know will have my back; those that that I've shared personal emotional moments with; those that may not be the same as me, but when we are together, something magic happens. This segment is my sounding board, my support network and when I am fortunate, a project collaborator. Second, there is a swath of professional contacts that may be a resource for me and for whom I may be a resource for them on a business issue. We have encountered each other at some point in the work world over twenty years—some on a daily basis, others perhaps only once or twice, most somewhere in-between—who have contributed to this performance. According to my address book and LinkedIn contacts, my direct professional network exceeds 1,500. This segment of relations serves a practical, operational component to being a Successful Business Leader.

The other practical, operational component to being a Successful Business Leader is found in the lower right quadrant—*active relations with things or events*. These relations help me set goals, make plans, track progress, identify hurdles, make tradeoffs, and ensure achievement. These inanimate relations, however, play a paradoxical role in pursuing the good life. On one hand, they help me <u>navigate</u> saturation, keeping work products and communications moving forward (for example, my computer, my journal, and my cell phone) or helping me stay on top of emerging trends (as with my business reading list). On the other hand, they <u>contribute</u> to saturation in that they bleed over boundaries in the workday (for instance, my computer and cell phone making me accessible to others 24/7) or compound what information must be navigated (such as more business reading and LinkedIn postings to keep up with).

The upper left quadrant—*voices of other people*—mainly contains the souvenirs of meaningful experiences with others and conversations that feed my spirit and soul. Two club advisors in high school that shared wisdom and encouragement when I was finding my way as an awkward teen. An intellectually rewarding college group and company project team where I felt I was able to express who I really am, and who left me

exhilarated. Stakeholders in the company who both appreciated the scope of what I was doing and also provided me with valuable insight so I could improve what my team did. Direct reports and bosses who believed in me, validated me, and inspired me. These memories are often ones of "flow" and contain much of what I attribute to having lived a good life. However, it is important to point out that there are a few voices of negativity whose echo lingers: those few former bosses and direct reports where tensions and conflict were high in our interactions. Bosses that criticized my style without the counterbalance of support; bosses that preferred I keep my opinions and ideas to myself, saying things like "you are really sharp, Michele, but you are really intimidating to people…you need to be more approachable…you need to smile more…don't use such big vocabulary words, dumb it down a bit…" Direct reports who resisted my push for substance in their work, those whom I perceived as doing the least amount of work to get by, who lied or misrepresented things, or who did not want me to be involved with them, making it clear they wanted me to stay away. These voices still "hang out there" in my inner world perhaps because, I wonder, there has not been a closure or resolution where we could have gotten to mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's unique talents and/or worldview.

Voices of imagined others (advertising campaign): My idealized self as a Successful Business Leader

The lower left quadrant—*voices of imagined others, things or events*—push and pull on my inner life and the momentum I experience as a Successful Business Leader. Some performance voices and voices of "shoulds"—such as the Infallible Daughter performance or my inner drives—creep in and

intensify my sense of pressure to perform, adding things to do on top of a saturated life. These voices can also be an internal judge, shaking my confidence or diminishing the satisfaction I may sense. Over time, I have come to learn to quiet these voices to reduce saturation and to enjoy a good life, but I am aware daily of their presence. Other voices, though—like the Creative Outsider performance and my 7-year old Miss Smarty Pants—are empowering and energizing. They inspire me and help visualize an ideal or potential self as a Successful Business Leader. Over time, I have increased my awareness of their positive power, and have developed my skill in amplifying what they are trying to say to me. This shift in listening—from the judging voices to the empowering voices—has deepened my sense of experiencing a good life.

While these relationships—these voices—have been organized into quadrants, it is important to note that their interactions are not limited to a particular time or situation; they are not singular. Instead, these relationships weave together, becoming external and internal performances of the self, constructing the reality of a Successful Business Leader. These relationships enable me to navigate social saturation and pursue a good life. A typical activity as a Successful Business Leader—my staff meeting, for instance—can be used to illustrate the interactions of these relationships both in an external and internal performance.

Considering an external performance example first, one of the activities I used to do with my team is to hold a touch point each week (*active relations with actual people*). At these meetings, I always brought my annual journal and computer (*active relations with things*). I used my annual journal to jot meeting notes and actions for myself and others; I used the computer for projecting the presentation content in the room as well as sharing the screen with team members at another work site. As the chair of the meeting, I am prepared and confident from habits I attribute to the influence of the Infallible Daughter and my achiever/pleaser drive (*voices of imagined things*). For example, I like to have these meetings run like clockwork and be a space where the team can engage with other. That means my habits include creating a clear agenda in advance and ensuring what we spend our time on is relevant to our annual goals and strategies. The team all brings their cell phones, but we have agreed our meetings are a "no multitasking zone" so phone use is limited to emergencies only.

Another habit is to pre-assign topics that others lead, so that everyone has a role in the meeting. I also make sure I ask questions to elicit opposing views and areas of concern. Finally, during a tough moment at the meeting, I find myself saying the very same words of wisdom my high school advisor used to tell me (*voices of other people*). We close with a quick assessment of the meeting and talk about ways to continue to foster a positive, fulfilling environment.

In considering an internal performance example next, this staff meeting happens with minimal logistical preparations, but the mental preparation often begins days in advance and outside the bounds of the formal work day. For me, work never seems to go away. I am frequently holding an inner dialogue while I am making dinner, or driving to an errand, or as I am trying to fall asleep at night. This mental preparation, in the form of an inner dialogue, also contains the swath of relations, sounding like this:

I perplexed on how to get Jenny to engage during these meetings. I don't understand what she wants to do with her projects, and I wonder if she is clear herself? I am not willing to feed her the project plan. She's a director and this is part of the minimum expectations of the job. I am concerned on how to prepare to address this, since we have our staff meeting this morning and she still hasn't updated her part of the team document. Do I ask her about it ahead of time or do I let it play out in front of the group? (active relations with actual people). *I know people are privately on-line chatting with each other during the meeting and I want to find a way to stop the in fighting without being demotivating.*

My mind is full and I have so many things I need to get done today. I am aware of my resentment of Jenny. She pulls the group down. This is not where I want to be spending my energy right now—I have my meeting with the Board in the afternoon and I have to get that right. I should just be unemotional about the Jenny situation, it's just a task, but I find myself asking why I am so pissed off (voices of imagined others).

I can hear my boss lecturing me on how it is my responsibility to lead the team no matter who the team members are or what their skill level. I get those annoyed sensations when I hear this because I DO believe in inclusion as a leader. He doesn't see the issue here as a skill or performance issue, and I wish he would acknowledge Jenny's ownership in this rather than blame me. I need him to support me in managing her performance. He let Jenny's previous boss ignore missed deadlines for years, and now that I'm her boss, he want me to clean it up. On one hand, he says 'go easy', on the other hand, he wants it fixed now. Reminds me—I need to call HR to take a look at my

comments on Jenny's performance review before I send it to her. [Make notes in annual journal] (active relations with things). *I repeatedly see him acting in his own interests and I need to be careful so I don't get set up. I can't help but suspect that he knows it's an HR quagmire and he wants me to be the fall guy with Jenny. I learned my lesson from that time with (my former boss) Darrell* (voices of other people). *Okay, breathe Michele, imagine what would (my advisor) Cheryl say to me if we were having coffee and talking about this?...*

Co-Researcher Conversation: Kim and Judi

Across my two decades of work, I have to come to experience "being successful" as a relational process. The people who surround me— from the bosses I reported to, to those who reported to me, to peer collaborators on projects—created or diminished how I understood to be having "success" and the extent to which I experienced the good life. I wanted to select co-researchers using an appreciative, life-giving vantage point, so I chose to engage people who contributed to my success and my sense of experiencing a good life: Kim and Judi.

Kim and I first came to know each other about 12 years ago when we were each hand picked by our business unit head to run key sections of an important product launch. Our offices were next to each other, and we spent countless hours developing strategy and taking turns building presentations together. While our styles and strengths are very different, she and I hit it off right away, calling each other "my wingman" as we went off like Top Gun into battle. Kim has this way to build me up, but also to tell me if I have "spinach in my teeth" that still keeps my confidence. I remember waiting for the President of our company to swing by my poster presentation and Kim made sure she came over to me first.

She leans in, "Looking sharp, my friend, looking sharp. Ok, whatcha got?"

I reply, "My main point is to make sure she understands we still have a long way to go—the project was good but we are far from done".

"Yes, but Michele, what is your *ask* of her—what do you want *her* to do", says Kim.

"You're right. It's not about the project. I need to get her ask the question about insight at the leadership review—it's not happening and

most of these plans are not good. Kim, you're awesome, you've always got my back".

Judi and I knew of each other for about 10 years, but began interacting only about five years ago where she was doing a special project serving as the Secretariat for the Marketing Vice President Council. Judi wanted to tap into me since I had worked closely with these VPs in the past. However, a great deal of my work depended on getting support from this team, and I wanted to tap into *her* because I wanted to collaborate better with them. Within the first accidental hallway discussion, we were drawn to confide in each other about some of the sensitive issues we were struggling with on this team. I appreciate Judi's realistic view and how she is a great reader of people. I always come from our discussions with new ways to see things. This informal collaboration continued until we both left the company, and she remains a close professional and personal friend today.

Over lunch, Kim, Judi and I held our co-researcher conversation. When asking my co-researchers about a highpoint as a Successful Business Leader, neither Kim nor Judi chose a time that I considered as the most successful in my career, those days when I was out in front, running multi-million dollar businesses, exceeding sales and profit goals, and racking up street cred and awards. Instead they chose a time when I worked in a more subtle capacity, helping a team find its way when it wasn't even my job to do in the first place. Judi described a two-day work session with the Marketing Partnership Board, a representative body of mid-level executives across business units. Judi was the lead on one of the Board's more political and contentious projects. Kim and I, as Board members, were part of the working group on this project. The room was filled with our peers—some of whom have been described as having very stubborn personalities, many others who were clearly overworked and exhausted—and stress of our looming project deadline was palpable. Only two hours into the first day, we hit an impasse that had to be resolved before moving forward. Issues, opinions, and options were flying around the room. I was obvious to me that we didn't have a decent framework for making decisions and organizing our work, but I was also well aware of the politics around the room. I pulled out the Marketing Ways tool that my team developed and asked if we wanted to use the six "Ways" as the business process to map the change

work. I then offered a different characterization of the "impasse" and how the "Ways" could help resolve it.

Judi shares, "The way you got us unstuck was amazing. You stepped up in a way that took all the different ideas, opinions, and personalities to bring us all together—you used your secret sauce. You saw the goal, the 30,000-foot view, and also all the details. You were a masterful magician and it was an amazing experience to be a part of it. You didn't step on anyone's toes and you also helped support me as the lead on the project".

Kim joins in, "It's like 'you know it when you see it' when someone is in their element. It is so loud and impactful. Michele, you can see things 20 minutes before everyone else does, but you wait for the right moment and also are not so beholden to your idea. You are curious so you remain open and adjust along the way. Respect, curiosity, immense intelligence, synthesis—you were in an environment where you could be *you*, playing that consultant role in the moment".

Judi continues, "There was no 'prove' lens on, you were comfortable in your own shoes and confident in where we would end up. You had no personal agenda or corporate speak; you were just there genuinely, bringing it on your own terms, authentically".

Hmmm, that phrase, "comfortable in my own shoes"…that stands out for me.

The Artifact: Shoes

Initially, I pushed back when hearing Kim and Judi's suggestion that "shoes" be the artifact that embodies me as a Successful Business Leader. After all, Kim, Judi, and I often talked about how we resented the princess archetype that the more successful executive women at our company seemed to embody—a non-threatening, always agreeable, Barbie-in-a-suit that our male colleagues were comfortable with around the conference table. I consider myself a strong woman, and buying cute outfits, looking pretty, and using my sexuality to make my colleagues more comfortable with me aren't actions that are in alignment with my view of myself or how the world should work. Fussing about "shoes", for instance, simply doesn't dominate my consciousness, my actions, and my conversations, especially at work (I am aware I hold judgment here). I am in the midst of complex deals, high-risk decisions, delicate politics, and unclear paths forward. Sure,

I want to look "put together"—the costume of a powerful professional you don't want to mess with—but it seems secondary to the more significant choices I make in my life. For an object with embedded meaning, I expected perhaps we talk about how I chose to have the latest cell phone technology suited for multitasking, or the clever briefcase/handbag combination that holds my personal and professional life all in one place, or even my computer.

"I hear you, Michele," says Kim, "but sorry, it's shoes".

Kim reminded me about how when we were working together on a contentious co-promotion situation (our company plus another company working together on a business endeavor), we would describe our preparations for tough joint governance meetings as needing to "get your pointy shoes on". We knew what we were proposing bucked conventional wisdom, and its boldness went beyond the comfort level of many of the

(mostly male and older) decision-makers, despite the evidence and strategy we weighed heavily in developing our plans. To gain endorsement, we needed some defense from the gendered slings and arrows
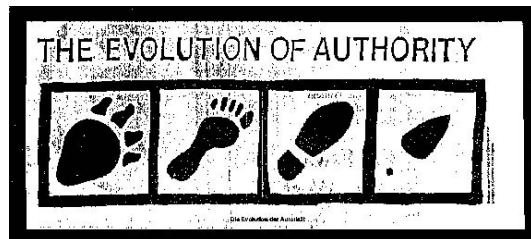
we would be facing, as well as some offense play to help us be unwavering and inspiring in how we wanted to move the business forward. Wearing that pair of power shoes channeled our assuredness into a wand of confidence that could address the naysaying and nudge others a step out of their comfort zone; seemingly, it helped us from within lead and prevail.

Kim also reminded me that our many conversations affectionately referred to "getting our big girl shoes on" as a means to traverse work life, leaping over personal or professional barriers. Kim and I not only had similar career ambitions, but we both came from rural towns—she from North Carolina and me from upstate New York. Just the right shoe seemed to stamp out our quiet whispers of self-doubt—"I'm just a girl from Barker" or "Can you believe I am here doing this?"—kicking around our smarts, our judgment, and our hard work. Scaling up the steep rock face of our careers in a very conservative and traditional "good ol' boy" company seeped of complexity and nuance: pleasing the whims of superiors; finding

that balance of toughness without making male colleagues feel too intimidated; wading through highly cutthroat scenarios while hanging on to integrity; accepting even the most inefficient travel without complaint; cleaning up others' messes without getting credit for it; coming up with that one "hail Mary pass" of an idea; and striving to get that top 1 rating. But, what achievement looked like was clear, and for me, when I was consistently achieving to others, inside I seemed to be doing well, too. Each award, each "atta-girl", each compliment, each promotion punched a notch on the good life belt. It showed I was making a difference. The singular priority of work and its rhythm of "toil-accomplishment-reward, toil-harder-accomplishment-reward" became life's familiar cycle. The shoes were my battle gear; shoes were my relational navigators; shoes helped me achieve.

Fifteen years of big girl shoes

The type of shoes I wore also seemed to follow what changes were happening in my work life. My most significant career transition happened about six years ago. Our company faced a disruptive and unpredictable environment like no other in the past half century—a consolidating marketplace making current business models irrelevant; looming political legislation likely to gut profits and cause tremendous pressure internally; angry customers now feeling betrayed by what were normal practices for decades prior; surprising competitors who weren't even in the consideration set a year ago. As Hemingway famously wrote in *The Sun Also Rises*, "How did you go bankrupt? Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly." That became our predicament. We were going bankrupt, and our leaders, used to a knowable business, became desperate as they were unprepared and out of touch. Shiny objects with the false promise of help were favored over strategic discipline. A continual "throw the spaghetti on the wall and see what sticks" approach caused their teams uncertainty, overload and panic. Worse, emerging technology seemed to enable and accelerate the directionless busy-ness that often seemed to define the workday. Everyone started getting smartphones and iPads, so that emails, texting, and instant

messaging could be done away from the confines of one's desk. Emails from leaders increasingly came at odd hours and over the weekend—not just during a crunch period, but also now as a regular habit—and it was an unstated expectation that you partake off hours, too. There was a more visible bravado in <u>not</u> taking your vacation, or if you did, it was expected that you were checking in daily. Reigning in the company crisis became a 24/7 job at all levels in the organization. Kim, Judi and I were "in it together" as leaders in the company experiencing these dramatic changes, and through frequent conversation, supported each other.

During this time of high change, I accepted a President-appointed role leading a major transformational initiative. No longer would I be in a line role, responsible for sales and profit. Instead, my job would be to develop the vision and strategy for a different business model, and to motivate my peers, my leaders, my organization to think different, work different, and be different. However, my in-line shoes—my pointy shoes, my power heels, and even my every day creative-invoked chunky Euro digs—began to be less comfortable and less able to carry my tired, bloated body. There also came a point where many of my shoes stopped fitting, as my shoe size changed from an 8 to a 9. I began to wonder if my relentless drive—over a decade of non-stop push, push, push without a distinct stopping point—was catching up with me, creating a metaphorical *plantar fasciitis*, leaving me weak, irritated, and in pain when I tried to do even the most routine of work tasks. In hindsight, I realized that I had started wearing different types of shoes. To help

"To hell with it" boots

me sludge through the muck of ambiguity, I opted for sleek, low-heeled, pull-on boots. When I needed to cajole the reticent, I wore my black motorcycle boots with attitude, trying to inspire rebellion against the ingrained, hierarchical culture. I rarely wore hose anymore with my open-toe shoes, maybe so that air could circulate as I was searching for fresh inspiration.

What I noticed, though, was that the change of shoes accompanied a change in my institutional status, as the success and momentum I once enjoyed—the good life—seemed to retire along with those pointy, powerful, chunky shoes. First, my job showed me that leading change is slow and small—one conversation at a time—not big and bold. It was difficult to measure and show how I was making a difference, and there never seemed to be an endpoint to the work, the endless people and the conversations that needed to be held. While there was challenge in making sense of the system, the navigating of it—the creating and the achieving— seemed impossible to notice. Even more, leading change meant that I needed to disrupt the status quo. I was someone who had been successful by pleasing others and aligning with the direction of the company. Now, I found I was regularly *dis*pleasing my superiors, peers, and stakeholders. What surprised me the most, though, was how quickly my group membership changed. Moving to a staff role shifted many others' perception of my group affiliation. Despite my positive reputation and expertise, the commercial teams no longer considered me as "one of 'us'"; instead, they treated me as "one of *those* people", getting in the way of sales and profits and the good old days. I recall a discussion with one of my former bosses (whom I had worked very well with previously) out of the blue, chew me out on what I thought was a very straightforward point. Finally, the social saturation—just like the normal bacteria that is around us all the time—turned into a full blown infection, an overgrowth that became uncontrollable. Keeping up with the around-the-clock email, instant messages, and texts was no longer sustainable. Increasing discussion with my family left me resentful of this intrusion on my personal life boundaries. I fell out of favor as I was less willing to take on inefficient travel and be continually available in the evenings and weekends when things didn't seem purposeful, organized, or thought out.

I shared with Kim and Judi how I wondered at times if my best career days were behind me. They quickly discounted that statement, saying that where I have grown into—the shift out of a line management role—is closer to who I am and what my unique offering to the world is. Likewise, the flatter shoes and boots I shifted to wearing embody me getting closer to who I am, and what I need and want in this life. Perhaps so. For one, flatter shoes are simply more comfortable. They do a better job keeping me

upright, in a more stable and sustainable way. They keep me more closely grounded. Kim also pointed out that "flat" doesn't meant "boring". She described how I chose bold flats—whether it is my motorcycle boots or blingy slide-ons—with the style and attitude that mirrored my boldness as a Successful Business Leader. Kim shared with Judi and me a highpoint story about me wearing shoes just like this:

It was about two years ago, when I was running a "Leading Marketing Excellence" course held at Wharton for our company's marketing leaders. This concept was one I conceived and led, joining marketing technical skills, change leadership, and new age-ish ideas, so that our leaders could "connect the dots" and help their teams thrive in the new norm of ambiguity. I partnered with key Wharton professors and held this program on campus using novel action learning methods I personally developed. Kim was part of the first learning cohort, being the student to me as teacher. Kim describes, "I can still see you in the room—you were wearing this simple black outfit, maybe just black pants and a black sweater, your hair up, in those super comfortable—but blingy—flat shoes. I think they were leopard print or something. You had this aura about you. As you stood in front of the class, it was like "ahhhh-haaaa", where intellect and passion came together in the moment—it

Magic slippers.

was like art. You had a command of the topics, a presence, and a passion, and were *captivating* to watch. It was a true joy to be there with you and your attitude. You brought joy to share with your colleagues. You had prepared, but it was more than content. Content is the price of entry and is taken for granted. It *how* you showed up, how you moved about the room, joining up different ideas, and connecting in a very personal, touching way with us all. It woke me up to see you like this, to know when people are in their

element and to be swept up and be a part of it. I am so appreciative at the same time of what you offered to me learning from you during this class."

In Closing

Over the past few years Kim, Judi and I spent many, many hours together working to transform the business, informally connecting our various projects together, collaborating and conniving on a mission to help turn the Titanic organization away from the impending iceberg, or just being a shoulder of strength for each other during a difficult moment. This time—today—during this co-researcher conversation, we are having lunch holding three very different spaces in our lives. Judi, despite being one of the top leaders and consistent high performers, was laid off due to consolidation of roles. Kim's group went through reorganization and due to some historical politics, she was skipped over for a key promotion. Kim is trying to keep her sales team motivated in a downward spiraling business, and next week, she is about to begin yet another round of layoffs in the group. And me, after 23 years with the company I started with right out of college, the writing on the wall with my own department led me to take a severance package while the "getting out" was still generously funded. I am now in the midst of starting my own business, but often doubt this new role—especially as the primary breadwinner in our family—wondering if I should be going after a more traditional, stable corporate job.

Sitting in these three relatively new spaces for us, we reflected together on what it means to be a Successful Business Leader today. Clearly, this performance has been built through our relations with the company, the bosses we work for, and the people we work with. We recognized that we are linked to the community surrounding us, whether we like them or chose them, or not. However, for us, being a Successful Business Leader means a lot more: to a significant degree, our overall *sense of self* is predicated on this performance. This realization brings mixed feelings. In one way, this performance seems as the primary focus in our life—we worship our work, and we prioritize it over many aspects of our lives, never doubting our own devotion and sacrifice needed to navigate the increasing demands saturation bestowed upon us, never questioning our faith that the spoils implicitly promised would be received and our gender would not be a factor. In another way, coming out of a number of years in what we call a parasitic

relationship with our employer, we are no longer willing to trade of ourselves to feed this performance; we find ourselves asking, "Are we losing our religion?" We concluded that as executive women, only three distinct—but equally unappealing—choices appear available to us: 1.) Dig in and fully give of yourself to work and all its saturation, with then no "real life" outside of work; 2.) Choose to give less at work, and then see less progress in responsibilities and/or stature, or 3.) Opt-out of work altogether. Definitely not choices that foster a good life.

It seems to me that a new choice—a new story—is needed for me as an executive woman. My concept of the good life as a Successful Business Leader is one of intellectual intensity but also one where work is not all consuming. It seems that *the manner in which* I approach saturation is part of that story; over the past few years, I have made changes to how I manage saturation. For example, I now see saturation as a choice, rather than something that just happens or that I am the victim of. I operate with intention, being choiceful in what I engage in and what I take on in my work life. Furthermore, the "busy-busy-busy" type of saturation—for example, available 24/7 for work issues, focused on cleaning out the email inbox every day, running to back-to-back meetings, weekly travel, etc.—is avoided by my own personal practices, contracting with others, and taking the lead in creating new cultural norms where I have the influence to. I treat this *mechanical* saturation as something to be managed *as part of* my work, rather than it *being* my work; indeed for me, saturation is no longer a badge of honor or a marker of how successful I am. Finally, reducing the unnecessary busy-ness creates more space for the *intellectual* saturation I crave—dealing with complicated and ambiguous situations and issues in business. But, why, I wonder, is it still not enough to feel at internal peace that this new story can also mean having the good life? Voices inside my head engage me in a dialogue of assessment and judgment, of not sure if its right, perhaps because I haven't seen this story happen before.

I closed the co-researcher conversation by sharing with Kim and Judi something happened to me last year, shortly after taking my severance. I am sitting in a catchall room at home and it's about a month after my last day at my corporate job—the house is quiet in the middle of what used to be a busy day at the office, and I am puttering. Before fully jumping into the new job search, I am taking some time to recover from an intense

transition. And, more practically, after years of neglecting my house over my job, I am trying to clean out a few areas that are just annoying to me. On this day, I am tackling a pile of stuff my parents brought over last time they visited. One of the items was a folder with all of my college scholarship applications. This is a very thick folder, as my "part time" job in high school was applying for scholarships (I ended up funding a year's worth of tuition just on these merit-based scholarships alone). I started reading through the yellowing handwritten and electronic typewriter pages with voyeuristic curiosity. I stop at the "American Business Women's Association - Niagara Falls Chapter" scholarship application, dated April 30, 1987—coincidentally, 28 years exactly to today's date—question 11: *What is your ultimate career goal?* My written response: "*Director of my own consulting firm dealing with Employee/Employer Relations*".

Question 11: Scholarship application

Before we depart, Kim grabs me and looks me straight in the eye, "Michele, I don't want you to give up on who you are—you *are* a consultant—I know you are worried about what that means for your stability and income, but Michele, it's how I see you, it's who you *are*".

My time with Kim and Judi leaves me wondering if perhaps I already know what I need to know to create my good life, to express what I was meant to do, and armed with all the resources and strengths to navigate the world I live in? That maybe, what is interfering now is that I am allowing old institutional "shoulds" get in the way of legitimizing my new story as a successful business woman? If I think about Kim and Judi's artifact—shoes—what I <u>do</u> know is how much I enjoy that I rarely wear shoes to work anymore. Most of my time as a Successful Business Leader today is experienced in bare feet under my desk in my home office: as I engage in what my peers would say are "power calls" with clients and professional contacts; as I navigate complex systems to find a novel way forward; as I build authentic programs that improve how people move through their lives. I am not sure yet if I will be able to sustain the income I need on a practical note, but I have a plan. It's a good life.

PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE:
Infallible Daughter

There was a girl
Who had a little curl,
Right in the middle of her forehead.
When she was good,
She was very good indeed,
But when she was bad she was horrid.

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Excerpts from my high school teachers' letters of recommendations for me capture the essence of my performance as an Infallible Daughter. One teacher writes, "Michele is a very considerate person who carries her load of the responsibilities. She cares and is a constant support to family members." He continues, "Michele respects and obeys authority at all times. She is exceptionally self-motivated and always accepts fully all responsibility for all of her actions…She always is considerate of others and makes sure everyone feels as if they are part of task that she is in charge of".

Another teacher offers, "Michele is very serious…It has never been her aim to simply get by; she has always given her best—and her best is impressive, often far surpassing the assignment's requirements…I have found Michele to be enthusiastic, hard working, and utterly reliable. She is self-motivated and responsible, has an eye for detail and a flair for organization. She finishes whatever she begins and completes each activity with superior results".

And finally, writes another, "Michele is one of the most outstanding young women I have met during my career as a teacher…She is extremely bright and capable, and one of the best organized people I know. She has always made herself responsible for planning her own education, taking the most demanding courses we offer…Her self-discipline, energy, ability to

prioritize and stay on task make it possible for her to accomplish enormous amounts of work…She has been thorough, well-organized, infinitely reliable, creative, and dedicated. These qualities have been the hallmark of everything she undertakes".

I was seventeen years old.

Introduction: Infallible Daughter

I am the oldest daughter in my immediate family. Fortunately, both of my parents are still alive, and I also have sister who is one and a half years younger. For the better part of my life, I attributed a good life with being an Infallible Daughter—trustworthy, reliable, dependable, dutiful, responsible, never failing, and pleasing—an ideal representative of our family. To be sure, it's more than the relationship I have with my parents and the functional role as a daughter in the family. I bought into my acculturation that said, "it's about *earning* the right to the rewards of a good life", and reminded me "it means being perfect to a 't'".

Saturation comes part and parcel with the pursuit of perfection, not only from the list of things that I believe is a "must do", but as I am exposed day-to-day to ideas or situations, subsequently, more things come into the fold. Each new relation, new conversation, new institutional directive expands what it means to be perfect, thus adding to my "must do" list. It is a vicious cycle, one where no matter how busy or productive I may be, to *be* a perfectionist means I'm never "done".

Thank goodness, in my thirties, I became aware of my perfectionist beliefs and behaviors, and did a great deal of personal work to find strategies to set them aside in order to reduce my saturation and enjoy my life in new ways. I came to realize that I could still have a quality, purposeful, and full life without being perfect. I didn't need to earn the right to have a good life—I already have the right to a good life due to the mere fact that I exist. I practiced delegating, prioritizing, and letting things go. I learned how to say no, not overcompensate, and not take everything on. I learned to be aware when the Infallible Daughter

was speaking to me, pushing me, making me feel guilty, like I needed to please or needed to do more. I learned how to quiet her voice. While these strategies reduced the saturation I brought into my life and helped me find more joy and meaning, it also has left me in a bit of a neutral position with this part of me. The Infallible Daughter still exists, but now lives in exile. I manage her, recognizing she is present but also not letting her get out of hand. I have often described this phenomenon to others similar to how many in the substance-abuse community label former addicts: "I am a recovering perfectionist".

Even while enjoy a life in recovery, in the back of my mind, I wonder if by suppressing this performance, I am denying a piece of who I am. For sure, I don't want to go back to the stress I imposed upon myself earlier in my life, but I also don't hold a sense of peace in the current coping arrangements today. There has to be a better way. This narrative explores the interplay between these factors—my self-imposed saturation and living a good life—as an Infallible Daughter. In this narrative, I describe the web of relations that shapes my performance as an Infallible Daughter. Then, I introduce whom I chose as my co-researchers and share our lived experience by recounting our co-researcher conversation. From there, I focus on the selected artifact, and engage in sense making by generating embodied language and meaning that artifact holds. Finally, I close the narrative with lessons learned and personal reflection.

I decided to capture this narrative in ARIAL font. It is a focused, serious, and practical font. It gets the job done. There is no nonsense with ARIAL; no extra serifs or odd sized proportions. It's neutral and non-offensive. It's an infallible choice.

Sociogram: Infallible Daughter

One's self is a by-product of the many relations, both real and imagined. I selected the color red as the backdrop for the sociogram. Red shouts "Urgent! Important. Pay attention to me." Upon reflection, I realized that color can also recall pain or injury; it's the color of blood. I thought about changing it, but no other color but red seemed right for this performance. Below is the sociogram I developed for my performance as Infallible Daughter:

Voices of other people

My Elementary and HS teachers - X

Father Mack and Father Bob - X

Those negative former bosses - X

My Grammie and Jaja (deceased) - X

Active relations with actual people

X - Key relatives on my both sides of parents family

X - My Uncle Bob

X - My Auntie Gail

X - My Mom and Dad (co-researchers)

X - My Husband

X - My Sister

Infallible Daughter

My 20-something feminist self - X

The crusader archetype - X

The Successful Business Leader - X

My achiever and pleaser drive - X

7 year old Miss Smarty Pants - X

The Professor- X

My JHS obsession with the Preppy Handbook - X

X - My shelf of awards from HS through professional life

X - My books and article collection

X - Report cards, Transcripts, and Performance Appraisals

Voices of imagined others, things or events

Active relations with things or events

In looking at the sociogram, the upper right quadrant—*active relations with actual people*—is made up of my close family who is still living: my parents, my sister, my closest aunt and uncle and a few other important relatives to me. It also includes my husband, as he participates in my family dynamics. Since I live a few states away from all my relatives—about a day's drive or a plane flight at a minimum—most of these active relations are done through the phone or email. My parents and I generally speak live every Sunday, email each other a few times during the week, and

visit in person for a few days two to three times a year. I connect with my other close relatives every month or so, usually via email. Because of our physical distance, my sense of saturation from active relations with real people is low, compared to active relations in other performances. But, there are tradeoffs in the good life. I hold a frequent worry about my parents' health and some of their physical limitations, especially when I can't be there "on a dime" to help in person. I know my family loves and values me, but the absence of them close by causes me to experience a sense of distance or aloneness at odd moments: maybe a Sunday afternoon while making dinner; at my kids or my birthdays or special events; holidays when we are not getting together in person. I wonder if this is due to echoes of old rhythms that I carry from spending most of my youth with both sets of grandparents living less than twenty minutes awa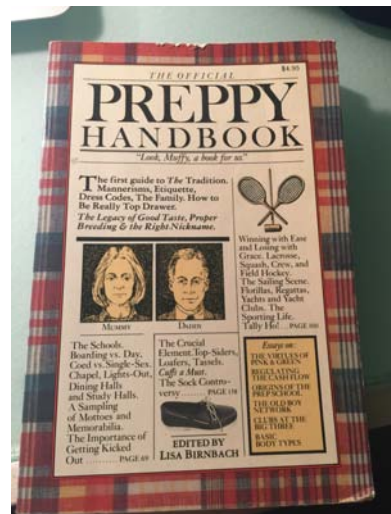y, as growing up, every Sunday, birthday, special event and holiday was spent surrounded by my parents and grandparents.

My Jaja and me

The lower right quadrant—*active relations with things or events*—is sparse in quantity compared to many other identities, but is important to the "infallible" part of this performance as well as to my sense of the good life. First, my achievements, awards

and recognition that I display on the top bookshelf in my study are a source of comfort and acknowledgement of what I have accomplished. Similarly, the file folders that contain my school report cards, college transcripts, and work performance appraisals continue to validate my performance quality, as judged by the prevailing institution. Finally, as an avid collector of "knowledge", I have amassed an extensive collection of articles, presentations, frameworks and tools, and other materials on topics that interest me or are areas that I want to be seen as an expert. This seems to propel the infallibility that I see inherent in my daughter role. Acquiring these "things" gives me a high—a steady source of deep satisfaction and meaning in my life.

The two inner-based quadrants, though, seem to cause much of the saturation. The upper left quadrant—*voices of other people*—continues to shape this performance, albeit less so in the more recent years. I have come to notice that a great deal of these voices come from places of institutional power, such as my school teachers, former priests, and old bosses. The tone lands in an authoritarian and judgmental way, not one that I experience as positive and life-giving dialogue. However, with one exception, are the voices of

My junior high school obsession with being "preppy"

my mother's parents. I find myself still "talking" to my Jaja and Grammie after more than 20 years since their passing, and experience these conversations as filled with love, support, and wonder in me just because I am their granddaughter.

The lower left quadrant—*voices of imagined others, things or events*—contain what I see as the "driven" part of my inner dialogue: warrior-like voices and archetypes. In seeing these together in one quadrant, what strikes me is the strength, the

determination, the confidence, and the potential value they hold in pursing the good life. What is also interesting to note is that they span most of my life thus far, running concurrent with the *voices of real people* just described. The 7-year old Miss Smarty Pants who knows what she wants and isn't going to let anyone tell her otherwise. My teen obsession with being preppy and invincible. The 20-something feminist voice who won't accept a second-class position relative to men. The successful, intelligent, and savvy gravitas of the Successful Business Leader. I hear these voices assert themselves into that ongoing, general dialogue always running in my head.

However, I cannot pinpoint how these four relational quadrants interact; instead, they seem to coalesce in my behaviors, my outputs, or as a net effect on my life. For instance, I have lived a good life by setting high standards for myself. I made choices that enabled me to achieve, exceeding what others expect of me, and not leaving a space for others to find fault. I am aware that I start each day making a list in my head of what I need to do and need to accomplish, sensing a chronic whisper of discontent. I practice behaviors so that I don't always act on that inner whisper. But, despite many attempts through reflection and meditation, I am not able to locate a conscious inner dialogue of the Infallible Daughter. I wonder if it has become so automatic that I am unable to discern them and transcribe what they say. Or perhaps, it's because I've been deliberate in tuning her out.

Co-Researcher Conversation: Mom and Dad

Among my relatives, I chose my parents to be my co-researchers. On one level, they were an obvious choice—they knew me the longest and could provide the best data. On another level, I saw this conversation as special, not the type we normally have. They came from a generational set of experiences where they don't often express how they feel or offer forward many direct compliments. While I know they love me and value me, I have

always experienced a bit of an emotional distance between us; there are rare, spontaneous affectionate moments. I was curious as to how they would respond to my questions and how that might deepen my understanding of our relationship and myself. I sent them the questions ahead of time, because I know my Dad in particular, with strong introvert communication preferences, likes to think about things on his own before responding.

My parents came from the American Baby Boomer generation, creating a middle-class, traditional household for my sister and me. My Dad was the primary breadwinner working in computer security for a bank. While my Mom had a part-time job as a teacher's aide at my sister's and my school, she was the primary caregiver and home maker. My parents were a bit of a scandal in their days—my Mom was Catholic and my Dad was Methodist, and in the 1960s, there was a scuttle among the family because of these differences in faith. Before they were allowed to get married in the Catholic Church, they had to do some extra counseling with the priest and my Dad had to swear that his children would be raised as good Catholics, a duty he took very seriously as we were growing up. I rarely saw my parents fight, for instance, as there were things you didn't speak to the children about, but I could sense normal life tensions that went on, mainly about money and managing other family member issues. But they have gotten on together, and are about to celebrate their 47th wedding anniversary.

I held my co-research conversation over the phone, since they live a few hundred miles away and we weren't going to be seeing each other in person for a while. I asked my parents about our relationship and they described it as "excellent", one with mutual trust, rapport and respect for the greater part of our lives. They said I was never a rebellious teen, and that they appreciated how we would talk to each other, and explain our points of view without being self-absorbed or getting pissed off. When we had differences, I would hear them out and likewise, they'd do the same for me, and we would figure out a way forward.

Also, they were partners in helping me manage saturation early on in my life. For instance, they described how for big challenges, we would divide up what to worry about, "let Mom and Dad worry about this, and you take care of that", for example, when I was getting ready for college. My parents attributed some of our good relations to how we see eye-to-eye on personalities. My Dad laughed and described when I was young, I was what he called a "Miss Goody Two Shoes", never really doing wrong, always having the right answers, taking on any adult who dares engage me, and making sure everything was perfect. My Mom described how I am like Dad and prefer a serious, "no nonsense" tone in my life, and noted that I always wanted to hang out with the adults when they came over, not their kids. She said I always made sure everything was always organized, like how I had to clean my room before moving on to my homework. She shared how my pleaser tendencies were similar to hers, and admires how I am doing a better job at saying "no" to things than she ever felt like she could. She spoke about our mutual love of raining, cloudy, and dark and dreary days and oddly, how we feel the most happy then.

They had a hard time coming up with one particular high point story for me as an Infallible Daughter, saying, "There are so many wonderful examples, Michele". They celebrated me being smart, and them not holding me to female stereotypes—they were very proud of that, and enjoyed my sharp, witty tongue. Mom acknowledged, though, that she knew how difficult it was for me being a smart girl, especially living in a small town. She explained, "People were just looking for you to make a mistake. It was like them being around you made them feel bad about themselves. I don't know why." This part of the conversation made me wonder how much of my own parents' desires, needs, and issues became channeled or projected or lived out through me.

The Artifact: Rock

I could tell by the energy in his voice that my Dad was really excited about having found an artifact for me. Mom and he were talking about it, and they came up with "a rock" as an object that embodies me as an Infallible Daughter. He said that like me, people can throw things at a rock, but it bounces off. Rocks are also durable, and likewise, he recounted that "I maintain what I am and what I want to be, and 'screw you, if you don't like it—nothing you do to me can destroy me'". Mom joined in and offered that my preferred life, my good life, was filled with reality not fantasy, saying "You never pretended—never, never, never—everything had to be real stuff and instances and scenarios. There was no room in your life for failure or stupidity or obnoxiousness. Many times people did not get where you were coming from, but you still listened to them and did not put them down, as much as you probably wanted to (laughing)".

Mom made the point that a rock was NOT about being stubborn, but was a tenacity that I displayed throughout my life. She shared a high point story when I was going off to Cornell University for the first time. Just the concept of being there was intimidating. While a few of my relatives had graduated from college before, I was the first across my extended family to ever attend a prominent, let alone Ivy League, college. Cornell was a large university, and my first class on the first day had 2,000 students in it—more students than people who lived in my hometown. Within the first few weeks of classes, quizzes and papers, I discovered that I did not have adequate study or writing skills, and my rural public school left me unprepared to compete with students from schools that, for example, offered AP (Advanced Placement) level courses. I was not only unprepared in academics, but also in social terms. Of course, there was a fair amount of super wealthy students—sons and daughters of prominent families—who drove luxury cars and had luxury goods and luxury experiences that, for a young person like me, was very enviable. There also was a significant amount of upper middle

class students, and they had the material comforts and an air of confidence about life that I lacked. Often they would tease me about my Western New York accent and terminology, like how I used the word "pop" rather than "soda", and made fun of my clothes. Mom said that despite being challenged with all of these things I wasn't prepared for, she saw how I worked my butt off, figured it out, and improved my academic skills, making Dean's list by sophomore year. She described how I exhibited independence and took control of myself, rather than "give in" or let people get the best of me. She said that she wouldn't have been able to do it. I shared that I was embarrased by where I came from, but on the outside, I took a "fake it 'til I make it" approach to be accepted and credible within the social community. We talked about how, despite all of this challenges, being at Cornell was one of the most enjoyable and meaningful aspects of my life. It fed my need for

Active relations with things – the awards shelf in my study: Even the statues resemble "rocks"

intellectual stimulation, it provided me with a relational circle of friends who held an interesting and broad worldview, and it created an environment where I found my own voice and confidence. It made me feel connected to something bigger than myself and that I could be part of contributing something important to the world. It was an ultimate relational "high" for me. My parents said that me being at Cornell was also enjoyable for them, not only the experiences we had together when they visited on campus, but also in them experiencing Cornell *through* me.

I asked them what message the rock held for me in managing social saturation and pursuing the good life. My Dad jumped in, "**Have faith in yourself, Michele**". He went on to explain that when I am challenged, I take in all the facts and dive

in to get relevant information to make a decision. Because of that, he said not to worry about what others will interpret about my decision or other things that I have no control over. Instead he said, "do what you think is right because you already weighed alternatives". Mom added that my drive keeps me going, and because "you are in tune with what your needs are, you can make tradeoffs and prioritize your tasks and my time, like what you are doing now with your family versus your work versus your Ph.D.". Dad said, "It's easy for you to overcome obstacles. I emphasize 'easy' because you *just do it* with thought and preparation".

As I thought more about a rock and me, I noticed that most of the jewelry I wear is rock-based: amber, turquoise, tiger eye, quartz. I love big, earthy pieces and wearing them makes me feel safe, soulful, and connected. What is interesting about a rock is that, like me, a rock is constructed from interactions with its environment over time. Rocks start off as a mineral or other type of substance, and then based on exposure to the elements, re-form themselves in a particular way. Because of this phenomenon, rocks reveal the geological record of the past. Thinking of the rock as the Infallible Daughter embodies how I am constructed by my relations, in the context of my environment: good weather and bad, high pressure and heat, growth and erosion of traits over time. These interactions alter my initial "mineral" form and give shape to who I am. How I respond to

Some of my treasured jewelry

environmental saturation in effect, determines who I am. Am I hard or porous, are my edges smooth or sharp, am I dull grey or shiny crystal? Does moss grow on me, or do I shine, reflecting the sunlight off the wall face? I wish I had asked my parents to describe the type of rock they envisioned I was.

One important fact about rocks for me to consider is that despite their durability, their form is not fixed over time; rocks are in constant change, just like organic materials. I recall Sahtouris (2000) describe planetary physiology theory which considers the Earth's crust to be the original source of the start of life on earth (p. 117-118) and accordingly, rocks have a life cycle in "the transformation of the Earth's crust from rock to living matter and back to rock" (p. 124). Being an Infallible Daughter, while to date *contains* my past, doesn't mean I am *beholden* to my past. I can transform and grow her, taking her in new places and directions. This transformation can also alter my past form. It's not about staying consistent; it's about what is useful and dropping off the rest. The Infallible Daughter in a way is the core of me about which other living matter surrounds. Being a rock means my past and my future are ongoing constructions.

In Closing

Mom wrapped up the conversation reinforcing the "no nonsense" preference of mine, saying that "Michele, you have your life under control. Yes, you have challenges, but you keep with it and don't say 'stop' to get off. You might have had crappy bosses or unfair situations, but you keep your 'Benton integrity', take it in stride, and make the best of it. But you are not naïve, so you also won't let it happen again". Although they never once said how much they are proud of me as their daughter, their stories and responses to my questions were filled with joy and admiration for me. I was surprised at how animated and engaged they were during this conversation, and realized that my accomplishments and experiences in many ways are theirs, too. It is as if my pursuit of the good life is their good life too. I know of my parent's regrets and missed dreams, some of which is driven by an inability to ignore some of the voices of others, real or imagined. When my parents and I talk about some of the bolder, non-conformist choices I've made, and they share a story about how they made a different—a "safer"—choice in line with what was expected of

them, but one with an outcome of regret or missed opportunity. In their story, I sense that they are getting a second chance to do it over vicariously through me. That idea alone is very affirming to me.

So what do about the Infallible Daughter?
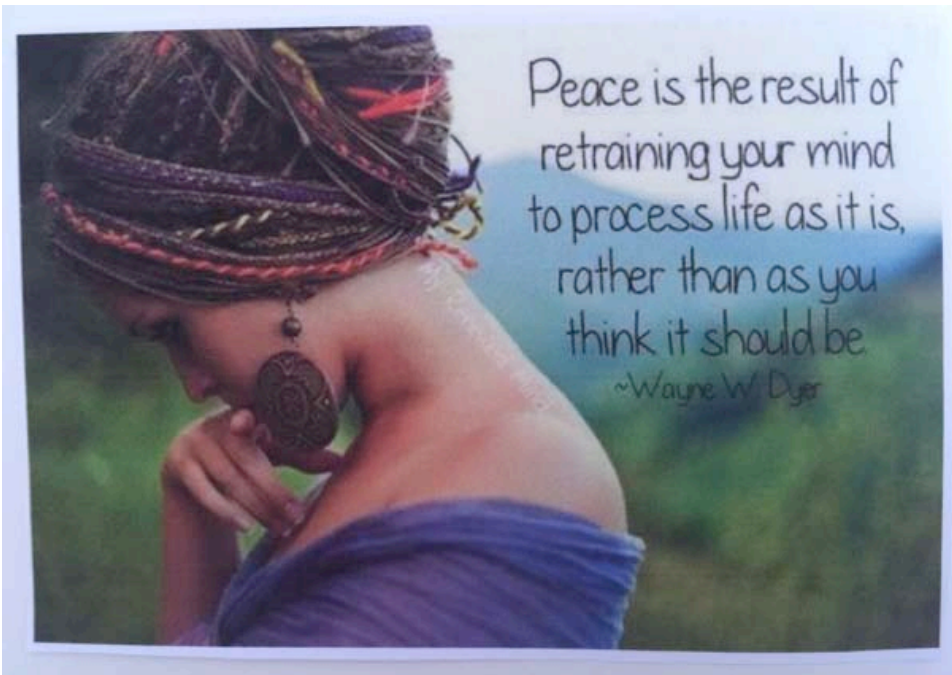
I am moved by this quote above from Wayne Dyer, and keep it in my annual journal in the back so I can remind myself of what I learned from some wonderful mentors and coaches about setting aside some of the perfectionist performance tendencies and approaching life less consumed about how others think of me or about making a mistake. Dropping some of these internal pressures on myself has been liberating and brought me new sources of joy. But in doing so, I have been ignoring my Infallible Daughter performance, silencing her voice and seeing her as an impediment, rather than a resource, to the good life. Writing this narrative makes me think it is time to honor her, as she has been

constructed from my many relations and experiences in my life, even if they might not have been ones I would have chosen.

I realize now that the Infallible Daughter holds tremendous special power—she *is* a rock. But she must be allowed to be visible. In thinking about the children's game "rock-paper-scissors", rock always beats scissors (it breaks them), but it always loses to paper because paper covers rock. In other words, rock loses when it is covered up. In thinking about this metaphor, I wonder what more my life can be if I welcome the Infallible Daughter back— rather than keep covering her up—leveraging her strengths and giving her my love rather than distain. In the past, she may have dangled saturation temptations in front of me, but that doesn't mean she will now. Life has evolved her. It has evolved me.

PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE:
Mother

In thinking back on my early life, I don't recall fantasizing about one day having children, with idyllic imagery of me as a nurturing, doting caregiver. My internal compass seemed to go awry when I encountered traditional gender role expectations, even before I became aware of the concept. As a teen, one of my relatives mentioned something to me about "my future kids" and I remember how I experienced a sense of restlessness and anxiety, feeling tugged at something I couldn't name, but for certain, it wasn't Motherhood. The call of being something "great" drowned out any ticking of my biological clock, and the traditional, American notions of a stay-at-home mom made me panicky. Sure, I figured, one day I may get married and perhaps deign myself to having a baby. But that was far into the future, something that would be more of happenstance, later, once my true-life purpose had been realized. Even through my 20s and early 30s, I found babies and toddlers uninteresting, baffled how people found them so cute and adorable, especially with bodily fluids spewing from both ends. Motherhood, it seemed to me, simply sucked: it meant I would have lots of boring, gross extra work and I would need to set aside most of my dreams and make sacrifices for the sake of my children. I couldn't see any upside of being a Mother.

That's why today, it surprises me how meaningful and rewarding being a Mother has been for me—not only from the sheer joy I find in day to day social and physical interactions

with my kids, but also from the sense of accomplishment I experience having mastered the mechanics of being a mom. I thrive in the commonality of it and find myself embracing its clichés when describing this part of my life to others.

Introduction: Mother

I am a mom. I have two children, a son who is turning eleven next week and a daughter who is seven years old. I raise my children along with my husband at our home in North Carolina. My life typifies more contemporary practices of American motherhood: I waited later in life to have babies; I worked right up to my delivery dates in both pregnancies; after a short maternity leave, I continued working full-time; I share house and child care duties with my husband. To be sure, while being a Mom is very important to me, it is not my sole performance.

Making the decision to have a baby was something that just sorta happened. My husband and I waited about nine years into our marriage before we decided to try to have a baby. Although we always agreed on our intent to have children, we were delayed by years of living abroad, wanderlust travel, and me waiting for that "right time" in my career to take a break. As I entered my mid-thirties, that "right time" never seemed to come, and during a routine, annual exam, my gynecologist suggested to me that if I wanted children, I should get started before I turned 35, as she saw higher issues of infertility and birth defects after that age. This rational impetus got us focused, and 2 months after turning 34, I got pregnant. The experience of being pregnant—even between the

morning sickness and discomfort in the later months—had certain magic to it and introduced a new dimension in thinking about what composes a good life. Likewise, going through childbirth and the early days of figuring out how to nurse and care for a baby revealed a secret club of knowledge and also expanded my sense of what my brain and my body could handle in life. I could physically get up from a deep REM sleep at 11pm and 3am nightly for feedings; I could manage with grace when my milk let down in the middle of the grocery store, seeping through my grey T-shirt; I didn't gag when my baby shot hot diarrhea on me as I was changing the diaper. I was surprised at how something so "common" could be so special at the same time.

Using up all my medical leave and vacation days, after 10 weeks I returned to work. A few key conversations with my husband led to the decision to have him be a stay-at-home Dad. Practically, we reasoned, neither of us has family nearby, so our support network was limited. Financially, we prioritized my career because I made more money, and the high cost of quality daycare was close to what my husband would be earning after taxes and other expenses. Emotionally, both of shared how we were very uncomfortable with strangers raising our children, and two people working full time would limit how much either us spent with our children. So, while we both agreed that him staying at home was the optimal solution, it has been difficult for my husband, who comes from a very traditional, foreign culture; being a stay-at-home Dad has challenged his own sense of performing well as a man. Even though the numbers of stay-at-home Dad's are growing in America, having

the man as "the primary caregiver who doesn't work by choice" is still not the norm—I saw a Pew Research report (June 2014) estimating that less than 500,000 American adult men fit this description. I have witnessed how our arrangement raises eyebrows and causing some negative judgment on him as the man who isn't working. However, my husband's role as a stay-at-home Dad has had tremendous, positive impact on our children. His loving and involved style infused our values and provided a foundation for their lives; his dedicated time in the early years resulted in bi-lingual children with a love of music and art; my kids tell me how much they enjoy being with their Dad, and I see the affection as the expression of it every day.

Despite my husband being the primary caregiver while I work, my social saturation as a Mother—my obligations and activity as a caregiver—remain significant and expanding. My husband may be a stay-at-home Dad, but that doesn't mean we have just swapped traditional roles, in that I am the provider and he is the homemaker. For sure, I don't come home from work hearing, "How was your day, dear? Please, relax, put your feet up, you had a hard day. Here's the paper. Dinner will be ready shortly." When my workday ends, I go right into Mother mode, not to mention all the mothering activity that happened before my workday started in the morning, as well as throughout the weekend. Motherhood and Fatherhood has become a partnership in caregiving, one that doesn't follow any existing institutional model. Over the years, we have experimented and laughed and argued, ending up with a mishmash of shared and divided up duties, and achieving somewhat of a predictable, daily rhythm to parental life.

Despite this partnership, though, the burden of saturation continues as Mother.

The nature of my social saturation comes from three sources. First, there is the volume of technical needs associated with raising children—making sure they are washed, dressed, and fed, and they have what they need for the day like papers, instruments, sports gear, etc. Then, when they get home from school, it is making sure their homework is getting done, they've unpacked their lunch bags and put away clothes, and that we get dinner. Over the weekend, things that still aren't done, sometimes laundry or cleaning the house or getting groceries, take over our time. While my children are able to do more things to help—for instance, I am no longer
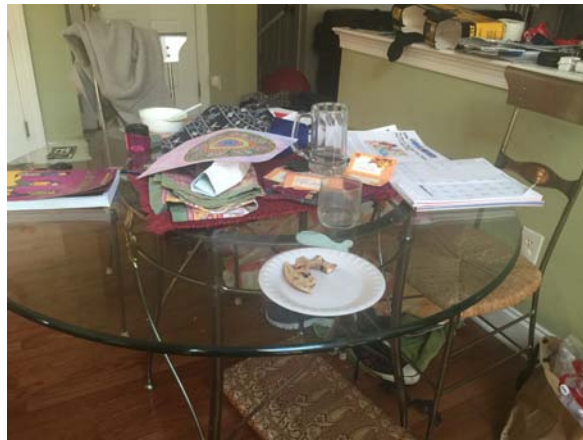
Side effects of social saturation, as reflected at the messy kitchen table

changing diapers and dressing them in the morning as they can dress themselves—there are additional technical needs as they take on more activities and become more independent, such as me needing to negotiate the clothing choices of the day and being more involved in "checking in" on homework and school responsibilities. And, it's not just all this "doing"; it's also the "anticipating" what might be missed or go wrong, such as a costume needed for a school play, and "reacting" to unplanned situations and the after effects, such as spilling breakfast all

over one's clothes or getting an injury that requires a visit to Urgent Care. While my husband plays an important implementation role in running the home and caring for the children, I find myself taking on the leadership role in the thinking, the scenario planning, the delegating, and the coordinating across many areas.

Second, my children's relations with other people saturate my world. Their friends, their friends' parents, their teachers, and others come into our conversation and into our lives. For instance, at least once or twice a month, we get an invitation for a birthday party, a chaperone request, or playdate opportunity for one or both of the kids. Our weekends had been getting so over programmed, that a few years ago, we as a family decided to limit the number of these events we participate in to two or three a year, so that we can dedicate our weekend time to our own errands and more important, to spend quality, unstructured time together as a family. Likewise, we are mindful of the invitations and requests we impose on other people. This decision has a ripple effect on the relations and our standing with others in the community, such as when we have to explain to a persistent mom why we are not available for a playdate with their child and at the same time, not make *them* feel personally rejected or make *us* seem weird. Another example is in helping my children manage their own relations effectively. It takes time and energy to coach my children's successes or challenges at school with relational strategies in a way that helps build their emotional and relational well being, without me smothering them. Even more, as they continue grow older, their circle of relations is

ever widening, and the issues become more complex. Furthermore, because of the dynamics of the school they are in, we have created a strong relationship with their teachers, where we partner up on parenting strategies and also to support academic areas where each child may need more support. My daughter's teachers recently asked me to be a Room Parent (a year-long, voluntary role), and I felt pulled to do so, but ended up declining so that I didn't get myself over-programmed; however, I do try to volunteer at a few events that my daughter says are really important to her, like chaperoning a special field trip.

Third, my children's involvement in a technology-based society—their relations with other things—adds to my saturation as Mother. Many toys and games have an interconnected, relational component, and as such, my husband and I have to figure out ways to balance our kids' interest in the latest thing, with safety and appropriateness. For example, I can check the age rating when buying a video game, choose how much "screen time" my children are allowed each week, and forbid devices at the dinner table. But, even within these parameters—even with an "E for Everyone" rating—when you put the game disk in the player, it operates via software from the cloud, and to play the game, you must create an online account. So, in these instances, I need to consider which email information I want to provide and figure out how to change the default function so that the kids won't play online with strangers. Similarly, as another example, allowing them to use the children's game apps on the iPad introduces the need to manage settings to prevent in-app purchases and ensure they

don't receive text notifications. Even with these setting, some apps have found ways to get personal information or are simply malevolent, so we need to be vigilant in what the kids download and use. And, rather than just imposing rules, we also spend a lot of time teaching the kids about proactive steps they need to take and what to avoid, in order to protect themselves and ensure there won't be embarrassing things out there that they can't get rid of later on. Then there's the issue of virtual relations: Do I scold the kids if they call Siri (the virtual assistant on the Apple devices) a buttface? Their societal involvement means that, as Mother, I now need to study up and keep on top of technological advances, and their implications and risks. I also find that as they are getting older, I learn from them and in some ways, rely on them to keep up on social trends. Thus, these three sources of social saturation—day-to-day activity, my children's relations, and a technology-based society—in effect, make me assume the role of the chief operating officer or managing director of the home in a volatile, uncertain fast-changing world.

Early on, my notion of a good life as a Mother had been anchored to things running smoothly, but over time, it has shifted to the pleasure I have in my relations with my children. During the first part of Motherhood, my sense of the good life as a Mother seemed to happen only when I was a good project manager making good Mother choices: Did I leave the house with the bottles and diapers I needed, so I didn't have to turn around mid-errands to do baby stuff? Am I starting solid food too early or late? Should I buy a drop down crib or one that converts to a toddler bed later on? What is the cost-benefit

ratio of cloth versus disposable diapers? Is it going to be okay to let my fussy baby just co-sleep with us or, as touted in the American sleep guidance book, *Babywise*, will it cause harm to their character in the future? Furthermore, the need for being good at what I do—earning my "A" in Mommy—was complicated by the saturation of the Motherhood industry. As I tried to research and learn, the aggressive marketing efforts of companies as well as the sheer volume of books, websites, magazine articles, blogs, and persons with a point of view was overwhelming, and worse, there often wasn't one consensus view or direction. I came to realize that there was no guidebook or plan to follow; what was "right" was situational and based on personal preference.

During these early years as a Mom, the scope and saturation of options and the pressure to make the "right" decision made it hard for me to relax and enjoy just playing with my son—that, too, became yet another "task" to do. I often wondered if being a Mom was just being a robot, a mechanical role going through the motions of life. Fortunately, about this time I was working with an executive coach for a new role at work, and she included some "life coaching" stuff in our work together where we explored these issues. Over many discussions over coffee at Starbucks, she helped me reframe Motherhood into a pursuit of joy, influencing what activities I prioritized and what input I took into my life. This mental shift, along with me becoming more skilled and experienced at caregiving activity, paved the way for a different consideration of a good life as a Mother.

Today, the good life as Mom is experiencing my children. It is both a social and physical relational interaction. I enjoy being a part of them as they move through life, learning new things and moving from a state of helplessness to greater independence. I also delight in the warmth of physical contact; nothing is better than hugs with little arms around your neck, or kissing and munching wriggly feet. I melt when they come to me unsolicited to give me affection. I find myself now with unexplainable satisfaction and pleasure in being Mom, so much so, that my Mother priorities sometimes win out to priorities in being a Successful Business Leader or Creative Outsider. Managing saturation is still essential—I know that for me, being orderly is a necessary enabler of being joyful. But I no longer pursue order for order's sake; I am learning what is *enough* order—that bring joy in of itself—so then can relax and make space for all the joy I am blessed with as Mom. In my inner dialogue, though, my unconventional way of "doing Motherhood" leaves me doubting if I am doing it right. I don't often get positive validation.

It is from this vantage point that I embark on my research of being a Mother: **can I be internally congruent living a good life as Mother when I don't follow institutional norms?** In this narrative, I describe the web of relations that shapes my performance as Mother. Then, I introduce whom I chose as my co-researchers and share our lived experience by recounting our co-researcher conversations. From there, I focus on the selected artifacts, and engage in sense making by generating embodied language and meaning the artifacts hold.

Finally, I close the narrative with lessons learned and personal reflection.

I chose to express this narrative using CHALKBOARD as the font. I wanted something youthful and that would appeal to my kids if they were designing this piece. It was important that the font had a playful—even whimsical—quality to it, and created a sense of comfort and warmth. I had never used this font before, but it spoke to me as Mother.

Sociogram: Mother

I chose to use the color pink as the backdrop in honor of the artifact my daughter chose: Fluffy Bunny, who will be introduced later in this narrative. Pink says "happy" to me and that's what I am being a Mom. On the next page is the sociogram I developed for my performance as a Mother.

Starting in the upper right quadrant of the sociogram—*active relations with actual people*—my key relations, of course, include my two children and my husband. My own mother and my favorite aunt are also included, as theses relationships expanded beyond the Infallible Daughter after I became pregnant. They shared my joy and experiences and there seemed to be a deeper connection between us now that I have gone through the same experience they had. My kids' teachers, as discussed previously, are partners with me in raising my children as productive, healthy adults. Finally, I have some good friends who are working Moms like me, and while the focus of our friendship isn't motherhood, we find ourselves able to vent on the challenges and issues we face in being a Mom who works full time. There is a different

"knowing" we seem to share versus my other female friends who do not have children, and our conversations are validating and rich with insight. These active relations form the core of my performance being Mom. I have deliberately excluded my children's friends, their parents and neighbors from this sociogram, as while I do *interact* with them as a Mom, I don't view them as *essential* to my performance as a Mom.
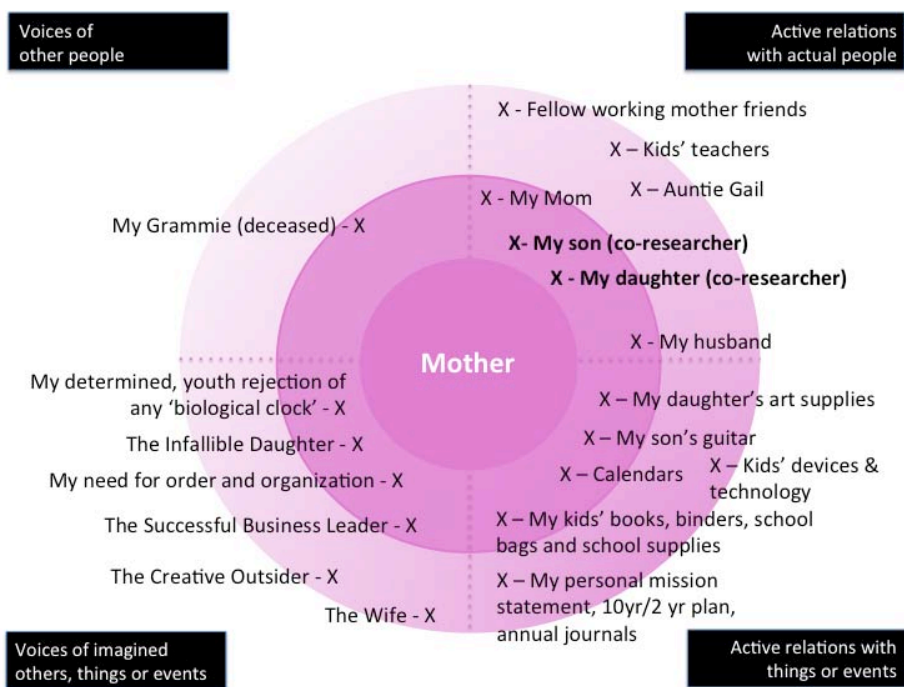
There also seems to be a lot of "stuff" in being a Mom, as found in the lower right quadrant—*active relations with things or events*. Most of this stuff is associated with the implementation and operational aspects of being a Mom, particularly given the high degree of social saturation. The kids school calendar—their days off, their activities, the teacher conferences, etc.—form the basis of our functional

life as a family and we keep it all organized on one main calendar in the kitchen on the side of the fridge. We add doctor's appointments, soccer practice, personal invitations, big sales at our main shopping venues, and the like. The kids check the calendar each day, and it has been an important tool to build planning and responsibility skills with them. This year, I found a calendar that is extra large and for each day of the week, has separate rows for each member of the family (heaven!). The stuff here also includes all the support items— my kids' book bags, my son's school binder and my daughter's spelling notebook, the holder in the kitchen where we keep homework practice books, all their reading books on the shelf, the bins with their shoes and coats, and so on. What's also important is the stuff associated with their favorite activities that I do with them. In particular, my daughter loves to color, draw, and create art projects, and we have way too many bins of supplies that she will bring out and direct me to play with her. My son is less into "toys"; instead, my husband has been helping him learn guitar, and since my son and I share a similar taste in music, he has been figuring out riffs of music we like and then plays it for me. Their devices and technology—from their iPads, use of the computer for school projects, game consoles, etc.—are also included. One final area of stuff is connection to my own goals and plans. On a daily basis, if there are things from the family calendar that would impact my workday, such as "kids—1/2 day school" or "dentist at 10am", I will then transfer it to my own mobile calendar on my phone (which als o syncs to my computer). On a longer-term basis, I

incorporate family things into my mission statement, annual strategies, and quarterly tactics.

The upper left quadrant—*voices of other people*—is quiet, except for my vivid memories of Grammie. Grammie was born August 20, 1921 the youngest of 10 children, half of whom were born in Poland. She met my Jaja—also a first generation Polish immigrant—at a dance at the Assumption

Family calendar: a typical jam-packed week

Church in Buffalo, NY, got married on October 27, 1945, and had three kids, with my Mom as the oldest. On one hand, Grammie's voice signifies the traditional expectations of being a woman and being a Mom in post-World War II America, as I observed how her life followed these expectations. On the other hand, I recall random comments and phrases from her that revealed her disagreement with many of these expectations and a general sense of frustration with her life. She passed away on their 38th wedding anniversary from liver cirrhosis—this was when I was 13 and before I had the life experiences to be able to ask her more questions about this topic. I often wonder what she would think of my own life and how I am approaching Motherhood.

The lower left quadrant—*voices of imagined others, things or events*—embodies the tensions I often experience in being a Mom along side my other performances in a world of

social saturation. I know that the traditional concept of Motherhood—a stay-at-home Mom who doesn't work and whose primary goal is to serve the husband and family—is not a framework that works for me. But instead of rejecting being a Mom altogether—what I had been doing earlier in my life—now, I have found ways to maintain many things that are important to me while having and raising children. These voices are important contributors to that notion.

These quadrants come together in how I am crafting a new frame for Motherhood for me, even if it has mixed results in pursuing the good life. Managing the high degree of social saturation that accompanies assuming multiple roles often leaves me tired and stressed, no matter how efficient I may be. The cultural norms of two societies (*voices of other people*) can make a way forward unclear or with conflicting needs. The Infallible Daughter and my need for order (*voices of imagined others*), while making me good at getting a lot done (*as expressed and actioned via active relations with things*), are loud judges on how I should do more and better. I get so much joy from the interactions children (*active relations with real people*) that I don't do some things that would make me more effective, achieving, and satisfied in being a Successful Business Leader or Creative Outsider; I resist excessive business travel and evening networking events; I am not publishing and teaching as much as I want to; and there are many compelling, profitable projects sitting on my "one day" pile. In the literature review, the concept of job crafting seemed to applicable here—"Mom crafting". But doing one's own thing without social embodiment and legitimization through

social relations is difficult. I wonder if it is the lack of an institutional reassurance—what is contemporary Motherhood anyway?—that is causing me to second-guess myself in living my life as a Mom: "Am I doing this right?", "Am I happy?", and "Have a settled or given up too much of my dreams and ambitions of what I could have been?". For sure, I don't want my life pre-determined for me, especially as what traditional Motherhood offers means I need to acquiesce to a second-class position. Yet, crafting my own path in integrating Motherhood with my other identities—important in the pursuit of the good life—remains an unsettled, work-in-progress.

Co-Researcher Conversation: My son and daughter

Selecting my two children as co-researchers for this performance was the obvious choice for me. I was less interested in exploring what institutions and traditions say I should do, and the many conflicts I have as a mother. I wanted to hear from the main participants in my Mother performance about what is like having me as their Mom. For the purposes of confidentiality, I will not reveal my children's names. Also, as they are minors, I have applied both parental and research ethics in allowing their participation, protecting their private information, and ensuring appropriateness in what is shared in the Performance Narrative. Furthermore, given their ages and comprehension ability, I have simplified some of the research questions in our co-researcher conversations.

I asked each of my children if they wanted to help me with my school project, as school has been a shared journey for us. For the past few years, they have been watching me

juggle being in graduate school part time while working full time. When it seemed right, I would mention my school work to them in the course of talking about their school day and helping them with school work, discussing my homework that's due, the papers I need to write, the research I am doing, etc. In this instance, I explained that I am doing some research on relationships, and I wanted to interview them about ours. They told me that that thought Mom interviewing them for school was pretty cool, and they eagerly agreed to help me.

I chose to interview my children separately to allow each individual voice to come through. I talked to my 7-year old daughter first. My daughter is a "take charge" kinda gal—she leads her life with an strong sense of what she wants, what is right, and how things should be done. Her zest in life and her lack of self-consciousness impresses me. When we talk about issues at school or with her friends, I find the voices of the Successful Business Leader or Creative Outsider coming forward to coach her on different ways to be a strong, confident female, recognizing that life is interacting effectively with others but not at the sake of one's own self. I am also conscious not to impose traditional gender norms on her; for instance, I compliment her more on being smart or working hard on a challenge, than I do on her outfit or how pretty or nice she is, and try to be gender neutral in her play and activities.

However, despite my husband and my efforts, institutional expectations still come into her life. For example, when I asked her if she wanted to help me with my school project, she told me that she knew a lot about relationships, so

I could ask her anything. I said I'd love to hear what she knows and she went on to explain, "Some people get married because they like each other and want kids. The brides wear white dresses and the men wear tuxedos. They have a big cake. The bride throws a bouquet to someone and when she catches it, it's her turn to get married".

To start the co-researcher conversation, she suggested that we sit in the sunroom—it's her favorite place to hang out. In there, she has a battered easel with a chalkboard on one side and a whiteboard on the other, with a tray for markers, and chalk and papers. Sitting in a kid-sized Winnie the Pooh chair, pressed right up to the base of the easel, she spends hours at the whiteboard—drawing her distinctly stylized figures of women, writing words and scribbles, pretending to do math in front of a class, talking to herself; it's her playland. At her direction, I sat on the couch while she sat at her whiteboard.

I asked her about a time when I was at my best as Mom. She talked about the time in the summer when I took a break in the middle of my workday to take her brother and her to trampoline park (it's a big warehouse-like gym with trampoline floors, dive pits, games, etc.).

She explained, "You didn't have to do it and it was just great. I kept falling down and you helped me back up. And then, I was tired and you stayed with me so I could sit and rest. On the way home, we talked in the car".

I asked, "How you would describe our relationship?"

She told me, "You cook dinner and help with my homework and get me ready for school in the morning. You help

me with what good choices are for clothing—what is acceptable and not acceptable. You play with me. The best time is the morning time before everyone wakes up, when we talk together while you are studying. You spend time with me when I want to show you stuff."

I continued, "If you were to describe our relationship to one of your friends at school, I asked, what would you say?"

She replied, "Perfect. Awesome. Like a real Mom is. You do what Moms do: help little ones".

She seemed intent on her whiteboard drawing and I wasn't sure if she was fully engaging with me, but we as we finished up the interview, talking a little more about just stuff in general, she revealed what she drew all the while we were talking:

Later that evening, I interviewed my son who's 10. I often describe my son as an old soul. Since he was a baby, he always seemed older than his years because of his own self-awareness and his interactions with others. He has a mature ability to read the emotional current of what is happening in a group, and then he interacts to improve or help what might be going on. His kindness and flexibility to get along with all types of people impresses me. In dealing with his school and friend issues, I find lessons from being an Infallible Daughter coming out as I coaching him to make sure he advocates for himself and his needs, and reminding him he doesn't always need to please others. He loves soccer, and can name any soccer cleat make and model. He is also interested in things that happen in the world, and the recent US political campaign has been a rich topic for us, especially with the opportunity for a first female president. We watch both political party debates, and I ask about his opinion and share mine. I thoroughly enjoy our varied conversations.

My son and I started our co-researcher conversation at the kitchen table. It's a familiar place where we work on homework together or just have a snack and chit chat.

I asked him to tell me about a time when he saw me being at my best as a Mom. Without missing a beat, he said, "This summer. I saw how committed you were when you went upstairs [to your office] every day. You are making sure you are getting your dissertation done. You are really good at getting more things done faster. It's awesome because, like, when you talk to your Mom on the phone and I need you to look at something, you can do both".

I asked him how he would describe our relationship to one of his friends, and he said "Happy. You are always nice and doing things to make me better. You always talk in a nice tone and even if we don't agree, you make me feel important. We usually find a way to come to an agreement. I would say that my Mom is an amazing person".

He told me he liked it when I was interviewing him.

The Artifact: "Squishy" Things

When I asked about an object that reminds them of me as their Mom, each chose different objects, but interestingly, both used the word "squishy" when describing the objects. My daughter pointed to Fluffy Bunny sitting next to me on the couch. She said, "You're fluffy like that bunny, Mom. You are squishy and delicious. I also like wearing your pajamas—they feel warm and cozy even though they hang down on me". My son recommended that either my glasses or my boobs are good objects for me as a Mom. He said, "The glasses because I never really saw you without them on. And your boobs because they are squishy like you. You cared for me when I was little, you fed me milk, they are like nice warm hugs."

I probed further with each of them on their objects. My daughter explained that Fluffy Bunny would describe me as a "nice, cute, squishy person" and that she—my daughter—is important to me. It helps create a good life because, she says, "Mom, you know what is good for people". My son giggled about the boobs and said he would rather just talk about my glasses. He said that the glasses are what he remembers me by. He said, "I see inside your eyes. You are a Mom and you work and

you know things." He continued, "I know I am the most important to you because I am your son. I have your sense of humor and I am happy." He explained, "Your glasses help you see things very well and see what's going. They help you buy the right foods because you can read packages and see if it's grass-fed beef and non-grass fed beef."

These artifacts say three things about the relational nature of the Mother performance. First, being a Mom is about living in the relational emotion of love; the inherent "squishyness" embraces all interactions, even if there is conflict or disagreement. Second, the relationship creates meaning and performance within my children. They feel validated and important, and

Fluffy Bunny

our relationship plays a key role in their own construction of self. Finally, our relationship creates meaning and performance within me. My Mother performance exists because of them and together we are creating my reality. Caring for them, especially helping them navigate the saturation of life, brings validation to me. It makes me happy and satisfied to know that I can be an important part of their lives, that they see me and appreciate me and value me.

The artifacts also embody two major themes of the Mother performance: **the power that the institution of Motherhood holds over Moms** like me and **how institutional norms can constrict more life-giving possibilities**. First, the institution of Motherhood's has a dominating feature—rampant consumerism—wielding influence over vulnerable Moms. Fluffy Bunny reflects this strong connection between contemporary motherhood and consumerism. Part of social saturation is experiencing a latent pressure to buy things in order to "be a good mom" and to "help your kids live a good life". Examples are abound. In the first OB/GYN visit when your pregnancy is confirmed, the doctor's office staff offers you to sign up to receive information and samples, thanks to the sponsorship of for-profit companies. Your email and mailbox then becomes flooded with advertisements under the guise of motherhood "education". After giving birth, on your last day out of the hospital, your discharge nurse gives you an insulated cooler bag filled with baby formula and bottle samples—a gift, thanks to [Baby Formula Company]—even though on the previous few days, the hospital staff have been teaching you and encouraging you to breast feed for as long as you can. Your information searches on the internet tag you as a Mom, and later, when you are online reading the paper, you receive targeted Mommy advertisements and other push messages. Retailers have algorithyms that use your purchase history to identify the likelihood you are pregnant or a Mom, and unsolicited, you begin to get customized emails and offers from them. You wonder, "How did they know I was pregnant? How did they know I had kids?"

Experiencing this consumerism played into my self-doubts and uncertainty on how to be a Mom. Because I had rejected outright any traditional way of doing Motherhood, I was without a rulebook. So, I was searching for guidance on how to do it differently or better. I was a sucker, ripe for this consumerism. I have begun to realize that my choices about the baby accessories and the clothes the kids wear really was about me proving to the world how attentive I was as a Mom. They served as props, ornaments, and costumes in the performance of Motherhood. I wanted to show others I could do it well and "right", even if my performance didn't follow traditional expectations and norms.

This overcompensation also caused more, unncessary saturation. Part of the saturation came from me turning to society to study up on what I needed to do to be a good Mom, which in turn, created lists of things "to buy" with new, additional research needed to ensure chose the best brand or features in my purchase decision. God forbid if I bought something that had only three stars! Shopping for a diaper bag with both the right fashion sense and the right dose of practicality was a week-long effort; choosing the most effective stroller had me up for a many nights reading up on *Consumer Reports* and manufacturer reviews; learning about the dangers of bisphenol made me throw out one set of sippy cups and rush out to search three different stores for new ones that were BPA-free. I made the mistake of overbuying onesie sets and baby clothes to minimize the excessive laundry various "Mommy Blogs" warned me about, only later to have piles of outgrown items given away to charity, barely worn. I

bought too many toys and videos, rationalizing to myself that these are educational or what they "should" have, filling shelves and bins and cluttering up the house. Consumerism impacts the good life. It raises the level of saturation, and when trying to counteract or correct its effects, our inner dialogue of "shoulds" creates new stress and guilt.

We acquired Fluffy Bunny a different way. We were walking down the aisle of Walmart, and there was a bin of big, colorful bunnies leftover from Easter. My daughter, who was about four at the time, saw the last pink one and made an instant connection, begging me to buy it. I wasn't impressed—it didn't fit my notion of a proper toy, it was stereotypical "girlie" pink, and anyway, it was past the season for bunnies. I said that we could think about it while we finished our errands, and we could come back if she still wanted it, secretly expecting her to forget about it. When we finished shopping and were standing in the check-out line, she asked when we were going to pick up the bunny and that she really wanted it and hadn't gotten anything in a while. With a quick conversation, my husband and I acquiesced—it was half price anyway—and he dashed to grab it before it was our turn to pay. Since then, it has been one of her favorite toys. Her selection of Fluffy Bunny as the Mother artifact made me realize that I was adding saturation unnecessarily to my life—that many times, it was *my* need that was being met rather then what the kids really needed or wanted; it was *my* need wear the costume of what I thought a good Mother should wear; it was *my* need to be perceived as an environmentally-minded, hip, urban family as reflected by what I clothed my children in and the quality of

the toys purchased; it was *my* need to be generous in buying things, perhaps to offset some of the material scarcity I experienced growing up. I needed to be more in tune with their needs, not my inner ghosts.

This leads to the second theme in the Mother artifacts: **how institutional norms can constrict more life-giving possibilities**. Traditional concepts of Motherhood endure—no matter the effort to set them aside, they linger as internal voices, and for me, their presence continued to interfere in experiencing a good life. My glasses as a Mother artifact serve as a metaphor for how to overcome these institutional reminders. To explain, my glasses contain corrective lenses because the "normal" nature of my eyes distort how external images come into my internal comprehension. Without my glasses, I would miss important details and my view of the world would be restricted to the biases and limitations my eyes bring me. Similarly, social institutions constructed how I perceived Motherhood and how I understood what is expected of me in "doing Mother" as judged by others. These constructions—these nearsighted eyes—limit the possibilities in my life. My glasses help correct some of these distortions, allowing me see the world in a more far-sighted, expansive way. My early understanding of

My collection of eyeglasses

Motherhood was based on seeing traditional institutional as absolutes, and dissatisfied with the options, I intially rejected the whole idea of being a Mom. Later, I decided to be a Mom on my own terms, but still struggled with what and how to do it. My glasses have let me see a different ways of Motherhood, ones that are not bound by instititional or gender norms, or rampant consumerism, but instead, can be an performance predominately rooted in my relationship with my children. It is not *Motherhood*—with a capital M—the institution, but rather, it is *motherhood*—with a little m—the ongoing relational interactions between my children and me, nothing more.

In Closing

Within my sense of self, being Mom is one of many performances. I experience Motherhood not as a siloed institution, but as a one of many institutions I navigate in the multiplicity of my life. My Infallible Daughter creeped into the Mother performance as I attempted to master Motherhood. Lately, I sometimes wonder if my Wife performance is simply the Mother performance done in conjunction with my husband. Competing priorities in the performances of an ambitious Successful Business Leader and Creative Outsider leave me questioning if I am doing enough—or too much—as a Mom. Adding to the multiplicity is the increased level of social saturation that I experience, and if not kept in check, it can add to stress, fatigue, and angst. The good life as a Mom, it seems, is interdependent on the good life across my other performances.

I am curious about the call of Motherhood: Is it in my nature—a type of Mother Nature—or is it just a construction? It's difficult to answer. On one hand, the intensity of my relationship with my kids seems real on all levels, and they *are* me—physically made of the same DNA material that I am. Being a Mom is part of nature; I am Mother Nature. On the other hand, the social reality of Motherhood—with its norms and expectations—may be just a social construction, something subject to the shifting tides of the times. In my dissertation reading, I came across the fact that prior to the 1800s in Western society, the strong, emotional relationship between child and parent was largely non-existent; the idea of devoted, motherly love was something conceived later in our history (Schor, 1992, p. 92-93). After World War II, for the convenience of the returning male soldiers, the traditional "stay-at-home" Mom persona became the preferred performance in prevailing American culture, as discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, these examples point to the lack of a biological mandate for how to be a good Mom; instead, perhaps Motherhood can be considered nothing more than a cultural derivation. If Motherhood is culturally derived, then the shifts in our contemporary cultural life seem to also call for shifts in how Motherhood is conceptualized in light of other significant roles women play. However, I don't see that we in American society have landed on a distinguishable contemporary model, a next generation version of Motherhood. I experience Motherhood as an institution in flux. I am not clear on the rules. I am not clear what is expected of me. I am making it up

as I go along. I hope I am doing okay and that my kids will be okay.

Despite these challenges, a clear definition of Motherhood that isn't *on my terms* scares me; I don't propose that as an answer. While the traditional institution of Motherhood holds clear expectations and makes choices and pathways straightforward, this clarity often comes at the sacrifice of one's dreams and possibilities as a broader member of society beyond the singular role of a Mother. The disappointed tone I often saw in my Grammie and my Mom is a stark reminder of what could have been, should I not have pursued my own path. Perhaps the new norm is not a predefined path, but the invitation for each Mother to craft her own path. And, rather than judgment or evaluation, could it be a societal celebration of the diversity of paths that exist across the patchwork of American lives.

In reflection on being a Mom, I am drawn to a lesson I had during the Thanksgiving holiday five years ago. Leading up to this holiday, work was crazy-busy as usual, and I ran out of time to plan out what we were going to do over the long weekend. I physically experience twinges to take advantage of the week of shared work and school days off. Yet being in a time of extraordinary saturation left me unable to think straight on where to go and what to do. Time passed, and the holiday was upon us without a plan. I rationalized my procrastination with a "why don't we just stay home and spend time together" solution, hiding my inner feelings of guilt and regret that I messed up. Our Thanksgiving weekend ended up being a low-key weekend, with the four of us hanging out at

the kitchen table playing board games, coloring, and painting, and most of the time spent in sweat pants and on some days, pajamas. On Sunday evening, as we were having dinner, I asked the kids how they liked the long weekend, dreading the answer, but making a polite attempt at conversation nonetheless. In response, my son shouted out to me, about to jump out from his chair, "Mom, this was the best time EVER! It was better than when we went to Florida".

I was stunned. I asked, "Why is that, what made it so great?"

He replied, "I love playing Battleship with you—that was so much fun".

It was in that moment that I realized I was going about the mastery of Mom thing wrong. My children don't need fancy trips, oodles of toys, special events, or a perfect implementation of a spreadsheet. They just need me. I am a good Mom not because I am clean, orderly, and organized, and get the right mix of material things to them. I am a good Mom because I give my conversation, my time, my intent to them. I am a good Mom because I am making relational choices to help them become well-adjusted, competent adults. It's the small moments on the drive to school, or at the kitchen table, or in the morning getting ready. That's how I do a good job—and have a good life—being a Mom.

Admittedly, some days the saturation is too much; occasionally I wish that I could just step out of it, longing for some solitude and quiet, flirting with jealousy about some of my friends who don't have kids, and wondering what "I could have been" in my career. Then, stepping back from the day-to-

day chaos of Motherhood, I see that *today* is precious. Ten years ago, I had only one small baby. Ten years from now, both of my kids will be adults. My Mom saturation will be lessened and will have plenty of this "me" time on my hands. But, just as today I think longingly about all those special moments nursing my son in the middle of night, making a connection together in the darkness, I know I will soon miss the tumbling, hectic dynamic I experience now. To be sure, I am in the midst of living a *great* life as Mother.

PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE:
Wife

I view the people in my life as active shapers of who I am. Because of that, I often wonder if meeting people, especially those who end up becoming important relations in one's life, are acts of random happenstance, a force of destiny, or somewhere in between—I acknowledge that my Western upbringing calls me to look for meaning and connections across touch points of my life. As I think about the pursuit of a good life, I am curious if life is one where the story that has already been written, or, as the social constructionist in me would say, it's more of a "Choose Your Own Adventure" where my interactions with others create the story along the way. But, when I think about my husband, I experience it not as that I *met* him, but instead, more that I *found* him.

I was 24 years old, living and working in London, and with a new boyfriend. He and I met through friends while out one night at a location that wasn't a usual place for me to go. For him, I later found out, he wasn't even going to go out that evening, and had to be cajoled by his friends; once there, fifteen minutes on one side or another, we probably would have missed meeting each other in the first place. Originally from Casablanca, Morocco, he was tall, dark, and handsome, spoke a number of languages, shared my odd sense of humor, and had this big, warm heart. While I was in no rush to get married, for sure, I was quite smitten. A few months into our relationship, I had to fly back home to the US for a friend's wedding and to spend a week with my parents helping them clean out the house and transition to being empty nesters. This was the first time my boyfriend and I were going to be apart since we started dating.

Two things happened on the trip that I hadn't put much significance on at the time, but in looking back, perhaps were quite significant when considering the question of "are we meant to be together?" First, at my friend's wedding reception, I joined the group of single women who gathered up to try to catch the bride's bouquet, with the winner, as tradition goes, being said to be the next person to get

married. The bride tossed the bouquet, and gob smacked, I saw it come hurling directly toward me; no doubt, it was mine for the taking. But I hesitated. I recall in that moment being embarrassed to catch it and be the center of it all, as I was getting a lot of attention already—I was a member in the wedding party, and also my living abroad had created a bit of a buzz among the guests. My pause allowed another woman to swoop in and snatch the tossed bouquet from me.

The second thing happened after the wedding, back home at my parents' house. I was sorting through some boxes of school papers and projects, deciding what to keep or toss. I came across an essay I did when I was about thirteen years old for 8th grade French class. The assignment was to write about a French-speaking country. Re-reading my essay made me remember that most of my fellow students chose obvious countries—France, Canada, and the like—and (not surprising, given being a Creative Outsider, too) I wanted to do something a bit different. I then recalled searching hard to find one off the beaten track, but interesting to research nonetheless. This essay was about the country of Morocco.

I got married to my boyfriend eight months later.

Introduction: Wife

I have been a Wife for over two decades—almost half of my life. After a whirlwind romance, my husband and I eloped at the Hammersmith and Fulham Register Office in London on January 26, 1996. I was about to be transferred to Prague for work, and given both of our immigration statuses, we would most likely be separated for a long period of time if we were not married. As I described the situation to others, "I am from country A, he's from country B, we're living in country C, and about to move to country D". I was madly in love and experienced a sense of knowing him for a long time; it seemed wrong to risk separation. The Infallible Daughter side of me would have preferred to wait to get married, to meet each other's families first, and to arrange it so that everyone could be at the wedding. But I also thought about my own parent's situation back in the 1960s: My Dad, who was working on his Masters degree, was engaged to my Mom. The military draft was

heating up, and unmarried men in school were now the targets of selection. During a weekend visit, my parents planned to elope in secret so that Dad would have a better chance of finishing school. However, by the end of the weekend, they talked themselves out of it because they didn't want to disappoint their families. Within a few months, my Dad's draft number came up, and he had to quit graduate school for Basic Training, never to finish his advanced degree. While my parents got married a year later as planned, the draft stunted the trajectory of my Dad's career, and their regret on their decision is evident in their regular retelling of the story to my sister and me. In my case, getting married right away was my gut and my heart winning the argument over my head.

While being with him added to my good life, dating someone seriously and then being married intensified the social saturation in my already-busy life. It's not just one person coming into one's life, but for example, it was his friends, his family, his challenges, his preferences and his needs that all came along, too. In many ways, partnering up with another person doubled my relational life. In addition, the nature of our international living compounded the amount of things we had to do: understanding complicated and unclear immigration rules of different governments, making sure the right paperwork was done at the right time, navigating bureaucracy and occasionally, unscrupulous situations with corrupt officials. During the course of our first six years of marriage, we lived in three different countries, moving five times in total, thus adding more administrative burden to the mix. Saturation seemed inevitable to us being together, but at
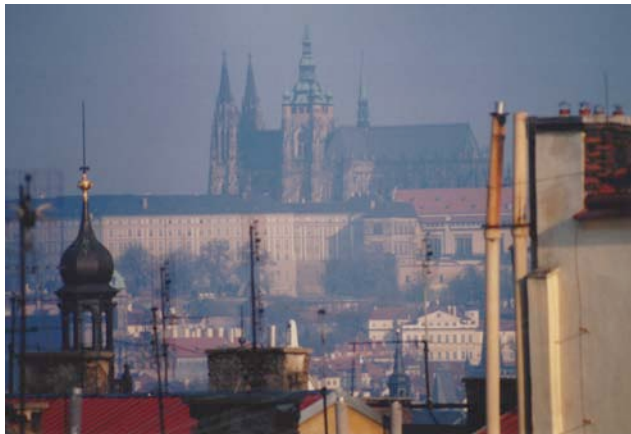
The good life: View from out the window of our first apartment together

the same time, we saw it as the cost of enjoying our exciting, global adventure. I was living the good life of the dreams of my youth.

Eventually settling down in one place, however, didn't seem to quell the saturation. For the past 12 years, running our lives together at our home in North Carolina—even before having kids—seemed fraught with too much to do with too many different people: planning for insurance and retirement and finding the right financial advisors; balancing travel and visits for two groups of families; figuring out who does laundry and who gets the groceries; making sure we're on top of doctor and dentist visits for our evolving healthcare needs and finding new providers when we were not happy with their bedside manner; deciding which type of technology we needed to buy for our home; and even handling imposing neighbors and having fun with friends. Trading the exotic backdrop for one in the suburbs of a mid-sized Southern city, our saturation seemed more pronounced. While our notion of a good life as being with international

My 10-year wedding anniversary band

adventures faded, our new notion contained the joys and chaos of parenthood. Thus, we viewed this saturation as important to building a good life—one that was healthy, secure, and comfortable together.

Getting married was never one of my requirements for a good life, but being with someone who cared about me, loving someone, and having committed companionship were always part of my hopes and dreams. I have found that there is something affirming and life-giving being in a healthy, very intimate relationship with another person. As the clichés go, it takes a lot of work, there are both good and bad times, you grow along the way, etc. And, because of this magnitude a spouse or

other significant other has one's life, I can't help but wonder if just the *idea* (that little relational exchange in your head) of being with a particular person as "one's destiny" strengthens the relational bond. After we got married, he and I talked a lot about the two things that happened on that US trip when we were dating, and there seemed to be many more coincidences that seemed to point to us being part of a story unfolding rather then be a result of randomness or in-the-moment relational co-creation. No matter if it's that the signs pointed to some predetermined plan, or if it's the bias of noticing and interpreting past events after the outcome is known—there still seems to be a magic around how two people come together. For me, experiencing that magic has contributed to me having a sense of a good life. When my husband and I celebrated our 20-year anniversary earlier this year—a second decade together—it was a meaningful, relational achievement for both of us. We talked about our sense of stability, of security, of healthiness and, of course, love, all of which we appreciate in our life together.

Being a part of this research also made me wonder: apart from a committed relationship with another person, **what the heck does it mean to be a Wife**? As you know me by now, it's not surprising that I never considered playing the "proper" role of a Wife, as defined by 1950s American tradition. Embarking on my research, though, made me realize that while I had rejected traditional expectations, I never replaced it my own notion of a Wife; I had never really stopped to think about the significance of being "a Wife" and performing as a Wife. It is from this vantage point that I embark on the performance narrative. In it, I describe the web of relations that shapes my performance as a Wife. Then, I introduce whom I chose as my co-researcher and share our lived experience by recounting our co-researcher conversation. From there, I focus on the selected artifact, and engage in sense making by generating embodied language and meaning that artifact holds. Finally, I close the narrative with lessons learned and personal reflection.

I chose to capture this narrative using GIL SANS font. There is something stable and straightforward about the cleanliness in the typeface, but there is softness and fun to how the letters are handled.

Despite the presence of love in this performance, a frilly, romantic font didn't reflect the grounded-ness that accompanies being a Wife.

Also, as a researcher note, because of the deeply personal aspects of my relationship with my husband, in this narrative, there will be aspects of my life as a Wife that I will not be addressing, including our intimate life and many personal details. That may result in excluding some information and facts that could be important to the topic. I have done my best to stay true to the goals of the research.

Sociogram: Wife

One's self is a by-product of the many relations, both real and imagined, and being a Wife is no different. In considering the backdrop for my sociogram, I chose the color blue because it reminded me of the ocean. I am not a great swimmer, but have always been personally drawn to being by the water. Smelling the air and relaxing my eyes across the endless horizon taps into my soul. My husband and I have always shared a love for the water, especially the ocean. The inner feelings and the meanings that the water evokes is an important aspect to experiencing a good life for me.

Below is the sociogram I developed for my performance as Wife:
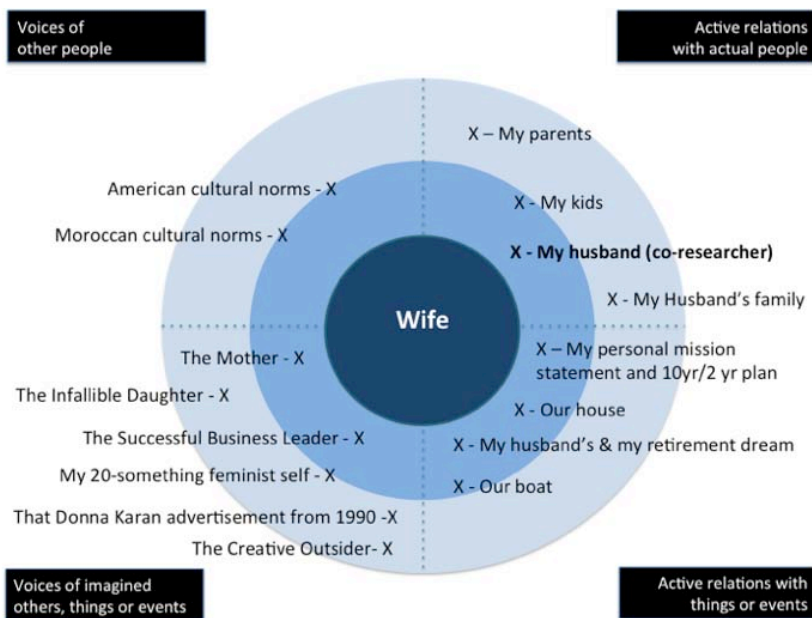
In starting in the upper right quadrant—*active relations with actual people*—my husband is the primary relation in Wife, and without him, this performance wouldn't be real. My kids are included here, as they are the most important output of our relationship and on a day-to-day basis, dominate much of our conversation topics and actions as a husband and wife. Both of our immediate families are also included, as many aspects of our lives together as a couple are impacted by our interactions with them. Sometimes, these aspects contribute to the good life—a heartwarming visit or doing something nice for them on a special birthday. Other times, these aspects add to the social saturation—an unexpected illness, helping them manage a personal issue, or in conflict over something between family members. Our families often enter our conversations and actions we need to take as a couple. However, my husband and I are purposeful in keeping others out of the dynamics our *own* relationship. This has been something critical to us since we started dating. We don't vent to our friends or our family if he and I have a disagreement or we are frustrated at something each other did; that's for he and I to work out on our own. We may share highlights or great news with others, but are not an "open book" on everything going on in our lives and in advance, discuss with each other what we are comfortable sharing with family and friends. We are a united front to the outside world. This privacy and solidarity keeps our relationship strong and helps minimizes the amount of saturation—including relational drama fed by others—that we allow in.

The lower right quadrant—*active relations with things or events*—tends to contain things related to building our life together, creating additional saturation at times. (Note that while there is a great deal of kid-related things or events entering our husband-wife relationship, I chose to keep these items in the Mother performance sociogram to allow for a focused examination of the Wife). A main aspect of our life together is our family house in North Carolina, as it's where our lives occur together on a daily basis. Keeping the house maintained and comfortable for the family also adds to my social saturation as a wife, for example, researching online or talking to people at our local DIY store

to determine if my husband or I can do the repair or if we need to find someone to do it for us. Our future life is also part of this quadrant. We have had a long-term plan of how we want our lives to be when we retire, and take actions presently towards those goals. This means tapping into other people for ideas and to learn, and also in securing a network of trusted advisors. One of these goals was owning a boat— something we both dreamt of since we were both young. After 10 years of saving and planning, we were able buy one a few years ago—nothing extravagant, a second-hand cuddy that is attractive and reliable to operate. Taking care of the boat has been a shared hobby of ours—us meeting new experts along the way—and has deepened our connections as a family as we just enjoy being together on the open water. Finally, my own personal mission statement and plan are included in this quadrant, as they are influenced by our goals as a couple and subsequently, contribute

Our house

back to the quality of our life together. My stuff as an individual is in a symbiotic relationship with our stuff as a couple.

The upper left quadrant—*voices of other people*—come from the institutional traditions I know from both of our cultures. Being in a multi-cultural relationship has meant that our life as husband and wife has not followed a particular playbook; we didn't pick one culture to follow, but rather, have blended and selected concepts based on what worked for us. As we have crafted our way forward as a couple over the years, many of our discussions has been in exploring and sharing our past and what is "normal" to us. We have been able to clarify some of these expectations, assumptions we took for granted before being together, and that knowledge has shaped our actions together. We may

not follow what is prescribed by a particular culture, but we are certainly aware of the expectations. Our backgrounds contributed to the unique life we have created for ourselves, and how I experience being a Wife within this context.

The lower left quadrant—*voices of imagined others, things or events*—incorporates the voices of many of my other identities and also some of the anti-establishment notions that influence how I am and how I view myself a Wife. These voices seem to come into conflict within me when my husband and I are dividing up duties in our life together. On one hand, there is a great deal of my activity at home that happens to fall along stereotypical, gender lines driven by our respective strengths. My husband is better than I am at carrying heavy stuff, doing mechanical work and house repairs, and driving; I am better than he is at organizing and tidying up, cooking, and navigating maps and directions. Our lives are more efficient when we base the division of labor on who has the comparative advantage. On the other hand, I resent it when a duty is allocated by default to me because of my gender, or when I am expected to complete it while also busy working or finishing my Ph.D. I recall a conversation at the breakfast table with my husband and the kids a few years ago. I was complaining about all the laundry piling up, and my husband—who prides himself in trying to be a progressive partner around the house—said that he would help, but shared how much he despised it, explaining that, "Doing laundry isn't in my DNA". I explained that it isn't in my DNA either and asked the family, "Who is excited to do laundry?" Of course, no one thought it would be fun to do laundry. That created the realization for them that I, too, find much of the housework boring or annoying to do. We agreed that everyone in the house has to help out since we all live there; no one person has to "get stuck" doing the crappy work. Despite us constructing a household with shared duties, it seems hard to shake traditional gender expectations in the household with me as a Wife. I often wonder what my life would be like if I were born a man, holding a high-paying successful job and being the primary breadwinner: to what extent would I be "expected" to do any part of the weekly laundry, in helping making daily dinner, or cleaning up my kid's barf at 2 am? Sometimes, I wish that I could have a

"wife" to take care of things and to take care of me, while I have fun working; after all, who *wouldn't* want to have a wife if they could?

In thinking about these relational quadrants coming together to create Wife over the years, perhaps being a Wife is how one juggles her various performances while being in a committed relationship with her spouse. But it's more about just being in a one-on-one relationship—that can be done without being married—there is also a relationship with the State: The legal aspect of the performance—the marriage license—allows for many practical benefits that contribute to the good life, such as insurance and healthcare rights, that can be difficult or impossible to secure without a formal, legal recognition of the relationship. There is an institutional benefit to being a Wife. But, ideally, maybe *living the Wife* can be less about performing a fixed institutional role—particularly one that subjugates possibilities in her life—and can be more about co-constructing with the spouse a unique path that works for each other.

Co-Researcher Conversation: My Husband

I chose my husband as my co-researcher for the Wife performance. It was a clear and obvious choice; no others were considered. I was curious as how he would characterize my performance, especially since we have been together for such a long time. He is also a private person and was reluctant to participate even as I explained more about the research. He agreed, but asked me to be mindful of what I shared so that he wouldn't be embarrassed.

I have always been surprised by how someone who was so different from me could also have a strong "Venn diagram" of shared alignment. My husband and I have a strong, common core of values—loyalty, work ethic, love—which has been central to sustaining our marriage. However, experiencing his strengths and differences expands my perspective; our conversations are eclectic, and I learn about new things, feeding into my sense of a good life. For instance, he is linguistically strong with a great ear. He's one of those people who can hear a piece of music, pick up an instrument he never played before, and then, with a little tinkering, is able to replicate the melody. This talent

transfers over to his mastery of many languages and a keen ability to identify local dialects spanning continents, which makes interacting with other people or even watching the news together a discussion on different cultures. He also possesses almost a sixth sense in being able to read situations and people, anticipating the tides of interactions. His perspective helped me navigate many work and life situations, offering possibilities I wouldn't have considered. He is also strong in the kinesthetic space, painting large canvases, building furniture, and doing mechanical things. His handyman ability along with his degree in computers earned him the nickname "MacGyver" (after the television series hero who was known for his ingenuity, such as using a piece of gum to break out of a locked room). His gifts have added a special, personal "feel" to our home, from the art on our walls, to some funky custom furniture, to rarely using outside suppliers for repairs and improvements. Across all my years, I have never met anyone like him.

I asked him about a highpoint in our relationship and he said that there are "so many". He explained that he saw our relationship as totally different than anyone else's, and that we had to overcome cultural, language and other differences to make it happen. He appreciates how the things important to him—trust and fidelity—are important to me, too, and that we have worked together and honored this over the years. He likes how I am wholesome, kind, and nice. He shared that, "I like how we are on the same page with safety, you know, how we text each other if we are out separately with an 'I've arrived' or 'on my way home'". It's like we are a part of each other and make sure we keep each other updated on our status and to confirm we're okay." We also talked about we prioritize time with each other, for instance, preferring to be together over a "boys night out" or "girls weekend away".

I asked about a time when he saw me at my best as a Wife, and he described a few examples. First, he said, "As an immigrant to come here, we had to go through a lot to get the papers done, but you handled everything without missing anything. Because you were so organized, it made it trustworthy [with the authorities]. This made it easy, and kept the hassle and any misunderstanding away from us." He

continued, "You are always helping me. When I went back to school [for an additional degree in the US], it was so hard for me, but you were the best! You helped me understand things, you had an open heart, and were just genuine. It was the same in studying for my driver's license test and in helping me study for my citizenship test. You supported me and really helped us solve big issues." We laughed about an inside joke related to the citizenship trip to Charlotte. He continued, "I think the top was when we had babies. We worked together as a team to handle day care and keep life organized. It was really hard but we worked well together, and my babies and you are my life."

The Artifact: Central Processing Unit (CPU)

In thinking about an object that is meaningful to being a Wife, my husband offered up a central processing unit of a computer, saying, "Michele, you are a CPU". I think my face reacted with a puzzled look—

CPU from one of our old computers

perhaps I expected something less mechanical in describing something so organic to me. He went on to explain that the CPU is the brains of the computer and where all the electrical activity happens. The CPU takes in information and commands from other components, like the mouse, hard disks and keyboards, and then orchestrates the tasks specified by the particular program. It makes things happen. Without a CPU—unlike a mouse or hard disk—the computer system would not be able to work. (I have to add, that he was really excited to take apart one of our old computers and remove the CPU so I could take a picture of it!)

My husband shared, "You are wired to prefer to work, and no matter what happens, you will be successful because of how hard you work." He described how now that I work from home, that I will go to my office upstairs and work, rather than just hang out or take time to go to lunch with him. He went on to say that "It's not bad or a criticism. You are always working—harder than other people—and you do it to keep the dream of our family and our lives. You want to be the best

mom and wife <u>and</u> working. That's a lot to keep balanced. I wish I had a great job like what you can earn, so that you can stay here and I can go off to work instead." I shared that I do a good job closing down work in the evenings and weekends, but when I'm working, I'm on and it's hard for me to just break away. He understood, and continued, "Family is the most important thing in our relationship—you and the kids are the most important to me. We protect our family by keeping things and people out that could hurt it. That's why we are stainless steel together. We are in a partnership as a couple."

In thinking about a highpoint example as a CPU, he recalled the citizenship discussion we just had. He said, "You know, I never thought I wanted to be a US citizen and then when all that 9/11 stuff happened, it became scary on what could happen to me living here in the US if I wasn't a citizen, even if I was married to one. Making that decision was a big step for me. The way you make important things happen, like all that paperwork and making sure we met the deadlines, it was too much for me to do on my own. I would have made a major mistake and screwed it up. Your ability to support me meant a lot. Of course, I love you so much. But it's more than love. It's what you actually *do* to make the other person be secure."

The CPU artifact embodies two important aspects to being a Wife and a wife/husband relationship. First, the CPU reflects the ability to make a desired outcome happen. A CPU integrates and directs the range of relational inputs. It converts the *dreams* of a good life into a good life itself. It is the way in which social saturation is taken in, evaluated, filtered, discarded or resolved. It is the way it arbitrates the span of
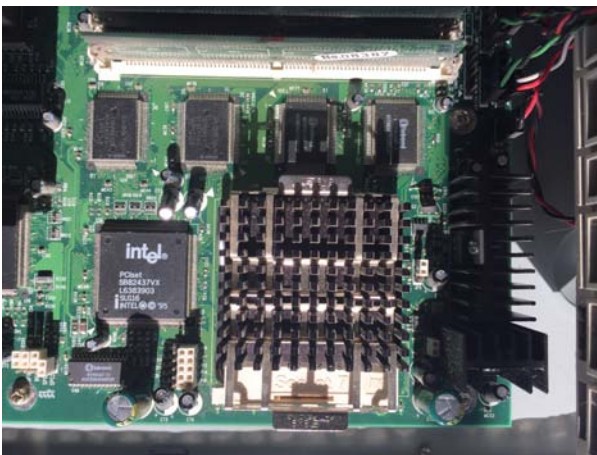
Inside of a computer operating system

relations when living a life. It is the way choices are put into motion. A CPU—a Wife—embodies action.

Second, the CPU also suggests a life that is a interdependent system. A CPU sitting in a box—even if powered on—cannot *do* anything; it needs the rest of the system to put things into motion. As a Wife—without other components as my husband and my kids and our home and our dreams—it would impossible for me to be a part of creating our life as we know it today. If our life is a system, I wonder how I might consider the role my husband plays in helping manage it all—is he the *working memory* to my CPU? Our kids are anchored to our lives, and is it only a coincidence that a CPU sits on a platform called a *mother*board? Do institutional norms, or perhaps even our dreams of a good life, serve as the *software*? Is our home the *hardware*? Do some of our relational habits act like *anti-virus protection*? Maybe our friends and family are like the *internet*, connecting us with the world. Together, all of these function in a societal relationship, a *computer system*.

Finally, one technial aspect of a CPU that provides a critical message to me in navigating social saturation and having the good life: it is the CPU's requirement for a *heat sink*. When my husband was explaining how a CPU works, he talked about the importance of a heat sink. The CPU is always on and always working when the computer is in use; this perpetual activity creates a great deal of excess energy and heat. A heat sink sits in front of the CPU to help absorb this excess heat so that the CPU doesn't burn out. A fan is nearby to help with the cooling, but it's the heat sink that's essential to sustaining CPU functioning over time. As a Wife, if I am the CPU—always on to keep the family functioning—I need to be sure I

Heat sink: Without it, a CPU will burn out. Unfortunately, I don't have a picture of MY heat sink.

have a version of a heat sink that helps me not burn out. Other than stealing a moment of me-time here and there, I am not sure I can adequately describe what my set of heat sink resources are. This point is something to consider.

In Closing

As much as many of my inner relations push me away from a traditional notion of a Wife, admittedly, if I accepted these traditional expectations, certain aspects of my life would be easier, the number of decisions perhaps reduced, and likely my saturation lessened. Division of labor at home would be automatic, not an ongoing external negotiation with my family and an internal debate within myself. I wouldn't be juggling work, family, and home—my "job" would be limited to taking care of my husband, my kids, and my house. I wonder if that is why institutional norms are so powerful, in that they provide a benefit of making things clearer and easier.

Never once, though, have I wished to be a stay-at-home, traditional Wife. There is little to nothing appealing about it. It seems like the bad end of a bargain. Instead, for me, being a Wife doesn't fit a known entity. I experience being a Wife as crafting a life in partnership with my husband, and together, navigating the slew of relations and its accompanying saturation so that we can have stability, safety, comfort and happiness. It is more about striving for an *outcome* together, rather than adhering to a set of rules. It's about the *end*, not the *means* to the end.

The challenges of living life this way is that the *means*—how I achieve this outcome—can result in inequities and a sense of not being settled, even with a partner who genuinely accepts equity and tries to help. I often ask myself: Am I taking on more than my fair share of the housework? Why does the running of the home seem to still default to me? Traditional expectations seem to continue to interfere, despite my desire to avoid them. Handling the demands of living a good life can be exhausting and overwhelming at times, and cause resentment and other emotions that can tug at even the strongest bond with another person. Despite a lack of an effective *means* or way for living as a Wife in today's times, my assessment that, on balance, the benefit of being more than a traditional wife is significant in the quality of my life. Being a Successful Business Leader and Creative Outsider is meaning and important to my holistic good life. I am certain I would be bored and frustrated if my existence revolved around being only a homemaker. Despite decades of

working wives, I don't see that our society has created a new institutional norm that reflects contemporary reality in many households. We are still stuck with the 1950s version, it seems. To be sure, living a 1950s version would not be what I consider a good life.

I have observed that, in many of my casual conversations with other wives who work, they allude to experiencing the same questions and issues themselves. However, nothing is discussed directly or openly, and I am also struck by how uncomfortable I am raising this topic with other women like me. This research has inspired me to start raising it more, but I find I do so under the guise of sharing my dissertation topic, rather than my own personal needs. I also don't notice this conversation happening in the public press. It's a shame more isn't discussed openly, as it seem like it could change these norms. Just the other week, I was volunteering with two other Moms at my daughter's classroom. Both of them worked like me, and had taken the day off to be at school. I was sharing with them my dissertation topic, and it sparked an intense conversation together, which then later, continued with each one privately. One shared with me that the previous day, she had to take an early work conference call, with this call happening on the way to school with three kids in the back of her SUV. She described her frustration that she was in this multi-tasking situation while her husband was heading on his own to work. Then, she described, while on the call, she started off apologizing for having to put herself on mute and explaining she was on the way to school with her kids. I asked her why she felt she had to launch into such a description, and instead, either decline the meeting or if it was business critical, why not just say, "Due to the early start of the conference call, I am enroute and need to put you on mute. (Period.)" She then revealed to me her anxiety in keeping up with it all and how guilty she feels in not doing a good job. The other Mom described that she was starting out in her new job as a high-profile real estate agent and was stressed about how she was going to manage picking up kids at 3:30 if she had clients who wanted to meet at that time. (Again, kid duty rested with the working wife not the working husband). I said, "If a client proposes that time, why not just say you have another commitment during that time, and offer some alternative

times that works for you? No one has to know the details of the commitment." She was so excited about this idea and we ended up talking about how we end up putting the pressure on ourselves, not the situation, to make it work. Afterwards, both said to me that they had not talked about this to anyone before, and how much they appreciated being able to share their concerns. These conversations made me wonder, why is it that executive women seem to be willing to hide the issues they face juggling work, home, and kids, yet are so willing to show their guilt about it to others?

So, okay, for me, Wife is a little complicated and messy and perhaps, one might judge, even "unfair". At the same time, my life has more dimension by experiencing it in partnership with another person, more so, I surmise, than if I were out there on my own NOT being a Wife. Creating and sustaining a deep, positive relationship with one person has been an important aspect for me in living a good life, and thinking about this relationship as something "meant to be" enhances how I experience it. Furthermore, creating a family with my husband strengthened our togetherness and launched another new performance—Mother—that is joyful and brings me purpose, extending my good life. The social saturation is a given—it's coming along for the ride; the heavy CPU processing is going to happen. I need to make sure that I focus on enjoying the quality of my in-person relations—the output of the computer system—rather than just go through the mechanics without being mindful of why. And, unlike a CPU, I am able to delegate or abdicate processing activity to others in the system…but I need to take that action. I also need to create a more stable and predictable *heat sink*. On any particular day, I have been effective at scaling back one performance to make room for another. However, I don't have a consistent, operating *heat sink* in place. To start, maybe from time to time, I can break away being a Successful Business Leader, a Mother, an Infallible Daughter—and just go and have a spontaneous lunch with my husband.

PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE:
Creative Outsider

Being a Creative Outsider has led me to experience incoherence with my sense of self for much of my life. I often perceive my self as a series of contradictions — someone who thrives being around people, but finds that my best work is often done as a hermit; someone who thinks deeply about things, but also reads trashy, celebrity gossip magazines; someone who prides herself in being the contrarian but at the same time, someone who desperately wants to fit in; someone who likes being a leader, but loathes working in groups; someone who is a driver and strong achiever with ambition, but wants work-life balance.

On my first day of my first full-time job nearly 25 years ago, I participated in a Myers-Briggs personality assessment during an orientation exercise, and thought, "I finally found a way to discover meaning in the various aspects of myself". I began to see these types of tests as a magic bullet, thinking that somewhere, out there, a scientifically based assessment would resolve my ongoing perception of incoherence and reveal to me the unified person I thought I should be. Over the years, I took any test I could find, and dutifully saved all the results in one folder, assembling an extensive dossier on "me". During times of difficulty, or in personal or career reflection, I would refer back to this file as data for ongoing synthesis as I sought my purpose in life. However, what always struck me was that while each test seemed to tap into something that aligned with my knowledge about my self, the answers seemed incomplete and even opposing, often raising more questions. One test would reveal my very strong extrovert preferences, suggesting a need be around

others for energy and effective productivity; another test would highlight my need for being away from others, concluding with statements like, "*you see things somewhat differently than others; if expected to come up with the 'regular' response, or be 'part of the herd', you will be working against yourself; you like to contribute from the point of view as an expert; you want to work primarily for yourself;* and *you find bureaucratic organizations difficult*". Across countless assessments over the years, I ended up with an even greater sense of incoherence, and found myself clinging to labels in an effort to discover and define who I was, and what my good life path should be.

This all started to shift for me about five years ago.

Introduction: Creative Outsider

Creativity accompanies my life. There is a ongoing "force" compelling me to produce original and meaningful things in my life the "Creative" and to do so in an unusual way, different from the group or what is conventional or expected the "Outsider". I cannot recall a time without this force, and I cannot point to a time when it began. It has always been with me, something I associate as primal and instinctual in my being.

There are vivid flashes of this relational pattern throughout my youth. It set the direction of school projects, with an intention to do something that would surprise other people and be as different as possible to how everyone else was doing it. It showed itself in my excitement being the only bassoonist in the school band. It was the basis for many of my friendships in school, the small theatre crowd who found humor in the offbeat, and who wrote scripts with a string of alliterations or cringe-worthy puns. It came to life in the bravado of participating in the Odyssey of the Mind (national team creativity competition) throughout junior high and high school. It influenced the choice

of my college major and led to me crafting my own concentration topic.

I also wonder how much my gender influenced the development of Creative Outsider. Through my pre-teen, teenage, and early adult years, I recall feeling resentment that I was a girl, and often imagined my life if I were born a boy. It was not that I felt like a boy trapped in a girl's body, but it was more a rebellion against feeling like a second-class citizen in my personal, school, and work life solely due to my gender. My brand of feminism was to embody and celebrate and amplify everything about me that wasn't stereotypically feminine: I was direct, I swore, I was aggressive, I was tough and unemotional, I was wicked confident, I wasn't ashamed or tried to demure my intelligence, I used big words, I never let myself get intimidated by people and situations, and certainly didn't kiss up. As one can imagine, this caused some relational challenges. I hadn't realized that people still saw me as female, and these behaviors went against what they were comfortable   men and women alike. I did make some great friends, but I found it hard to have a boyfriend, and often I had few allies to help me along the way in life. This dissonance only reinforced my archetype as an outsider, and made creativity a happy and fulfilling space for me. Creativity, it seemed, made my outsider-ness okay.

Later in adulthood, creativity continued to shape my life. At work, I delivered fresh approaches to strategic problems, and found novel ways to engage customers that drove profits and excited management. I wasn't afraid to buck status quo or say the things out loud that others might be only thinking. I inspired my teams to push the envelope and express their own unique brand of self at work to do and be different and together, we did some groundbreaking stuff. I became known among my colleagues for being a bold, witty, and very innovative person,

and was often tapped to develop learning programs or to mentor others on the topic, in addition to my day job. Being a Creative Outsider is where I have known moments of the best life, where I experienced a deep connection to something bigger than me, and where I was able to express this to the world. It has been deeply satisfying being a Creative Outsider.

But the satisfaction has come, it seems, with a perpetual membership in the "out group" club. While my ideas or solutions might be valued, oftentimes I didn't experience it as *me* being valued. For example, my group project teams at school were happy to have my contributions, but outside of the project, I would overhear them whispering about me being a weirdo, or making fun of a comment I made within the group. Even more recently at my former job, my boss would be comfortable leveraging my unique take on the business to his peers, using my work to make himself look good. However, in providing feedback to me, he would advise me to be more in line with tone or pace of the company, to put on a façade of a "normal" leader and not rock the boat. He also did not take steps to help me move up the corporate ladder, no matter how valuable I was to his work and the business. Like many before him, his words and actions made me conclude that he didn't want the *outsider* part of the Creative Outsider; what he really wanted was a creative *insider*. This insight was the ultimate incoherence to me.

These examples set the stage as to why, for a long time, I turned to self-editing as one of the main strategies, compartmentalizing my *Outsider* from my *Creative*. As much as possible, I kept the Outsider in the back area secretly feeding her when most were not looking and put forth the Creative when it was useful to the situation. Self-editing led to me running two parallel lives for most of my adult life, with two simultaneous relational worlds. I created different relational

circles that fed each of these very different aspects. However, the accompanying social saturation was significant. For example, in college, after a night of hard partying with the "cool" kids, I would drag myself to the library to finish a paper for the Medieval Architecture class I was taking for fun, often meeting up with those who were seen as "not cool" but were wicked smart and so interesting to talk to. About five years ago, for instance, I started graduate school part-time in pursuit of an advanced degree that would do nothing to help my career at the company I worked at, but compelled me and engaged me. While my days were filled with the web of relations of a Successful Business Leader in a full-time executive role, my early mornings, late evenings and weekends were filled with interactions from my professors, fellow students, and the literature of many scholars across the decades. Even before graduate school, the content of my day-to-day life wasn't interesting enough for me (despite being busy), and I needed another outlet which led to some side projects going on in my pre-dawn morning "me" time perhaps reading up on the basics of quantum physics, immersing myself in a culture or country, sketching out a new set of ideas for a leadership model, or exploring the foundations of astrology. I probably could have used the sleep instead. And, self-editing was not always successful, as seen with the feedback from my boss. It takes a great deal of energy to suppress one's self, especially when one part is contingent on the other part to exist, as with the Creative Outsider.

It wasn't until I came into social construction resources about five years ago at an Appreciative Inquiry workshop that things began to shift for me. I began to consider that perhaps, I was mistaken about creativity in the first place. Like many, I saw creativity including my own creative being as an individualist, solo venture, like a mad scientist in the lab. After the Appreciate

Inquiry workshop, I began to wonder: perhaps creativity is more universal not a thing reserved for a select few and more significantly, not a recipe for a product but rather a relational process for life. I also began to experiment with different notions of myself, for instance, maybe myself wasn't something "out there" to find, but my self was being constructed based on whom I was with. These reflections began to quell my obsession with personality testing, among other things. Most recently, I ended up leaving my stifling corporate job to participate in the dynamic gig economy better suited to my Creative Outsider strengths and preferences.

Being a Creative Outsider is a good life. She excites me and thrills me and keeps my life delicious. I enjoy mixing together different things to produce something super cool and when she's present, it's often where I see myself creating something high-impact and fulfilling, no matter which role I am in. When it's just her and me, we have a blast. Introducing her to others broadening her relations however, has been mixed in terms of the good life. On one hand, I am at my best when Creative Outsider is fully expressed and others connect with her, valuing me as I am. On the other hand, my other performances especially the Successful Business Leader run into people and institutions that prefer conventional wisdom, who want me to play it safe and tell me to get along well with others. Furthermore, the Creative Outsider approaches life with an intensity, speed, and energy, all of which based on years of specific verbal and body language feedback from others can be intimidating or off-putting to those with different styles. These social realities can cause self-doubt on my choices and interfere with me savoring the good life. Rejection and not belonging can sting even the most confident person. And, most significantly, sharp pangs of incoherence of self still linger in inner dialogue.

I embark on my research of the Creative Outsider performance accepting Ken Gergen's "invitation to incoherence": **What more can I learn about being a Creative Outsider and the incoherent but co-existing patterns and practices? More important, how can I** *celebrate* **rather than mitigate the accompanying sense of incoherence**? In this narrative, I describe the web of relations that shapes being a Creative Outsider. Then, I introduce whom I chose as my co-researcher and share our lived experience by recounting our co-researcher conversation. From there, I focus on the selected artifact, and engage in sense making by generating embodied language and meaning that artifact holds. Finally, I close the narrative with lessons learned and personal reflection.

I chose to capture this narrative using DIDOT font. In a side project a while ago, I came across a stunning visual design evoking the Paris Salon culture in the time of the Enlightenment. This period was one where intellectuals gathered to share knowledge and debate. It was a time of curiosity and exchange, and one of challenging authority and tradition. I tracked down the name of the font used on this design, just out of my own interest. When thinking about fonts for this performance, I remembered this project. DIDOT is inviting and accessible, just like I aspire my creativity to be experienced by others.

Sociogram: Creative Outsider

Below is the sociogram I developed for my performance as a Creative Outsider:
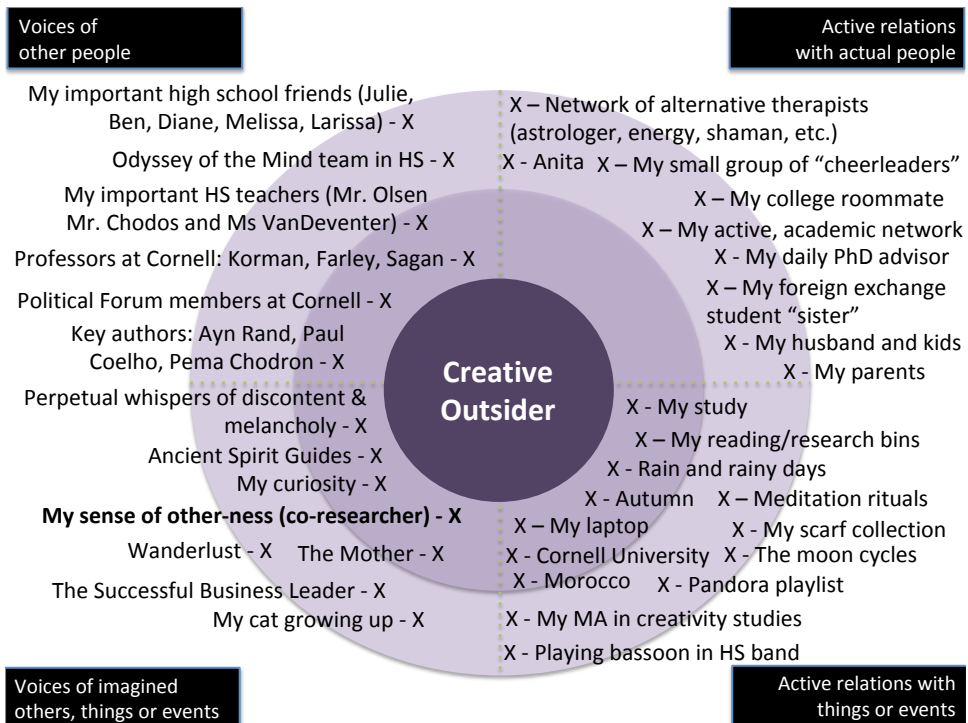
I chose to use purple as a backdrop for the sociogram to connect these intense relations and to show how they exist in wisdom and health. For many years, for me, purple has evoked a sense of creativity, of being a cosmologist, a sage, and a healer. About a decade ago, I was doing visualization work with my coach to help me with future planning. One of the most significant symbols that came out was a large, deep purple silk meditation pillow that I was sitting on. I don't wear a lot of purple or have purple things around me. But when I think of the color, I experience a connection to the primal, intuitive, knowing side of me. It seemed to embody being a Creative Outsider.

This sociogram contains the most intense amount of relations across all quadrants, as compared to the other sociograms. In starting in the upper right quadrant of the sociogram *active relations with actual people* the relations are those who have interacted with the Creative Outsider aspect of me in a meaningful way and continue to be an active part of my Creative Outsider life. First, there are my closest friends who understand and appreciate my creativity, often nurturing and encouraging it. They include my dear friend and former coach Anita; my college roommate Lorena, who always reminds me that "to be abnormal is normal"; one of my best friends from high school who was a foreign exchange student living with my family for the year; and my handful of amazing friends that I have met across the years, "my cheerleaders". Second, I work with a network of healers and advisors that have provided alternative approaches to maintaining my physical and mental health. Many have shared perspectives that expanded possibilities for my consideration. These experiences inspire and feed my soul, and make me more confident in my creative choices. Third, important relations include those involved in my intellectual pursuits, such as my key professors in my Masters' program and the academic network I built through my former job leading Marketing and Sales Training. A key academic relation is also my daily Ph.D. advisor, whom in many ways I consider a co-creator in this dissertation and a partner in helping me achieve a life goal I set out for myself when I was 16. Finally, my immediate family whom you met in previous narratives is included. What is most notable is that despite the rich relations in this quadrant, these people still sit further away from the center; unlike other sociograms, there are no *actual people* who are mapped closer in. This placement isn't a reflection of the quality of our relationship to be sure, these are some of the most meaningful

in my life   but more to show my sense of distance between them and the essence of my Creative Outsider performance.

The lower right quadrant *active relations with things or events* holds things that set a backdrop to enable the Creative Outsider to come forth. I am in tune with these relations I know what is needed to maintain "good health". My surroundings provide a tone that facilitates creative flow. My cozy study with only my stuff no kids toys or clutter is a calm space rich with ideas and knowledge. I am embraced by shelves of books and have research bins to hold the topics I am actively working on. There is a system and all the pieces and parts fit together. In addition, there is certain weather and seasonal patterns which seem to bring

My home office/study, where I am writing this dissertation now

the Creative Outsider into the fore: Dark, early mornings; Gray days with a mist of fog and rain, the colors and smells of Fall; A glistening full moon; a fat, low harvest moon; or the starkness of a new moon. Interacting with my love of the vibrant culture of Morocco and continuing to experience my academic life pictures of Cornell, going through my notes from graduate

school, and staying connected ideas coming from universities inspire me. My meditation and thinking rituals are often the sites where creative insight occurs. My Pandora stations let me hear the particular type of music needed for the task at hand   club music for ideation, chanting for reflection, classical to write, pop to relax, etc. My laptop is on my desk, helping me stay connected to others thinking, archiving things that are "keepers", and conveying my own creative output. This dissertation, in fact, is being written against this backdrop right now!

The upper left quadrant *voices of other people* contains memories of significant times where I was at my best as a Creative Outsider in my youth: my small group of high school friends; my teammates from the Odyssey of the Mind program; a few caring, understanding, and encouraging teachers. It also contains memories of being at Cornell with amazing professors who made my thinking better, and inspired me as a scholar and creator of things, and with a diverse group of students working together on the *Political Forum*, running a magazine and doing educational programming. College was one of my most intellectually rewarding times of my life. I find myself accessing these memories and holding conversations with how my current situation might be faring. I often find that these voices help me overcome a block in my thinking, or regain that momentum or flow in my thoughts. This quadrant also includes interacting with authors through reading their work and listening to the subsequent dialogue it creates in my head. My knowledge and awareness of other paradigms and curiosity about spirituality are developed through relating to others, even if not "in person". My taste and what I incorporate from them has evolved over my lifetime   I hold on to what still makes sense, discard what is no longer useful, and continually search for new ideas and inspiration.

The lower left quadrant *voices of imagined others, things or events* seem to be where the other quadrants become "processed". My sense of other-ness, whispers of discontent and melancholy that underlie my best days, an intense curiosity, a sense of being rootless and feeling most at home when I am away from home, a wisdom and intuition of a sense of ancient spirit guides these play with and weave the voices of the other quadrants into Creative Outsider action. I cannot access a conscious conversation, but I am aware that something is happening. Phrases or flashes of ideas seem to pop out to surprise me, but as if they were hiding in wait all along. A wave of energy, propelling me to do something seems to sweep me along with it. I find that much of the synthesis "just happens" in this organic way.

Co-Researcher Conversation: My Sense of Other-ness

I chose to My Sense of Other-ness as my co-researcher for the Creative Outsider Performance. I experience her as a primary voice in bringing form to the performance, a kind of force or a distinct presence. I chose her over an actual person for two reasons. First, my active relations with actual people seemed more distant from this performance, compared to My Sense of Other-ness and many other inner voices. To be sure, the Creative Outsider reality is one largely played out in my inner relations; thus, someone internal would be best positioned for insight and perspective. Second, one of the reasons I was drawn to autoethnography was the opportunity to examine inner performance, something important in a social construction paradigm. While inner performance has been explored in all narratives, I wanted to push the notion further, and experiment with an internal relation as a co-researcher. This benefit was a

key reason for choosing autoethnography. Plus, I'm a Creative Outsider   let's try something different!

I held the conversation in my study, the ideal backdrop as described earlier. It was early in the morning, dark, and only my small desk lamp was on. I asked posed the question, "when do you see me at my best as a Creative Outsider?"

I can think of so many, Michele, you truly are a Creative Outsider. It's hard to choose just one. Rather than deliberating, I am going to choose the time that popped to mind when you first asked me that question: the time that you were leading the advertising shoot in South Africa. It's one where I saw and heard how you related to other people being your own distinct brand of you, but so was everyone else—being their own different brand. The vibe of the group thrived on everyone's unique personhood. I also participated in the feelings that came about for you feeling both creative, outside, and connected, and how you even tap into the experience from time to time even today—you are reconnecting with the "old friend" of the memories—giving you energy and thrill.

This project was a challenge for you. You were in charge of getting two full commercials and all the marketing visuals done, and had a large team from the agency as well as the production company that would be leading to make it happen. It was a major undertaking, and at the time, the most significant you had done to date. All aspects of this experience embodied you as the Creative Outsider at your best. The ad concepts themselves were built on your ability to reframe a new way of talking about the category that wasn't confusing and inspired sufferers to take action about a disease that was very embarrassing for them; it wasn't just about sales and profit for you, you honored the implicit societal contract. These concepts generated some of the highest testing scores ever—even the testing company recognized you with an award for this accomplishment—and your leadership was eager to invest in your work. You showed up in a way that engaged your

President, who presented himself to others as a stoic, conservative personality to work with—you got even him animated about this project. After getting the storyboards set, you also came up with the idea of shooting outside the country. Talent and production costs were significantly lower, even after travel costs, and this allowed two ads and all the adjunct materials to be produced for less of the price of one ad shot back in the US. This was the first time this was done at the company—people were skeptical and a bit taken aback at first. But, you rocked it, and it ended up becoming a model for how much of the work would be done in the future.

But, there's more. It was how YOU experienced the shoot. I watched how you connected with the agency and production teams— people very different from those you worked with back at your office and whose cultures spanned many continents. You were able to transverse two worlds—the strategy and business efficiency with divergent thinking and even a bit of wackiness. You created an

Some of the dailies coming out of the advertising shoot in South Africa

environment and vibe for those two weeks that I have never seen before. It was this ideal jam session, people pushing for excellence, building on each other's strengths but absolutely being themselves with a "take it or leave it" air of confidence, getting into flow that was so fun but doing the best work, too. The top agency leader told you that he appreciated how you inspired the team—especially the Creative Production team. He said that he had never seen them so excited and engaged to be working on a project. He said for him, too, this project was a highlight in his own *career. It's so hard to describe, but I remember how you felt—you were in your element and it enveloped your whole body and being. And, everyone else felt that way too—you all talked about how this was one of the most meaningful experiences of your lives and when you encountered them later on, that still held true for them. I know you still think about that experience today. The final ads were stunning and compelling, and many people dealing with this problem wrote to the company, telling them how much this advertisement had a positive impact on their own sense of self, too. It was definitely some of the best work of your career so far. I think of this time as a highpoint because it was when you experienced being a Creative Outsider* **in conjunction with other people***, not just as an internal phenomenon. Your Creative Outsider makes your other performances better; being around certain types of people makes your* Creative Outsider *better. The shoot in South Africa was one of those times.*

I expressed gratitude for that story and also, I spent some time remembering myself. I caught myself smiling thinking about it. (So moved, later that day, I dug out some of the storyboards and dailies to include in this narrative, and reconnected with a few of the folks I worked with on that project). I then requested my Sense of Other-ness to share a description of our relationship.

I am so grateful that we are on this journey through life together. You act on your creative impulses, and respect and value this

part of your life. I also think you have made good choices and taken steps so that the potential of this "being" can be realized. It's not just some random creative clutter, or hopes and dreams. You have channeled your creativity into your work and your family and your home. That makes me engaged, and makes me want to continue to do more to support you. I feel like we are a team, best friends, solid—all those things. You make life interesting for me.

My only wish for you is that you allow what you label as your duality or your incoherence—your opposing differences of self that create debate within you, like choosing a favorite child—to co-exist as one, rather than feeling like you have to be so compartmentalized and structured. I think you want to do well in all aspects of your life and at times, you may have made safe choices, even though you let your Creative Outsider peek out within that safe choice. I am really proud of how last year, you left your corporate job after 22 years—that took a lot of courage and I know you made that decision less on being "rational" and more in following your other senses. But, you know, Michele, as they say, "Chance favors the prepared". You have done all the preparations over so many years, and I certainly won't let you down. I want you to precede forward in each day, trusting that you have the resources you need as a Creative Outsider to continue to have a good life. To be able to provide for family. To be comfortable and secure for the future. And, more important, to have more incredible experiences, for instance, like you did at the shoot. You deserve it.

The Artifacts: Moleskin Notebooks and My Computer

I was curious as to what My Sense of Other-ness would suggest as an artifact that reflects the Creative Outsider. I did some breathing and stillness to allow it to come forth.

I want to celebrate what you have previously labeled as your incoherence. I am going to choose two artifacts at polar ends of a spectrum that I think embody you in being a Creative Outsider: your

moleskin notebooks and your computer. I chose these artifacts because I see them as central to how you do your creative work. They are also examples of how to allow opposite things to co-exist, even if it seems inefficient at times or may not make sense to others.

On one end of the spectrum, you are drawn to nostalgic paper and notebooks and you have been using Moleskin notebooks for a very long time. You get a new notebook each year, and use it to bring your life together in one spot. But in there, you also capture your thinking and ideas along the way, and it is important to you that the page and feel and look all provide a good experience for you—you wouldn't be able to do this if you didn't select just the right one. You would often cringe when you see what others at work use, so I know that the kinesthetic sensations with the notebook are important for you. Once you started back in graduate school, you used a special notebook to capture all your reading notes from other authors, your questions, and your new ideas. When it got full, you would start another with the same color to make a series. You added color-coded tabs and numbered them, to find things easily later on. Using the notebooks gives you a place to capture a thought that you can retrieve later and that frees your mind, ready for more input, or to make or find new patterns without feeling cluttered inside. When it goes into the notebook, there is

Some of my Moleskin notebooks

the quick exchange inside you, "ok, this is handled, what's next". But these notebooks aren't static. You go back through the notebooks as you are drafting papers, and from time to time, you skim through them looking for fresh connections or sparks of another idea. I also think it gives you satisfaction to put a completed notebook on the shelf, ready to be pulled down later as needed. It seems to mark some progress or some meaning of all the activity that goes on inside of you. But at the same time, you can grow and expand—you can evolve—without feeling beholden to where you were in the past. You can always get more Moleskin notebooks—even in different styles as your needs change— and there is always room on your shelf for that next completed notebook.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a speed and industrialization to your productivity, and using technology has been important to being a Creative Outsider; that's why your computer is the other important artifact. The computer is important for you to **stay connected** to other ideas and muses for your creative spirit, even if you aren't part of a particular formal institution. So much of your research

Writing my dissertation on my computer. The lettering on the "e", "d", "c" and "n" keys are

and search for information is done online, whether it be for work, school, home, or just general interest. Access to a wide range of perspectives is critical fuel for this performance. The computer is also

important for you to **produce your creative product**. It helps you work through your thinking—words and visually—but it also helps you put it in a consumable way for others to experience its. You write your papers in Word, do your analyses and organize information in Excel, and build your presentations and design visuals in PowerPoint, for example. Finally, the computer also allows you to **share yourself with others**. Using your computer, you email, Skype and network with others, you develop and maintain your LinkedIn profile and company page so that others can find you, and you engage your contacts list and calendar for people interactions that support you as a Creative Outsider. I think about how you created all of the logo and marketing materials for your new company all by yourself—from the strategy to the design and the content—it says to prospective clients what your priorities are, what your sweet spot is. What you do with your new consulting company is an important part of being more of a

My daily Ph.D. advisor, Diana, and me during one of our meetings.

Creative Outsider in the future. So much of that development has been happening on your computer.

In thinking about a highpoint story with these artifacts, I was struck by an observation your daily Ph.D. advisor made, when you were doing a beta test of the co-researcher discussion guide with her over lunch at your usual spot, Firebirds. She described how your computer allowed you to **co-work with others**, for instance, you

send her a draft chapter, she in turn sends back comments, you exchange some questions, answers and ideas, and then you send back a revised chapter, etc. She went on to describe how the computer helps with coordinating meeting and talk time, and makes creating with another person easier. For instance, you don't have to carry stacks of paper or worry something might get lost. It can all be tracked and contained, growing with you while staying the same size from the outside. I loved what she said, "It lets me know there is a there there; it becomes real *by the computer." Therefore, I think the highpoint for the Creative Outsider artifacts is the pursuit of your Ph.D. In many ways, it is a culmination of all your creative projects to date, a mastery of how to be a Creative Outsider; it's been you coming into 'your own'. There is an inner aspect to this experience—a great deal of time is you working on your own in your study: reading, capturing notes and ideas in your notebooks, looking for connections. These inner relations are through voices of people you haven't met in person—authors, scholars, data on a page—largely expressed in your notebooks and developed through the creative product on the computer. There is also a live, external aspect of this experience—interacting with professors and fellow students in the Masters program and now with your daily advisor, supervisor, and fellow students in the Ph.D. phase. Your notebook ideas come forward and you can manage your information without being overwhelmed or stagnate. The accumulation of knowledge and a sense of achieving your goal in effect gets symbolized as the notebooks stack up. Your computer is the vehicle by which* you *are shared with others, where you contributing to other student's work and others are contributing to yours. For sure, the dissertation is a co-creation project across all your relations—active and imagined, people and things— enabled by the partnership between your Moleskin notebooks and computer.*

The important thing, Michele, is that you need both artifacts working in tandem, which reflects a larger message about embracing

incoherence. To explain, each artifact alone isn't adequate. The Moleskin notebooks don't allow co-working with others and cannot produce your creative product. Using the computer for notetaking doesn't give you the intimacy you need with the physical page; its efficiency often gets in the way of ideation and spontaneous connections, and it doesn't provide a visual marker of progress or completion that is important to you. I see you ebb and flow between these two artifacts; you don't denote 'this is the time in my Ph.D. that I am using a notebook and this is the time in my Ph.D. that I am using the computer'. You need both ends of the spectrum for a good life. They work together seamlessly, and both are valuable, just like being an extrovert as well as a specialist loner. I think that is the underlying message for you in your pursuit of the good life. It's about embracing all the dimensions of who you are in a holistic way. It's not about trimming down one aspect so that it 'fits' with the other—that is leaving a piece of you on the table, with all its unrealized potential. It's also not about living two parallel lives—that's way too much saturation. It's about being okay with the contradictions as is. My wish for you is that you reframe your label of duality to be <u>one whole, fluid form</u>. The continuity or coherence you seek is found, paradoxically, <u>in the singular idea of incoherence</u>.

In Closing

I hadn't made the connection until I just started typing these closing reflections: I was born under the sign of Gemini, the sign of the twin. At the onset of this research with this narrative, I had wanted to understand more precisely the components of being a Creative Outsider, and to reconcile or remove the tensions and differences to improve my pursuit of the good life. The act of trying to resolve this, though, suggested a problem to be solved and uncovered its own set of social saturation. Instead, I now wonder if the good life is being at *peace*

Most Gemini symbols have some form of "two" in them. What I love about this one is how the two women seem to blend into a larger image of its own.

with these contradictions, as seeing them as necessary to contribute to one's self, rather than trying to fix it or smooth the edg es down. What if I lessened the inner conversations about the differences? What if I stop dwelling about incoherence and start *celebrating* incoherence?

What is most profound for me is that this lesson of the Creative Outsider can be projected to a larger stage: to the multiplicity of my self. In as much as being a Creative Outsider is important to who I am, she is not a separate entity living a part of life on her own. She is infused in my other performances, as they are in her. My whole self is the unique concoction of these many beings Successful Business Leader, Infallible Daughter, Mother, Wife, and Creative Outsider with all its contradictions and inconsistencies. I am not a collection of parts but my self is all of these performances in one. I can be a feminist while doing traditional, gendered things. I can have my family as a priority along with my career ambitions. I can be a successful Creative Outsider as my profession. I can move fluidly in the academic and business world. I can live in the US and Morocco. I can be a cool nerd.

Writing this narrative made me realize that the good life isn't about finding congruency, or integrating pieces and parts, or making things balance. The good life is about living in the *whole-ness* of differences.

Reflection

Given the autoethnographic nature of the research, a brief reflection is warranted. Important to note, analysis of the data relative the research question is not being explored here. Rather, the purpose is to share four key reflections I uncovered while participating as both the researcher and subject in this dissertation study. These insights also may be useful to those considering autoethnography as a method for their own research.

Four Reflections

Reflection 1:

Researcher/subject interaction brings significant benefit to the research

Reflection 2:

Autoethnography as a method is just as rigorous as traditional scientific research

Reflection 3:

While the promise of social construction is strong in navigating a world of social saturation, it still remains difficult to change one's acculturated ways

Reflection 4:

Autoethnography demonstrates how research can result in transformative outcomes

Reflection 1: Researcher/subject interaction brings significant benefit to the research

There is tremendous and unique value in bringing the researcher perspective and the subject perspective together in partnership in research. I observed how these two perspectives worked in tandem, aligned in progressing toward the research outcome. Situating each equally, rather than forcing a hierarchy of power, enabled richer data to come forth. However, it is important to point out that this relationship

introduced some challenges. In order to keep to the integrity of the study design, it was important for me to create a loose but distinct mental form of each—the researcher and subject—as the research progressed. Otherwise, the content risked bleeding into the realms of autobiography and psychoanalysis, rather than its intent as ethnography. This approach meant that when I was writing the more academic chapters (Chapters 1-4 and 6), I did so holding the intent and voice of a researcher. When I was participating in research (as presented in the Performance Narratives— for instance, the conversations with others, the narrative writing, the photo selection, etc.), I held a mindset as a subject and used a first person voice. In both cases, I was aware of the other role, but set it to the side, in an observer function. Generally, these mental gymnastics worked well, with the exception of writing the Creative Outsider narrative. In this situation, additional complexity arose in the co-researcher being my internal sense of other-ness, thus making my *co-researcher* self a second person conversing with my *subject* self as a first person. My hope is that grammar choices and formatting minimized any confusion for the reader.

Dealing with these logistics, however, was worthwhile as it resulted in richer data. While in a *subject* stance, I still was able to leverage my researcher knowledge, so that I could convey data that would be most useful; in other words, I knew where I wanted to go, and I could prioritize what to share. Conversely, while in a *researcher* stance, I was aware of the vast range of subject data available, but perhaps, I might be reluctant to share as a subject. This knowledge allowed me as a researcher to push for more vulnerability, in order to get the most useful data. One example was the theme of gender performance expectations that appears across most of the narratives. As a subject, I entered into the research presuming that I would not focus on gender issues and for sure, never saw this work as a feminist dissertation. Up until that point, I had been in a personal habit of dismissing feminism and in abstaining from using that label on myself. I considered it a less useful performance from my early adulthood. However, in particular after completing the literature review, I concluded that to ignore this theme would be negligent as a scholar. Thus, I expanded my introduction chapter, and encouraged myself to reconsider looking at some of my life experiences through a

gender lens as I gathered and wrote my data from a subject stance. These concurrent stances helped me come to the realization that I was harboring a great deal of institutional expectations—even strong judgment—in holding a feminist label for myself. I realized that as I adapted to advance in my career, my work institution dissolved my connection with feminism, as feminism is negatively perceived within many of my professional circles. Simply, I had grown used to discounting it, and became a co-conspirator in perpetuating its negative perception. Important to note, without having been both the researcher and subject, I am sure these data would not have been revealed to another third-party researcher had I been just the subject. Thus, being the researcher and the subject allowed for a rich exploration of an unintended, but critical theme. Introducing gender themes not only were more accurate, but they enriched the research. I also found there was a compassion as well for each research role; I never experienced a power play or treated either role as privileged. In considering the gender example, this compassion allowed intellectual exploration and vulnerability; both roles were "in this together". Indeed, I experienced it as an ideal partnership. I found it also deepened my own compassion for myself.

Another important example of the positive benefit of a researcher-subject partnership is found in the shift from an *identity* to a *performance* conceptualization in this research. As I embarked on the study design, I considered identity under a psychology frame, where *identity* was treated as something that served as a marker—that identified—what I value and who I am. Under this frame, with my identity and my self tightly linked, I was interested in making sense of the disparate identity pieces of my saturated self, in a search for connections that brought deeper unity, meaning, and purpose to my life. I saw myself as an individual made up of various identities, and as such, designed the research with an identity inventory that resulted in distinct identity categories of self, and the writing of "Identity Narratives". As I described in Chapter 4, in wrestling through rewrites of the literature review and participating in the research via conversations with co-researchers and crafting narratives, my intellectual, academic definition of identity kept buttressing up against what I was experiencing in writing about performing from a social

construction perspective across various roles in life. As the dissertation work progressed, this tension continued to build, and in one instance, as I was preparing for an upcoming meeting with my advisor, this tension broke. I realized: I am not made up of identities; simply, I perform, a "you are what you do" rather than a definitive identity where "you do what you are". This viewpoint shifted for me in a kind of flash of insight—it was as if my researcher persona and my subject persona came together as one. From this insight, I reworked how I described my research, shifting from identity narratives to performance narratives, as you see written in this dissertation.

Reflection 2: Autoethnography as a method is just as rigorous as traditional scientific research

It was exciting to forge new ground in working with autoethnography as a research methodology. Its fluidity and flexibility were strengths in considering how to approach the research question, and as one can imagine, my Creative Outsider in particular enjoyed being in this space. However, the lack of an established structure by no means suggests the research process is any less rigorous than traditional scientific methods. Adherence to, and considered evolution of, the study design—down to each small detail—were important practices in doing the research. In many instances, I found it more difficult than traditional qualitative or quantitative research I had done in the past. Key design components, such as the co-researcher conversation and artifact, added process complexity yet were central in enabling the autoethnography to be effective in achieving its goals. In addition, the autoethnographic requirement for resonance created a separate investigative effort and a great deal of prototyping to get to a writing product that is engaging, while staying true to the content of the data. Indeed, for my future research, any use of autoethnography will continue to help me build this skill as a scholar. For the academic community, there is an opportunity to offer more comprehensive guidance and competency building to support other scholars who want to achieve resonance in autoethnography.

Reflection 3: While the promise of social construction is strong in navigating a world of social saturation, it still remains difficult to change one's acculturated ways

Despite extensive study on social construction, practice in applying the tools in my professional and personal life, and a social construction orientation in this dissertation, my early approach in this dissertation ended up being very traditional. For example, midway through my research, I realized that unwittingly, I had been interpreting my research question as how does a *person* create a good life, emphasizing the individual over her relational interactions. This interpretation had led me to approach my many identities as pieces that make up my self, as previously discussed. As another example, I was surprised to find that my default writing in first drafts of the narratives individualistic and realist in nature. Through feedback from my daily Ph.D. advisor and self-examination, I was able to make the necessary shifts, but it still is something that does not come naturally to me yet. Notably, with these shifts, I also realized that these narratives could be written from either paradigm: as an independent individualist or as a social constructionist. Indeed, earlier individualistic drafts positioned the data differently than the rewrite with a more social constructionist stance. Interestingly, this point only reinforces the social construction view that there is no one truth, but truth within a community. However, it also reminds of the ease in which one can revert back to a less useful stance just out of habit. Recommendations for cultural shifts to social construction tenets must acknowledge the challenge in creating sustainable change from deeply acculturated practices.

Reflection 4: Autoethnography demonstrates how research can result in transformative outcomes

The researcher/subject partnership led to transformative outcomes with the research. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) share how writing is indeed a form of inquiry. In my research, writing allowed for both the researcher side and subject side come together. Writing was a valuable method for the research question, and led me to shift my thinking from my self being multiple fragments of

identities, for example, to rather my self as engaging in varied performances of self, as previously discussed. For the gender themes, as mentioned earlier, since the research, I have changed how I weave what some might call feminism in my own life. I find that I am more comfortable in reintroducing equality ideas into conversations—in a way, changing the conversation. For instance, I highlight micro inequities in discussion with my children, so much so, that my son often points them out when he observes them. I talk openly with other executive women without shame about the challenges I face performing all of my roles, and through this conversation, they often say they are encouraged to do the same. I treat my family relations on the same level as my work relations, without feeling as though I need to apologize, hide, or overcompensate because I need to address personal things *and* work things. I don't use "he/him" as the default gender in my own communications and reorder when using both genders, so that "she" comes before "he". Another example of transformation is my own interaction with social saturation. While in Successful Business Leader I had developed techniques to prioritize and mitigate social saturation, by participating as both a researcher and subject, I have begun to explore how to "be" with social saturation rather than control or battle it. I have challenged the ideal worker value and its usefulness to my own life, and I try to practice this as I work with clients, for example, not being beholden to ineffective project management that result in "emergency" meetings that happen last minute, right in the middle of school drop-offs. I don't always make myself available and also, I find myself sharing my family challenges with colleagues to help with work planning. As I reflect on my progress in this shift, I recall that my early thinking on this dissertation was that I was going to write a "Philosophy of Work". How far I've come! The research has led to a new story where I see social saturation as my relational context and I welcome it and try to model it as I go along with others in my life.

As a subject, writing has been a valuable method for learning about myself and helping me continue to shape and improve who I am, and how I continue to come to know my self. Going through my massive relational life—taking inventory and developing sociograms—deepened

my awareness of the relational nature of my existence, which in turn, makes me more mindful as I live each moment. I find that I am more compassionate and patient as my sense of self moves from being a bounded individual to one who is relational in nature. This shift removed the pressure I placed on myself to find the good life on my own, and I see my relations—what I do with others—as the means by which the good life can be co-created. I am also experimenting with being at peace with ongoing incoherence—this is a very compelling contribution to my life journey. While I never "resolved" lingering incoherence, I found acceptance—even meaning—for my incoherence, and being aware of relational practices I am using strengthens my ability to co-create a good life with my relations. I also found that achieving my desired goal from when I was a 17-year-old—running my own consulting practice— seemed to fall into place more easily in parallel with engaging in research inquiry. On a more practical side, being a subject has helped me apply clarity to my consulting practice as well as how I want to show up as both a Successful Business Leader and Creative Outsider. To be sure, the researcher/subject experience exemplifies social psychologist Michael Murray's thesis on the benefits of narrative work; he writes, "The telling of narratives is closely intertwined with the shaping and maintenance of personal performance" (2003, p. 100) and moreover, "Shaping our personal narratives is closely connected with how we shape our social narratives" (2003, p. 101). As a result of being a study subject, I have a greater awareness and appreciation for my relational world and the relational processes that create my reality. This vantage point, I have concluded, enhances my good life. Indeed, the act of relating *via this research* in of itself has been a critical relational practice that is helping me create a good life in a world of social saturation. It confirms the future-forming potential social construction research holds.

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Chapter 6

Findings and Conclusion

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The social construction literature review in Chapter 2 uncovered four messages with new, more life-giving potential for executive women: Co-create your good life; Focus on your relations; Language is your friend; and Thrive in inconsistency and multiplicity. My research was interested in how executive women might put these messages into action, asking, "What relational practices can executive use to create a good life in a world of social saturation?" As presented in Chapter 3 and 4, I chose to use autoethnography as my method for my data collection and analysis to explore this question. What resulted were five written self-narratives, called Performance Narratives, as well as a Reflection provided in Chapter 5.

As I continued to read and reread the five Performance Narratives and my Reflection, patterns began to emerge about how executive women might go about the good life in a world of social saturation. I uncovered themes and insight that led to a new story about how executive women can thrive in a world of social saturation. This new story for a good life—one of relational performances thriving in a world of social saturation—opened new possibilities for me, and prompted me to re-review the Performance Narratives and Reflection with this new perspective in mind.

Out of the Performance Narratives and Reflection, I was able to identify eight relational practices, or things that can be done with other people, to put the new story about a good life in motion while living and working in a world of social saturation. Having located these practices, I was most interested in how to make them accessible for executive women. As I developed the findings, I chose to describe these practices using action phrases, with the purpose of explaining how executive women might "do" them or apply them in their own lives. The eight relational practices coming out of the research are: *1.) Emphasize Relational Resonance, 2.) Generate Prosocial Surroundings, 3.) Bring*

Family Out of the Shadows, 4.) Negotiate Velvet Ropes, 5.) Speak Truth to Power, 6.) Use Tools for Co-Planning, 7.) Co-Create Relational Rituals, and 8.) Tap into Your Inner Network.

Since becoming aware of these eight practices, I have been using them more frequently and with intent as I continue in navigating my socially saturated life. I have found them of tremendous value, allowing me to engage more effectively with social saturation and deepening the sense I am experiencing a good life while living in multiplicity. My hope is that these findings will be useful to other executive women looking to create a good life in their relationally demanding world.

In this last chapter, I share my detailed findings—the new story about a good life and the eight relational practices that I uncovered in the research. From there, I summarize the learning and offer a tip sheet that executive women can refer to. Finally, I discuss the implications of my research on theory and praxis, and offer closing thoughts to wrap-up the dissertation.

Research Finding: A New Story about a Good Life

The modernist self and identity as well as women and work literature showed that executive women live without a viable script as they live and work in social saturation, leaving them with impossible expectations for creating a good life. As feminist social psychologist Mary Gergen (2001) points out, "How does one become when no strong story can be found?" (p. 58). As I worked through data analysis, new patterns, themes, and insight began to emerge from the research. I realized that I uncovered a new, potentially more life-giving story about executive women thriving in a world of social saturation. This new story says:

> *My "self" is being co-created through my ongoing, relational performances. My good life is happening through ongoing, conversation and collaborative actions; in other words, what I am doing right now makes my life meaningful. Most noteworthy, my good life is to be created within the*

> *context of a world of social saturation. Thriving means being immersed openly in the rich, relational life of social saturation.*

This new story about a good life reflects two significant shifts in perspective. First, it reflects of a shift from individual achievements toward relational performances. Second, it also reflects a shift from being an embattled self to someone thriving in a world of social saturation. These shifts generate new possibilities for me in creating my good life. Each of these shifts is discussed in more detail in the remainder of this section.

From Individual Achievements to Relational Performances

My own story about a good life had been rooted in individual achievement. Coming into the research, this story lingered in the domain of an independent, self-determinate individual with an end goal of a good life. Despite entering into the Ph.D. program with an enthusiasm for postmodernism, old habits from living and working under a modernist paradigm persisted. My social sciences background was rooted in traditional scientific method and an individualistic vantage point. For two decades, I worked in business, a community that holds a mechanistic worldview and values realism. As I shared in the Reflection, midway through my dissertation project, I realized that unwittingly, I had been interpreting my research question as how does a *person* create a good life, emphasizing the individual over her relational interactions. This interpretation led me to approach the many identities I used in the research as pieces that make up my self. I held hope that examination of these many identities though my Ph.D. study would reveal some magic self-knowledge that would unify these disparate pieces of a saturated self, bringing a deeper meaning or purpose to my life. It did not; something quite different happened. As I wrestled through rewrites of my literature review and participated in co-researcher conversations, my viewpoint shifted in a kind of flash of insight. What I learned is that I—my whole self—engage in multiple, simultaneous relational *performances*. My self is not made up of identity fragments in search of unity, but simply, I

perform with others. These performances occur with different people in different situations, and hold no requirement to be consistent in genre or character across performances. This finding suggests *self* as a fluid process, being co-created through ongoing, relational performances.

In addition, at the onset of my research I presumed the good life to be an achievement, a goal, something one finds and pursues as an entity in its own right. In analyzing the Performance Narratives, however, I found no climactic moments or ideal story arc through which a heroine overcomes adversity to reveal the earned prize of a good life. Instead, my research showed that feelings like a sense of success, satisfaction, joy, happiness, and meaning are relationally created moment to moment. The good life surfaced as something done in an ongoing way among people. This observation made me wonder if the good life could be considered a verb instead of a noun. Under this new conception—as an action not an object—the good life not only arises out of the relational practices, but it appears that the *practices themselves* constitute the good life. This finding points to a new meaning for the good life, where the good life can be held as ongoing, collaborative actions and processes, rather than an objective or absolute "is" to be achieved. What one is doing now with others makes her life meaningful.

From Being an Embattled Self to Thriving in a World of Social Saturation

Writing and then reading the Performance Narrative collection—being both the participant and the researcher—brought forth a deep compassion for my self and an appreciation for the complex and muddied context in which I live. I had been cognitively aware of the impact of living in social saturation, after all, it was the area of interest for my doctoral study; yet, seeing it all laid out—from the debut in Chapter 1, across the performance inventory and the crowded sociograms, and to the final narratives—was a poignant experience: I was struck by how my relational life was massive and substantially interrelated. As I described in Reflection, this experience made me see that I had been treating my self as an independent, contained being, and that with that view, social

saturation left me bursting at the seams of a bounded self. Through this reflective experience, I discovered two important insights.

First, I began to consider social saturation as a normal, beneficial aspect of contemporary life. Being busy no longer became a badge of honor I wanted to wear, or an enemy I wanted to conquer. This consideration reformulated my expectations for the good life: I began to see the good life as about *being with* social saturation, rather than needing to overcome it as a problem. Under this alternative view, a good life holds no requirement to be saturation-less, in fact, social saturation becomes a necessary feature of today's advanced life, offering many benefits than less saturated eras did. Moreover, social saturation provides important relational resources; it allows, supports, shapes, and feeds the relational dance I am in with others. As I describe in Successful Business Leader, it has become an important contributor to my performances. As social saturation shifts from being an antagonizing "other" to something simply woven into me as a *life* force, thus, the good life today must happen along with, not despite of, social saturation. Interacting with social saturation moves from a construction of failure to a construction of normalcy. This finding embraces that idea that a good life is to be created *within* the context of a world of social saturation.

Second, I realized that my relational life—not my solo abilities—allows me to thrive. It is social saturation, with its plethora of relational resources, which enables me to create a good life. I reflected back to the artifact my husband selected for me in Wife)—a CPU in a computer—and began to visualize myself moving from a stand-alone computer station, to becoming a Wi-Fi enabled laptop, part of an "always on" relational web of others around the globe. Instead of looking inward to manage the challenges of social saturation, I needed to get out of my contained head and into the realm of relations. I began to shift from the onus on me as independent hero out there on her own, to me seeing myself as *inter*dependent in a relational body with others. With this vantage point, I reread my narratives and saw instead an executive woman in ongoing, orchestrated movement via conversation and relational exchange with others. Relational practices weren't isolated to a handful of instances that I could pick out here and there; relational

practices were omnipresent and life giving. They were the *embodiment* of my self. The conversational exchanges held no clear delineation as to where "I" stopped and where others began, recalling Chang's (2008) point that self is a web of others. For sure, living in a world of social saturation demands performing across multiple roles. Yet, this new story allows me to shift the tensions I experienced from something "I need to do" toward an emphasis on my relational practices—that is, what conversation and action that happens with others in the workplace, at home, and elsewhere— as a life-giving source. I learned that in my socially saturated life, my email inbox with messages from others will always be full; my home and personal administration items will continue to populate the to-do list; there will always be more interesting reading bookmarked for later, and more follow-up conversations to be had. Embracing social saturation means I can accept that things will remain unfinished as relations continue, as opposed to needing closure and completion as markers of success. This stance allows me to sit still and enjoy my surroundings or the people around me, rather than feel as though I need to keep moving and get things done. More significant, the messiness and chaos of social saturation is invited to "be"—as is—in concert with this relational dance. As described in Reflection, social saturation has become included in conversation and action, rather than something that needs to be hidden or overcome. This finding offers that thriving means being immersed openly in the rich relational life of social saturation.

Research Finding: Eight Relational Practices for Creating a Good Life in a World of Social Saturation

My research question asked: What relational practices can executive women use to create a good life in a world of social saturation? Upon reading and rereading the Performance Narratives and my Reflection, and considering the new story about the good life just described, I found that eight relational practices seemed to accompany times where I performed better and felt better, in essence, when I was experiencing a good life in social saturation. Having located these

practices, I was most interested in how to make these practices accessible for executive women. As I developed the findings, I chose to describe these practices using action phrases, with the purpose of explaining how executive women might "do" them or apply them in their own lives. In writing the findings, I held a relational stance, but also privileged words and phrases that executive women could relate to, based on my two decades of experience in this community. This findings section describes the eight relational practices that hold potential for creating a good life in social saturation. A brief overview of each practice is provided below:

1.) *Emphasize Relational Resonance* is the practice of consciously and deliberating identifying which relations create a sense of wholeness and meaning, and then cultivating the resonance in these relations. This practice allows multiple relational priorities to co-exist simultaneously and honors the temporal nature of relational performances.

2.) *Generate Prosocial Surroundings* is the practice of leveraging the various environmental components of relational performances in a way that fosters a mutually beneficial collaborative exchange.

3.) *Bring Family Out of the Shadows* is the practice of privileging family in conversation and actions at work, and integrating family and work domains when navigating social saturation.

4.) *Negotiate Velvet Ropes* is the practice of agreeing temporary, visible rules and boundaries when in exchange with others. These rules and boundaries are conveyed with a sense of gentleness, respect, and efficiency, and can be set aside and reestablished as needed.

5.) *Speak Truth to Power* is the practice of reframing or introducing unexpected or unconventional information openly into conversations, so that the direction of the relational exchange can be altered.

6.) *Use Tools for Co-Planning* is the practice of using physical objects in a visible, purposeful, and consistent way in conjunction with other people to help manage, transport, and exchange information.

7.) *Co-Create Relational Rituals* is the practice of noticing and creating everyday patterns of exchanges together with others.

8.) Tap into Your Inner Network is the practice of getting to know, trust, and rely upon the range of relations present in inner life, with no requirement for consistency or coherence.

Relational Practice 1: Emphasize Relational Resonance

In a relationally demanding world, my research suggests that executive women must being discerning in the relations that are most useful to them in creating a good life. *Emphasize Relational Resonance* is the practice of consciously and deliberating identifying which relations creates a sense of wholeness and meaning, and then cultivating the resonance in these relations. This practice allows multiple relational priorities to co-exist simultaneously and honors the temporal nature of relational performances. This practice includes: Finding people who resonate; Narrowing the number of relations; Nurturing choices, giving only what's necessary; Recognizing that multiple relations can co-exist; Knowing that relations can change over time; and Asking how relations can be resources for each other.

Across the Performance Narratives, I found that relational resonance accompanied times when I felt at my best and experienced a sense of a good life. Performing with another person or small group with a positive intensity or chemistry seemed to bring about collaborative actions that resulted in a sense of a good life—this intensity or chemistry reverberates, creating a sustainable, positive vibe. Resonant relations can create a good life even during difficult times. For example, in Successful Business Leader, resonance with Kim enabled me to enjoy myself and have a sense of purpose, despite a very hostile and demanding work situation we were working in.

The practice of *Emphasize Relational Resonance* also appeared to contribute to the good life in other ways. For one, I found that resonant relations help make things real, especially when going against the grain of what's expected. The research showed the importance of relational resonance in how certain people affirmed me, like Kim encouraging me "you *are* a consultant" (p. 172) even before technically I was, and my college roommate celebrating in me what might be off-putting to others, "to be abnormal is normal" (p. 251). Additionally, I learned that resonant

relations seem to constitute the performance. In collecting the performance inventory, as described in Chapter 4, I was surprised to find that "friend" didn't emerge as a distinct Performance Narrative. Instead, as illustrated through the sociograms, it seemed that good friends—how one might label a resonant relationship—were woven *within* each performance, contributing to the performance itself.

In applying this practice, my research showed that in a world of social saturation, I needed to narrow in on a smaller number of relations without regret. My learning on this topic was inspired by Greg McKeown's (2012) idea of essentialism, or "the disciplined pursuit of less" (online). In many of the Performance Narratives, being purposeful in pursuing less helped me feel confident and at peace when leaving less resonant relations behind. Across the narratives, I saw that I did a great deal of relational pruning, a dropping off of non-essential relations to allow space for others to bloom. This practice made me able to find the good life among social saturation, as I wrote how setting aside less useful relations "creates more space for the *intellectual* saturation I crave" (p. 171). One example of this relational pruning was found in Mother, where I explained how I tried out some professional and women's networking groups, and while "everyone" says being in business requires networking groups like these, I didn't experience resonance with these relations, so I chose to no longer participate. Instead, I chose to focus essential professional networking on resonant interactions, and limit these social interactions to the typical work hours as much as possible so that I can focus my evening time on my resonant relations at home.

In addition, I found that I needed to narrow my relations within technology and social communities in a way that enabled me to realize the benefits of a socially saturated society without being succumbed by it. As seen in the Performance Narratives, I limit my participation across the range of social media platforms to only one, LinkedIn, where I go in about once a week to handle messages and read articles in a batch. Likewise, I look at a handful of different newspapers and newsfeeds on my phone once a day to keep up with the world, but I am not online surfing all the time. I have found that emerging technology has become a topic that I can talk to my children about who in turn, help me filter key

trends in a more efficient and joyful way. These research observations made me realize that while the ease of building a broad social network— such as the number of LinkedIn contacts, Facebook friends or Twitter followers—may increase the potential for useful resources in one's performances, it can also overlook the importance of finding and cultivating resonant relations that lead to a good life. Being discerning in what relations come in my life appears to help me be more successful in social saturation.

In thinking about how this finding relates to existing research, the importance of selecting and prioritizing quality relationships is already commonly understood in American culture. A simple online search will show numerous popular press articles describing the importance of surrounding oneself with positive, helpful people in life. This concept also carries into the work world as well. The literature review showed how executive women receive messages that a good life requires prioritization in the activity and relations they engage in. In the recent *Forbes* article "People Leave Managers, Not Companies", for example, recent business research reminds executives that a poor manager is one of the main reasons employees leave an organization (Lipman, 2015, online). The literature recognizes the importance of quality relationships.

On the surface, the practice of *Emphasize Resonant Relations* could be considered nothing new. However, there are two important distinctions coming out of my research. First, conventional advice tends to pit relations against each other; the literature review showed that for executive women, prioritization often meant deciding between work or family relations. Be a devoted executive worker, or take the dead-end track by participating in a flexible work option. Be Superwoman, or never mind, opt-out. Reflecting on my Performance Narratives, though, I realized that a world of social saturation allows for multiple, parallel relational priorities to co-exist in executive women's lives. My research showed that relations across all five of my Performance Narratives can remain active contributors to a good life—there seems no requirement to cull life down to one or two main domains. I found that when I focused on my resonant relations, I didn't experience sense of burden living in a relationally demanding world.

Another important distinction in my research from what is in the literature lies in what is expected when prioritizing. Modernist literature prescribes that once something has been prioritized, executive women need to "give it her all" to demonstrate to others its importance. One hundred percent commitment is a strong cultural expectation for American executive women. However, my research suggests that a good life in a world of social saturation holds no requirement for this absolutism. I found in the research that I was able to be selective how I engaged with others within a particular performance—resonance didn't require an "all or nothing" to be a legitimate priority. This learning was evident in Mother, for example, when I declined the request to be my daughter's Room Parent for the year, but offered to help out with a few events. This allowed me to maintain my relationship with the teachers, position myself as a mother in the classroom, and let me daughter know that she's important to me. Giving what's necessary, rather than giving your all, can be a helpful guide for determining how one joins up with resonant relations. These distinctions also made me wonder how I might take this further—for instance, how can my multiple, parallel relations not only co-exist, but become resources for each other?

As a final consideration for *Emphasize Resonant Relations,* my research reminds me that it is important to realize *who* resonates can change over time; relational resonance appears to be temporal in nature. Looking across the sociograms and narratives showed that who was central to me at 15 was different from age 25 when I got married, and then from 35 having kids, and today in my mid-40s raising a family, starting a business, and finishing my Ph.D. In Successful Business Leader, for example, how I wanted to engage at work—how I experienced success—shifted as bosses, leaders, and teams changed across job assignments and locations. For sure, as my relational life changed, so did my ideal set of performances, and as my performances changed, so did my sense of what created relational resonance and a sense of the good life. This finding points to the idea that for executive women, the line-up of relational performances is not fixed over time, and performances and relations no longer appealing can drop off, as new, more meaningful ones come in. The narratives showed that some of my

own challenges in creating a good life occurred when I felt the need to be consistent with whom I was already committed and what I felt called to do, or to be steadfast in carrying out my original plan for my adult life. These notions made me feel as though when I was changing people or courses, I was disloyal, settling for less, or losing focus on my life purpose. As an alternative, the research demonstrated that a good life could be the ongoing asserting and shaping of one's relational performances, keeping it fresh and exciting. *Emphasize Relational Resonance* means I am both a co-producer and a co-performer in a good life, where the featured shows and billings are subject to change as time and tastes evolve.

Relational Practice 2: Generate Prosocial Surroundings

My research suggests that executive women's physical environments hold relational implications for creating a good life. *Generate Prosocial Surroundings* is the practice of leveraging the various surrounding components of relational performances in a way that fosters a mutually beneficial collaborative exchange. This practice includes: Being aware of what is trying to be done together; Finding the optimal setting or making adjustments to foster collaborative action; Wearing what works; Bringing supportive objects; and Amplifying the scene with small details, while doing only what is necessary.

In reading the Performance Narratives, I discovered that one of the things people do together is create environments, with the environment playing a key role in bringing about a sense of the good life. Across the narratives, there were numerous examples of my relations and I generating environments that resulted in joyful, beneficial conversation and collaboration. As one example, in Mother, my daughter and I created two spaces for our special time together. She clears out a space for me to sit with her in the sunroom, where she can draw on her whiteboard while we talk. In my home office, I use a long bench as seating at my desk, as mentioned in the Debut, so my daughter can sit next to me and color while I work. These two spaces have become where many of our resonant relational moments occur, signaling specialness together away from others. The act of creating space for each other seems to honor the other

person and helps deepen relational resonance; it fosters the sense of a good life.

My research showed that being able to create a good life means paying attention to what is needed to be prosocial. I found in my research that my relations and I often make prosocial choices together that optimize our environment for what we want to do together. For example, implied in Creative Outsider, my daily Ph.D. advisor and I discuss which location would work best for us to meet, one that we know is comfortable and not too noisy, and where we can select a booth with a large, wooden table to spread out and work while enjoying a meal together. When the environment isn't working, my research demonstrated that it's vital to make adjustments so that social saturation can be managed. For example, in the Debut, I explained how moving out of an closed-door office to an open seating plan at work made it difficult to have beneficial strategic and innovative conversations with other leaders; it was too bustling and chaotic, creating a perpetual state of transition and exhaustion that was getting in the way of other critical conversations. Shortly thereafter, my husband helped lessen this saturation for me by renovating an unused alcove off our Master bedroom to build my own home office, which created an energizing space to engage with my colleagues via phone or videoconference on certain work-from-home days, and to interact with the range of relations described in the Creative Outsider sociogram. Not only does paying attention to surroundings enhance collaborative action, it helps me address the challenges navigating a relationally demanding world.

My research also showed that very often, what I wore and the items that accompany my relational performance also contribute to prosocial surroundings. In Successful Business Leader, my co-researchers identified my shoes as embodying my performance and contributing to the resources needed at that particular time to manage the challenges of social saturation. Kim and I would get our "pointy shoes on" for an upcoming high-stakes meetings, or I'd opt for motorcycle boots to disrupt or shake things up with stagnant teams, or blingy flats to make more grounded connections with other leaders. In Infallible Daughter, wearing rock jewelry brought strength and centeredness in

difficult relational exchanges. In Creative Outsider, the kinesthetic in writing and handling Moleskin notebooks evoked deeper thinking and creativity, while using a computer brought dimension to conversations. Even in my crafting of the Performance Narratives, it seemed necessary to consider how they were to be communicated to others: colors, fonts, and additional imagery were carefully chosen for each performance, as described within the narratives. Being able to notice and amplify the surroundings in conjunction with others—to *Generate Prosocial Surroundings*—seems to result in a sense of a good life in a relationally demanding world.

This practice is aligned to a great deal of literature that says surroundings matter. From before recorded history, archeology discoveries confirm that the aesthetic has been an important part of the human experience, and there is little in the literature that contradicts the importance of environment on quality of life. Contemporary philosopher Henri Lefebvre posits that space and everyday life is a "part of a practical relationship, as part of an interaction between 'subjects' and their space and surroundings" (1974/2000, p. 18). Executive women see these notions translate in the popular press, as scores of articles reinforce how their personal surroundings—anywhere from a beautiful mountain view to even lighting a small aromatherapy candle—can help improve their outlook and energy. Feng shui and other related home organization and optimization resources are abounding. For executive women, these notions also carry over to the work setting, too. A recent review of the business literature by Kamarulzaman et al. (2011), for example, concluded that "workplace design, indoor temperature, color, noise and also interior plants" are central to office employees' well-being and performance" (p. 262). Not surprisingly, companies are paying attention to the important role the physical space plays in employee productivity and satisfaction (Morgan, 2015, online).

What is distinguishing in the relational practice *Generate Prosocial Surroundings* is that it is more than creating pleasant, comfortable surroundings suggested by the literature. Instead, my research encourages executive women to join up with their relations to leverage physical space in a way that *fosters beneficial, collaborative*

action. This practice also advises executive women to consider other aspects of space, as what is being worn on the body and what physical objects are incorporated into the collaborative exchange. These physical elements work together to help generate a good life while in action with others.

Interestingly, though, executive women receive mixed messages on the importance of their physical surroundings. On one hand, many aspects in the culture reinforce its importance, as previously described. On the other hand, as a rejection of the perfectionism found in the "Superwoman" script, the work-life balance movement has been suggesting that executive women not worry about these environmental details. Work-life balance enthusiasts, like Tiffany Duru's (2017) *Drop the Ball*, give executive women permission to lose the Superwoman persona—don't worry about a messy house or the laundry piling up, who cares if your bra and panty don't match, delegate more, just let your standards go. While this advice is well intended, it misses the point that these types of details often matter when managing social saturation.

My research counters some of the work-life balance literature and shows instead, that some of these small factors can actual be very important to performing well. For me, my research showed I experienced environmental clutter as a visual "to-do" list, compounding my sense of saturation and getting in the way of a good life. Across the narratives, I found that small details matter. My performances benefitted from having a dedicated calm, organized space of my own to think and create away from the chaos of an open seating plan at work and a home filled with kids' toys and piled up laundry. Paying attention to sound and outside light drove a better mood and intellectual capacity that I could bring to a conversation. Having enough physical space was vital to a meaningful meeting with my daily Ph.D. advisor. And, what I wore often amplified my intent in a mutual exchange. For me, the ability to thrive in social saturation and the experience of good life moments seemed to accompany a well-tended environment. To be clear, my research is not suggesting perfection or complete orderliness—there's already enough to do in a world of social saturation! Rather, as shown in my research, it's about choosing certain spaces to make special when performing with

others, and being intentional with objects or apparel that bring joy, flow, or other characteristics as needed for different types of interactions. It's in effect co-creating a defined setting for a particular performance.

Executive women can explore what types of environmental elements are important for their relational exchanges, and then be deliberate with others in bringing these into various performances, recognizing that environmental elements may participate differently in different performances. In addition, as leaders in their organizations, they also should recognize the importance of the environment on their teams and talk with them to explore how the surroundings facilitate their work lives. For example, while the financial benefit of open workspace plan is clear—more people can be fit into an open plan configuration than a traditional office configuration of the same size—its touted goal of "easy, ongoing collaboration" may not be useful in all team performances, and can be undermined by losses in other aspects of productivity and engagement, as described in the Debut. For executive women, *Generate Prosocial Surroundings* is a practice that can deepen and enhance the quality of performances, helping to create a good life within a world of social saturation.

Relational Practice 3: Bring Family Out of the Shadows

As discussed in the literature review, the American cultural ideal of a devoted worker—committed to work above all else and where work is seen as a key source of individual identity—can pressure executive women to keep up appearances that work is paramount. For many executive women, success and opportunity at work means showing unwavering job dedication and minimizing the importance and demands of family life. As a result, executive women often manage family and work as two separate domains without addressing their interconnected nature. In a world of social saturation, for the ambitious executive, family lies in the shadows. However, my research offers that for a good life, executive women should challenge the devoted worker ideal, incorporating the family back into work life. *Bring Family Out of the Shadows* is the practice of privileging family in conversations and actions at work, and integrating family and work domains when navigating social

saturation. This practice includes: Treating the spouse and kids as important as the boss; Shifting conversation and action to equalize family in a work context; Including family in work planning decisions; Considering the "devoted worker" as an artificial concept created for the benefit of the employer; and Determining to what extent the devoted worker concept is useful in creating a good life.

My research showed that, like most of my colleagues, up until only recently I accepted the idea of work as my religion, where I had a "calling" and a work identity to pursue with vigor. In Successful Business Leader, I wrote about how as far back as my youth, I associated "busy-ness" with business, and how for a significant part of my career, I gave it all to work, setting aside any personal and family needs, so that I could demonstrate my worth and value to my employer, and be considered key talent. Kim, Judi and I talked about this during our co-researcher conversation, describing how we all believed that if we worked hard enough and gave it our all without complaint, we will earn our ticket on the good life train. This belief also showed up in Mother, where I delayed having kids and avoided sharing my delight in becoming pregnant and raising my children, to prevent being seen as less committed and thus becoming slow-tracked in my career.

As a result, in the narratives I found that I also often treated work and home as separate and unequal domains. For instance, for a particular day, working from home might be a more efficient choice to juggle work and family appointments. This combination of work and home, however, filled me with guilt and self-doubt, and I preferred to work from the office as much as possible. As shown in the Wife narrative, I found that when I did work from home, I felt I needed to work even more hours and even more diligently to prove my commitment, as if being at home de-legitimatized the ability to work fully and effectively. For sure, for a good part of my life, I might have made statements that family is most important, but my *dialogue and action with others* reflected that work actually was. The intensity of my work sociogram relative to other family-based sociograms also underscores this imbalance. Like my Successful Business Leader co-researchers Kim and Judi, I could be considered the quintessential "devoted worker".

Examining my Performance Narratives and Reflection led me to consider that perhaps the devoted worker ideal and the good life are incompatible in a world of social saturation. I noticed that in our Successful Business Leader co-researcher conversation, Kim, Judi and I experienced that adhering to the devoted worker ideal didn't seem to translate into a good life. This implicit social contract did not seem to be upheld by our company, by our bosses, and by our lives overall. Sure, we were tossed scraps of success to keep us motivated at work—a key project, a nice bonus, or some other recognition—but that "big" promotion or victorious moment never really came; we were never "done" with work and the sense of a good life as executive women remained elusive. This observation left me to wonder if by rejecting the devoted worker ideal, I might be able to increase the possibility for a good life.

As I dug further in the Performance Narratives and Reflection, I saw certain points where I shifted my dialogue and action with others in a way that equalized my family relations with work. In doing so—that is, rejecting the devoted worker ideal without opting out—I ended up creating improvements over what I had been previously experiencing in my life. For example, in Successful Business Leader, while working in a high profile, President-nominated role, my family became a conversational partner in reevaluating if I was going to take on travel or after hours work—I no longer blindly accepted these work demands. During these actions, the nature of my artifact—shoes—seemed to change, reflecting my own, positive improvement in performance; I wrote, "the flatter shoes and boots I shifted to wearing embody me getting closer to who I am, and what I need and want in this life". Similarly, in Wife, after rejecting multiple invitations from my husband to go have a weekday lunch together (due to my need to show I was a diligent employee), I began to enjoy his spontaneous lunch invitations without rationalizing it to myself, or overcompensating with additional, unnecessary work time later on. In Mother, following years of prioritizing work needs over personal life, my husband and I decided that I would try to get pregnant in a middle of an important product launch at work, equalizing my family relative to work. Most significantly, when I

felt I couldn't advance any more at my company due to these personal choices, I left and started my own full-time consulting practice, applying my ambition and talents elsewhere. Successful Business Leader, Wife, and Mother all showed me that not only is it okay that the kids and spouse are treated as important as the boss, but that success, joy, meaning and purpose still can accompany a non-ideal worker. I realized I could devote to work in my life without being a devoted worker.

As executive women consider how to apply this practice in their own life, my experience with the literature review suggests that it begins by becoming aware of the role acculturation plays in propelling an American, devoted worker ideal. As discussed in the Reflection, my own shift occurred in realizing that this devoted worker ideal is just a capitalist sham to get me to work harder. I wonder what would happen if more executive women came to the same realization I did. The literature suggests that the devoted worker ideal remains so, as institutions, executive women, and their communities continue to reinforce its legitimacy. Work institutions apply modernist organizational behavior theory via work identity and employee engagement, which serves to establish and reinforce legitimacy in the devoted worker ideal. Executive women and their communities take the devoted worker ideal as truth, because, as Kessler-Harris (2007) explains, "socialization and culture influence perception of roles so that they appear to be inevitable and unchangeable (p. 98). What results is that executive women and their communities maintain the devoted worker ideal. As Williams et al. (2013) point out "professional women…accept extreme [work] time norms as legitimate…[due to] distorted perceptions…as people misunderstood the gendered and status-based nature of access to flexibility" (p. 228). For executive women, everything points to the devoted worker ideal as a non-negotiable for the good life.

My research suggests this does not need to be so: A good life in a world of social saturation holds no requirement for a devoted worker ideal. Thriving means allowing multiple, parallel priorities to flourish. *Bring Family Out of the Shadows* is a practice that helps challenge this devoted worker ideal. As the Reflection described, I have become deliberate in advocating for and privileging my family as I craft new

norms in my business and interact with my clients and colleagues in other companies. I find myself holding new conversations with clients and co-workers about incorporating family needs while meeting work requirements, rather than hiding the issues and dealing with them on my own. My research invites executive women to do the same, to *Bring the Family Out of the Shadows*, in order to nudge cultural norms away from the devoted worker ideal less suited for executive women living in multiplicity in a relationally demanding world.

Relational Practice 4: Negotiate Velvet Ropes

Living as a relational self in a world of social saturation, there are often few established rules or boundaries, requiring people to co-create these as they go along together. For executive women whose lives span varied performances, the need for rules and boundaries can be particularly significant. The research showed that being able to broker temporal boundaries when interacting with others could be a useful practice in creating a good life in a world of social saturation. *Negotiate Velvet Ropes* is the practice of agreeing temporary, visible rules and boundaries when in exchange with others. These rules and boundaries are conveyed with a sense of gentleness, respect and efficiency, and can be set aside and reestablished as needed. This practice includes: Being clear in the boundary or action needed; Collaborating with others to identify and create useful rules and actions; Using visual signals or cues when possible; Building in flexibility or shared understanding of exceptions as needed over time; Cutting to the chase in language, avoiding inefficient apology or explanation; and Being aware of when unintended signals are being sent.

The narratives showed that I used the practice of *Negotiate Velvet Ropes* frequently in many of my Performances. Like the velvet ropes strung between stanchions at entrances in theatres and other performance venues, arranging temporary boundaries within my own performances helped me direct the flow and pace of contact and conversation with others. Creating these boundaries is a co-constructed process, putting them up in a gentle, respectful way honoring the people impacted; to be sure, these ropes are made of velvet, not barbed, chain-link metal.

To begin using this practice, executive women might start by identifying points at which social saturation or relational exchanges gets crowded or unruly, and then explore with others how it might be lessened or made more effective. For instance, in the Debut, I was being subjected to ongoing distractions and interruptions while working in an open space environment, so when concentrated work was needed, I would put on my headphones, even if I weren't on a conference call, to request of others, "please do not disturb". Colleagues would interpret this signal as I was not available for a conversation at that time, and respond by not interrupting me. Without this signal, from experience I know multiple team members unaware of my need to focus would likely approach me, and my own stress may cause me to react to their unwelcome interruption in a short or negative manner. When I finished my concentrated work, I was able to take the headphones off and return to being available to others as a leader. This visual cue resulted in a gentle, respectful, and efficient boundary.

Another example of *Negotiate Velvet Ropes* occurred in Successful Business Leader, where my team and I highlighted some frustration and hurt feelings as a result of distraction during team meetings. After some experimentation and ongoing team conversations, we found some velvet ropes that worked for us. We decided to keep our staff meetings as a "no multitasking zone", a time focused on our issues and needs, and on building our own sense of community. Computers were put away and phone use was prohibited. Moreover, this boundary was set up as a mutual understanding that we all respected, rather than something I needed to enforce as their leader; for instance, I wasn't collecting everyone's devices at the beginning of the meeting. We all understood that if someone needed to text during our meetings, it must be something urgent. Not only were these collaborative agreements respectful and efficient, they were flexible, in that we were able to detach the rope to allow an exceptional situation to come in.

I also saw velvet ropes play a helpful role in navigating social saturation at home as well. In Mother, my husband and I decided to limit the time as well as days of the week our kids can use devices, and as a family, we don't allow devices—parents included—at the dinner table or

during outings or other family time. When we get pushback from the kids, we talk about the importance of family and being together—emphasizing relational resonance—and also determine what changes or exceptions make sense for us all. In Wife, my husband and I agree boundaries on what we share with others, often dependent on the situation and person. Because we are a united front, we can be discreet with what we are doing, and not offend or hurt the other person. Moreover, our agreement with each other on what to share, in turn, creates a trust and deepens our connection and affection for each other. In my research, negotiating with others in the co-creation of boundaries, finding visual cues, and building in flexibility contributed to the respectful and effective use of the practice.

In addition, my research showed that efficient language is helpful to the practice of *Negotiate Velvet Ropes*. Labor saving methods become vital living and working in a world of social saturation. Continuing the metaphor of the theatre, people see the red velvet ropes and instinctively know what they mean: line up here, don't cross there; take your turn, etc. No one from the theatre staff is standing by the ropes saying they are sorry for the line, or no theatre goers are taking time explaining why they are queuing up behind someone. Similarly, my research shows that upgrading one's language to be more efficient is critical, suggesting that executive women should cut to the chase and resist any urge to apologize or explain as they navigate multiplicity across home, family, and work. For example, as established in the Debut, sometimes non-work issues need to be addressed while working. Many times, these concurrent demands can be addressed without anyone else being aware, such as when my husband and I text quickly about groceries during my meeting. Other times, though—no matter how well things might be coordinated or pre-arranged—these concurrent demands can unexpectedly turn into a flashpoint, such as getting a call from the boss in the middle of dinner, or seeing an emergency client meeting appear on the calendar right in the middle of school drop-off. In these flashpoints, it becomes very difficult to hide the work-home conflict from the affected parties. To soften the impact of the conflict and manage the inherent stress, executive women's language can default to guilt, anxiety, or unnecessary explanation. As I

reflected in Wife, "Why is it that executive women hide the issues they face [juggling work and home], yet are fine to show their guilt to others?". This inefficient language can denigrate executive women's relative power and standing with others. It sends the unintended signal that something wrong is being done—in this instance, that the devoted worker value is being violated. Inefficient language weakens boundary negotiations.

In contrast, when *efficient* language is used, it conveys that no violation or anything wrong is being done that needs to be apologized for, thereby maintaining executive women's relative power, and in this case, making the devoted worker construct less valid. The value of efficient language is brought to life in Wife, during the discussion I had with two fellow executive moms during a volunteer event:

- "I asked [the fellow mom] why she felt she had to launch into such a description [saying she sorry for background noise from her kids in the car], and instead, either decline the meeting or if it was business critical, why not just say, 'Due to the early start of the conference call, I am enroute and need to put you on mute'".

- "I said, 'If a client proposes that time [when you need to pick up the kids], why not just say you have another commitment during that time, and offer some alternative times that works for you? No one has to know the details of the commitment'".

The narratives prompted me to recall other examples of efficient language I used with others. Let's say the boss wants a meeting with me at 3pm, the same time I need to be at my kid's school event that day. I might say "I have another commitment then and won't be able to do that time"— exactly how I would handle a conflict due to a business commitment. I don't need to accept the meeting time, only to be stressed multitasking at the school event later, and also, I don't need to apologize for not accepting or launch into justification because it's a family-related event. Similarly, instead of struggling with explaining that, "I'm working *from home* and cannot make the in-person meeting", executive women

might consider instead saying, "I am working *remotely* on Tuesday, but I am available for a call at 3". As another example, if I get an email saying, "I sent you a message a week ago but I didn't hear back from you. Can you help…", I simply reply with the information, without any explanation of "Sorry, my inbox is overloaded and I'm behind". Not only is this approach more efficient, but also with this unapologetic, cut to the chase exchange, I can navigate social saturation more effectively. The research made me realize that in a world of social saturation, what matters is how executive women talk to other people.

  Negotiate Velvet Ropes builds upon an already modest body of literature and popular press that consider boundary setting as an important life skill. University of Toronto Professor, Mariana Bockarova (2016) explains that, "Boundaries can be defined as the limits we set with other people, which indicate what we find acceptable and unacceptable in their behavior towards us. The ability to know our boundaries generally comes from a healthy sense of self-worth, or valuing yourself in a way that is not contingent on other people or the feelings they have toward you." Even more, as described in the literature review section "Don't be a Man", establishing boundaries can be more difficult for executive women due to societal expectations around gender performance. Clinical psychologist Dr. Mary McKinney explains, "Saying no is more challenging for women because of societal pressures to be likeable…Men are still seen as likeable if they're assertive, while women are more likely to be seen as likeable if they're compliant" (Clay, 2013, online). The literature encourages women to stop being "people-pleasers", with advice such as engaging in positive, validating internal self-talk; beginning in small ways in saying no; buying time before responding ("let me get back to you"); being clear in their long-term goals; avoiding interactions with toxic people; and reducing unnecessary apology (Cooper, 2017, online). Unfortunately, as the modernist and women and work literature point out,

it can be difficult for executive women to negotiate boundaries in way that doesn't result in social penalty.

My research reinforces the value of boundaries in a relationally demanding world. It says that while executive women can't always choose every person they must interact with or what demands are calling them, it is crucial that they choose the terms by which they engage with others: I might not be able to say "no", but I can negotiate "tomorrow at 3" in a way that is respectful and equalizing. This relational practice elevates the role of language as a tool for boundary management, and considers boundary setting and maintenance as a co-created endeavor. In the literature review, the poem by Natasha Josefowitz summarizes the Superwoman story executive women are subjected to—the perfect mother, wife, daughter, worker, and friend that is always available and helpful to others, as "she is everything to everyone". For executive women, relational overload can become an impediment to a good life, and in absence of temporary, visible boundaries, they risk encountering Josefowitz's parting question "But who is *she*?" The practice of *Negotiate Velvet Ropes* can help executive women navigate the nature and speed of their relational life within a world of social saturation.

Relational Practice 5: Speak Truth to Power

As the modernist and women and work literature revealed, many cultural norms, expectations, and standards are less useful for executive women living and working in a world of social saturation. My research suggests that to improve their lives, executive women may be able to modify these less useful norms by changing the nature of their relational exchanges with others. *Speak Truth to Power* is the practice of reframing or introducing unexpected or unconventional information openly into conversations, so that the direction of the relational exchange can be altered. This change in direction can be more positive, useful, and life giving in a world of social saturation. This practice includes: Becoming more attuned to gender and devoted worker assumptions and norms that are less useful; Examining one's own potential co-conspirator behaviors; Using questions and offering alternatives to help engage and redirect others; Starting small; Expecting discomfort; and Being brave.

The advantage this practice brings in helping create a good life can be demonstrated by the impact when I did not deploy it. Examples across the Performance Narratives illuminated the downside in keeping quiet. As described in the Reflection, I found that when I ignored gender micro inequities—continuing along in conversations as normal, in order not to be labeled a "feminist" and risk my ability to be accepted and to advance in the business community— I unintentionally reinforced them. I didn't inquire with my bosses as to why I needed to tone down my direct, sharp leadership style in favor of the princess archetype that most in my company seemed comfortable with. Instead, as described in Successful Business Leader, I followed my bosses' suggestions, trying to be less intimidating and more approachable, using less "big vocabulary words", and smiling more, in the hopes it would lead up a fast path to the C-suite. But it didn't. Despite my many successes and innovative contributions to the business and as an effective leader among my teams, my promotions still became fewer and far between. As another example, mentioned earlier in this chapter, I found that so much of my own struggle balancing the demands of multiplicity in a saturated world was something I put on my own to solve, hidden from others, sucking it up and doing the best I could to keep everything visible to seem under control, while behind the scenes, it was anything but that. In using the metaphor of the theatre, it was as if my performances as an executive woman could only occur in front of a proscenium arch, the arch in a theatre that frames the opening between the stage and the auditorium, separating what the audience sees versus what might be going on behind the scenes. I was not attuned to how my communities' norms were less useful to me and rather than try to change or at least challenge the norms, I focused on fixing myself.

Participating in this research made me see how I was a co-conspirator in perpetuating institutional power, as mentioned in the Reflection and in previously in the relational practice, *Bring Family Out of the Shadows*. While the institutions carry the benefit of historical momentum and power, I realized I also played a role, as my conversations and action with others continued to make institutional norms real and reinforced their legitimacy. In the literature, Mary Gergen and Kenwyn Smith (1995) discuss a disruptive workshop with one

participant displaying a "complex authority dynamic" (p.105). They explained that from a conventional perspective, this individual's behavior would be the issue. From a relational perspective, though, there is shared responsibility with the other attendees for the dynamics of this individual in the workshop. Gergen and Smith used the metaphor of sadomasochism, where both the giver of pain and the receiver of pain participate in the exchange. Gergen and Smith's article made me reflect on my own role in allowing certain power dynamics to occur. For instance, when reviewing Successful Business Leader, I was struck that often my colleagues and I accepted negative or power-based dynamics "as is", rather than asking what our role may be in allowing this situation to prevail. I accepted that feminism was radical and unnecessary for business, because companies were already taking steps to fix inequality through diversity and flexibility programs that would be supportive to my career. I accepted the silent burden of being a busy Superwoman because I thought having a stay-at-home husband and father at home would offset it. I accepted the devoted worker ideal as a human truth and the means to find purpose and a good life. In all these cases, keeping quiet didn't seem to be helping me navigate social saturation very well.

In contrast, I found there were numerous times in the Performance Narratives and Reflection that I used the practice of *Speak Truth to Power*, which in turn, seemed to change the direction of travel to be one that was more positive, useful, and life-giving for living in a relationally demanding world. In Wife, I described a family conversation like this, writing that,

> [M]y husband—who prides himself in trying to be a progressive partner around the house—said that he would help, but shared how much he despised it, explaining that, 'Doing laundry isn't in my DNA'. I explained that it isn't in my DNA either and asked the family, 'Who is excited to do laundry?' Of course, no one thought it would be fun to do laundry. That created the realization for them that I, too, find much of the housework boring or annoying to do. We agreed that everyone

> in the house has to help out since we all live there; no one person has to "get stuck" doing the crappy work.

In Reflection, I described how,

> I highlight micro inequities in discussion with my children, so much so, that my son now often points them out when he observes them. I talk openly with other executive women without shame about the challenges I face performing all of my roles…. [When I work], I [don't] hide or overcompensate because I need to address personal things *and* work things. I don't use 'he/him' as the default gender in my own communications and reorder when using both genders, so that 'she' comes before 'he'.

In Creative Outsider, I found that some of my more effective actions with others were when I spoke the truth, describing how others appreciated that I was "[un]afraid to buck status quo or say the things out loud that others might be only thinking. I inspired my teams to push the envelope and express their own unique brand of self at work—to do and be different...I became known among my colleagues for being a bold, witty, and very innovative person". Most significant, as described in Successful Business Leader, being a key leader during a period of restructuring and layoffs on my team, to the shock of my bosses and peers, I took a severance package, which opened up a promising new career running my own consulting practice and (hopefully) the timely completion of my Ph.D. The practice of *Speak Truth to Power* appears to lead to a good life trajectory in a world of social saturation.

For executive women interested in using this practice, it may be helpful to know that these disruptions do not need to be seismic in nature, although their resulting impact might be. I reflected on times when I have used this practice, which provided some examples that executive women might consider. For example, when facing work travel demands, rather

than grumble to the spouse and blindly accept yet another trip, instead, an executive woman might ask the meeting organizer, "Is it possible to shift the start time of the meeting from 8 am to 10 am, and do a working lunch, so that the group of us here can fly there in the morning, versus having to fly out the night before?" Or inquire, "In reviewing the agenda, it seems like most of this can be accomplished on a teleconference—what objectives require us being together in-person?" Another example may be in how one raises micro inequities with her boss during a career development discussion, "I noticed that no one at the Vice President level or above participates in the company's flexible work program. I wondered how my use of this program might impact my ability to become a VP". In thinking about countering the premium the culture places on busy-ness, for instance, executive women might consider responding to a "How are you?" with a "calm and creative" rather than "busy and chaotic". Or, if courageous enough, rather than "The weekend was great! We took the kids to the museum for the new exhibit, and my husband and I had a special date night together", perhaps the response can be, "You know, I found it stressful. We had to take the kids out on a playdate at the museum in the middle of a beautiful Saturday morning, my house is a mess and I have laundry piling up, and my husband and my date night was spent cleaning up Jonny's puke because he ate too much popcorn at the museum. I have this major work presentation tomorrow, and I might have to figure out how to call in for it, if Jonny is still sick". *Speak Truth to Power* can be particularly helpful when used in conjunction with the practice of *Bring Family Out of the Shadows* discussed earlier. These examples demonstrate being attuned to less useful cultural norms, and then disrupting typical exchanges with others to reframe or redirect these exchanges in an alternative way forward.

As a fair warning, as I reflect on the practice, *Speak Truth to Power* often comes with discomfort and requires one to be brave. This practice contradicts the requirements for social acceptance—that is, adaptation and assimilation—as described in the literature review section, "Be a Man". And, for executive women, additional social penalty often comes when speaking out, as shown in "Don't be a Man". For sure, there is little in management or business literature that supports using this

practice, and executive women can find little reassuring guidance in the popular press. Whenever executive women disrupt the smooth flow of conversational currents, it most likely will feel awkward or come with tension. Recently, while I was working on this chapter, in the background I heard a TV commercial promoting a CNN special program on race relations. One of the speakers said, "Uncomfortable conversations create change". I stopped to reflect on this message and realized that is what is being proposed here: *to change conventional norms less useful, the conversations that create and sustain these norms must also change.*

This commercial prompted me to consider what it is meant to be a feminist today, and what's needed to lessen the relational pressures experienced by executive women living in a world of social saturation. Across all the literature I read, I had not found a good, contemporary feminism story that connected with me, my executive woman community, and my life in social saturation. Of course, I appreciate what Lean In and other movements are doing to raise awareness about gender inequities at work and home, but I didn't see their efforts were translating into leaders and policy makers making practical steps to help me as an executive woman living in multiplicity. I didn't see well-intended work flexibility programs—myself having worked for an employer designated as a Top Company for Working Women—addressing the real issues executive women face in social saturation. My disappointment is only made worse in seeing the recent political conservative backlash against women and a resurge in the American cult of domesticity; it stirs a sense of anxiety and urgency within me. With all of this in mind, I see the need for feminism remains strong, yet, I am left to wonder, is feminism dead?

As a timely response, on December 12, 2017, Merriam-Webster suggested perhaps not—they announced they selected "feminism" as one of their Words of the Year for 2017, based on it being a top lookup coming out of political and cultural events (other 2017 notables include dotard, complicit, gaffe, and recuse). They define feminism as "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes" and "organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests" (Merriam-Webster, 2017, online). In reading Merriam-Webster's definition, however, I found it lacked resonance with what I and my colleagues

experience as executive women living and working in a world of social saturation. As an alternative, my research suggests to me an alternative definition for feminism, one that reframes it as "the ability to speak truth to power, one exchange at a time, across a swath of executive women and their relations, going against the grain, no matter how uncomfortable it may feel". *Speak Truth to Power* seems promising in altering the cultural norms less useful to executive women, and in contributing to the co-creation of a good life in a world of social saturation.

Relational Practice 6: Use Tools for Co-Planning

In a world of social saturation, there is a great deal of information coming in and going out across multiple people and via multiple channels. As shown in the Introduction and in the literature review, executive women tend to hold primary administrative responsibility in their varied roles, serving like a "Chief Operating Officer", a leader keeping things organized and humming along at the work, home, and community front. For executive women, managing this information effectively appears to be a critical factor in performing well; the right information at the right time is essential to success, while missing important details can lead to negative, downstream effects for themselves and their relational stakeholders. The pressure to manage these information flows well can be experienced as an individual burden, contributing to executive women's stress and sense of being overwhelmed in a world of social saturation. My research identified that physical objects can help with this relational information overload, in effect becoming key tools for executive women and their relations to share in the management of the demands of social saturation. *Use Tools for Co-Planning* is the practice of using physical objects in a visible, deliberate, and consistent way in conjunction with other people to help manage, transport, and exchange information. These tools are regular accompaniments to relational activity, enhance collaborative action, and can differ across performances. This practice includes: Identifying tools already in use, and expanding their functionality to include others in planning and action; Considering time management as a coordinated, relational activity, and getting others involved; Ensuring selected tools

are visible, easily accessible, and actually used by others; Incorporating the selected tools in conversations; Using each tool consistently and in a reliable way; and Being sure the tools integrate work, family, and other personal needs.

My research showed that co-planning tools appeared as a conduit in key relations, helping improve how my relations and I moved together in information and social overload. In Mother, for example, the refrigerator calendar helped my family manage the breadth of our activity. As described in the narrative, all activity that impacts on one or more family members—from school and sports activities, doctor and service appointments, birthdays and anniversaries, and even not-to-miss shopping sales events, for example—are added to this calendar. This calendar hangs on the side of the refrigerator located by where the cupboard for the drinking glasses are, making it visible to others and in an area that gets used frequently to prompt its use. Family members check it daily, talking about what's ahead and reminding them what they need to bring or do, and everyone participates by adding their own items to the calendar, making sure to bring up conflicts along the way. I also transfer from my mobile phone calendar select work items, such as business travel or a key meeting or deliverable that may have family impact, and likewise, as entries back into my mobile calendar, I put items from the family calendar that would impact my own work, such as an early school dismissal or doctor's appointment. What's significant is that the calendar is incorporated in our conversations as a family, fostering shared responsibility and accountability.

Co-planning tools are also essential at work. The Debut and Successful Business Leader implied that my assistant had access to my mobile phone calendar via her workstation, so that my personal and family commitments entered via my mobile phone could be coordinated with work-related obligations. We held conversations nearly every day using this shared electronic calendar. In addition, my team members and I would add key items to each other's calendar as well, such as planned vacation or a significant meeting, so that we would be able to plan our work appropriately and also respect when each other might be on vacation or out of the office. The electronic calendar served as a key tool

in my work team's planning and action together. In addition to the calendars, my annual journal served as another coordinated action tool, accompanying me to any face to face meeting so my direct reports, my boss, my peers, or my clients can see me writing down key points and any next actions. They get to see that I have a section dedicated with sticky notes for each of them that identifies key needs or follow-up for next time we meet. It seems as though this practice reassures these important work relations that they have been heard and there is accountability for what is going to be done. I also bring this journal out for key discussions with my husband to capture life administration requirements, such as healthcare and finances, or immigration paperwork actions, as mentioned in Wife. Reflecting its important role in my life, this journal provided key data for the performance inventory described in Chapter 4. Relational tools can make social saturation both manageable and a shared responsibility.

These tools do more than manage more than relational information; they serve as performance partners. In my research, all of the sociograms had a number of objects identified as "active relations with things or events" as positioned in the lower right quadrant. Relational objects like these were featured prominently, for example, in Creative Outsider, where my grey Moleskin notebooks and my computer were situated as tandem partners conducive to my academic relations. The notebooks became the site to capture key ideas and quotes from my Masters and Ph.D. reading and research, and also were pulled out during my regular conversations with my daily advisor, program administrators, fellow students, and other academic relations. Between meetings, I would jot questions or discussion topics for my advisor as they came up; during our meeting, I would pull the notebook out and refer to these notes to shape our conversation. The computer helped coordinate meeting and talk time, and also allowed me to "co-work with others" as my advisor and I exchanged drafts, comments, answers and ideas. As my advisor once said to me about the computer, "It lets me know there is a *there* there". The relational performance quality deepened through use of co-planning tools like these.

Executive women may consider the objects they already use or could use in helping foster relational exchange. My research suggests that this practice requires the object to be something that is visible in the relational exchange. It can't be used privately like a mobile phone; it must be something that can be actively shared. My research also suggests that the object be used regularly or at least in a manner that makes it dependable. Most significant, it seems that the object needs to be part of the conversation. For example, in Mother, the calendar was something my kids talked about in the mornings getting ready, and in Creative Outsider, the grey Moleskin notebook was something my advisor noticed, often asking me, "what else is on the list to talk about". My research showed there was a natural deliberateness to the involvement and celebration of these tools used in conversation, and at times, it even made social overload pleasurable.

The practice of *Use Tools for Co-Planning* expands upon the existing literature, where guidance for executive women's planning usually involves dos and don'ts of effective time management: Don't do email first thing in the morning—do the most important thing first; don't touch a document or email more than once; don't let papers accumulate; schedule the type of work done (strategic or rote) based on what time of the day you do that kind of work best; delegate effectively; set aside time for just thinking each day; and end each work day by making a short list of key priorities for the next (Hallowell, 2005, p. 61). Executive women are advised that good calendar habits include being aware of where one's time goes, manage to the week rather than the day, and carve out time and protect it for important personal items and self-care (Vanderkam, 2016, online). For sure, efficient time management is considered a fundamental skill for business executives, evident by the countless business books, articles, and blogs on the topic.

The practice of *Use Tools for Co-Planning* offers a fresh twist on the time management literature in two distinct ways. First, this practice emphasizes that planning tools should be used in conjunction with others and second, this practice requires co-planning to be integrated across all domains in work, home, and other personal life. Most of the conventional guidance treats planning as an individual practice, without much

discussion about co-planning or in making the planning tool visible and in active use with others. My research showed that what's important in planning is *how* and *with whom* you do it; it is a relational practice. *Use Tools for Co-Planning* can help executive women manage multiple roles effectively, share the burden of social saturation with others, and enable social saturation to become a positive, beneficial aspect of relational exchanges.

Relational Practice 7: Co-Create Relational Rituals

The Western value on being a self-determinate individual, as discussed in the literature review, can direct executive women to focus on accomplishing major tasks or acquiring certain things as markers of having a good life. In a world of social saturation, however, these markers can become transient, quickly irrelevant as the next thing is progressed, or simply lost among the relational melee. My research suggests that small, more commonplace, regular interactions with others constitute a good life. *Co-Create Relational Rituals* is the practice of noticing and creating everyday patterns of exchanges between others. This practice includes: Emphasizing small or mundane moments over big events; Noticing when rituals happen, as well as where there are opportunities to co-create new ones; Cherishing the rhythm to the ritual, whether it be scheduled or unplanned; Listening for life's sweet invitations; and Being aware of the intention behind the ritual to co-create meaning about what matters.

What struck me in reviewing the Performance Narratives was that none contained rich descriptions of what one might call major life events or achievements, such as graduating from high school or college, a big promotion, my wedding day, or even the days of my children's' birth. Instead, the narratives were overflowing with everyday, little exchanges—or rituals—done with other people that bring meaning. Often these rituals are scheduled, such as Sunday calls with my parents, talking with the kids on the drive to school, or my daughter sitting next to me in the early morning while I work on my Ph.D. Other times, these rituals were unscheduled, but still held a rhythm to it when performed, such as texting back and forth with husband when we're apart to say, "I've

arrived" or "heading home now", or an impromptu, supportive lunch with Kim and Judi. Sometimes these rituals were used in conjunction with the practices of *Use Tools for Co-Planning* or *Generate Prosocial Surroundings,* as previously described. I found these relational rituals brought with them a sense of contentment, that my life felt good right now. Using the word each of my children used to describe me, these rituals make me feel "squishy". They become enactments of the good life. As I learned through the artifact in Mother,

> My glasses have let me see a different ways of Motherhood, ones that are not bound by institutional or gender norms, or rampant consumerism, but instead, can be an performance predominately rooted in my relationship with my children. It is not *Motherhood*—with a capital M— the institution, but rather, it is *motherhood*—with a little m—the ongoing relational interactions between my children and me, nothing more.

To executive women, my research offers that it is important to notice when these rituals happen and also when new ones have the potential to be co-created. One of my lessons from the research is how to listen for life's sweet invitations. In Wife, my self-imposed pressure for work left me to automatically reject my husband's invitation to go to lunch. I wasn't listening for the opportunity to engage in a good life relational ritual. But, participating in this research has revealed the value in noticing, as for instance, my lunch dates with my husband have become a treasured ritual together.

Despite the benefit of relational rituals, it can be hard to notice them. The perpetual "to-do" list from executive women's many roles can be a loud voice that drowns out a soft exchange, and there is a need to be intentional in listening. Bringing in an example that happened to me just the other day, my son said to me, "Hey, Mom, this weekend, I want to do something special with you". At first, my inner dialogue shouted out a little dread, fearing what new project was going to be added to my weekend list, when I really hoped to crank through some dissertation

writing. I quieted this loud voice, and instead, paused and shifted to listen carefully to my son with curiosity and openness.

"Like what?" I ask.

He replies, "Oh, maybe just play Connect 4 or something like that".

What a sweet invitation that is very doable together! For executive women, shifting their focus away from large achievements to these everyday relational rituals can allow the good life to breakthrough the clutter of social saturation.

This practice amplifies the existing literature, which establishes that rituals are a commonplace and beneficial practice across cultures, dating back to early human communities. Behavioral scientists and Harvard Professors Francesca Gino and Michael Norton (2013) describe that "People engage in rituals with the intention of achieving a wide set of desired outcomes, from reducing their anxiety to boosting their confidence, alleviating their grief to performing well in a competition – or even making it rain" (Gino & Norton, 2013, online). There are many studies that show the beneficial impact of engaging in rituals (Gino and Norton, 2013, online).

In my research, the practice of *Co-Create Relational Rituals* emphasizes the action executive women do with others and prioritizes small, everyday exchanges over larger life events. It is less about preparation, as put forth by Gino and Norton, and considers the desired outcome as the co-creation of good life moments. Popular press related to meditation and yoga practice seems more aligned to what I found in my research, as these topics encourage the use of ritual as meaningful in everyday activity. As yoga expert and certified wellness educator Katie Silox explains, "Rituals make even mundane activities intentional and sacred" (2012, online). Like my research, she sees rituals as creating a good life, describing how "a ritual returns you to what matters…[It] puts us in a state of mind where we can break with the routine patterns of the mundane and remember the sacred" (Silox, 2012, online). I find Silox's view helpful in articulating how meaning making can arise out of a ritual. Silox shares, "What makes a ritual sacred, however, is the intention behind it. The word "sacred" comes from the Latin word sacrum, which

relates to power or strength. So, a sacred ritual is an exchange or action that *you imbue with meaning*, thus giving it power" (2012, online). In the melee of social saturation, being able to sort through what matters can be challenging. The practice of *Co-Create Relational Rituals* allows executive women to find and make certain conversations and collaborative actions stand out from the ordinary as they go about their lives.

Relational Practice 8: Tap into Your Inner Network

Executive women know that having a good network is vital to being successful at work. Their network connects them to resources, helps them solve problems, and cheers them on during tough times. My research suggests that executive women also have an inner network of relations that also can be accessed for these same reasons, which is particularly valuable in relationally demanding world where executive women face a multitude of unhelpful messages as they go about their lives. *Tap into Your Inner Network* is the practice of getting to know, trust, and rely upon the range of relations present in inner life, with no requirement for consistency or coherence. This practice includes: Taking stock of the many voices in your inner relational life across performances; Prioritizing the voices that are most helpful and life-giving; Setting aside less useful, dissonant voices, but being open to bringing them back when needed; and Celebrating inconsistency and incongruence within a sense of self and across collaborative actions.

Participating in the research showed me the value of being aware of my inner relational life. As shared in the literature review, social construction promises an unbounded self, brought to life through relations. For social constructionists, inner life is inherently relational as inner dialogue, self-reflection, and other mental activity are considered where "[one is] engaged in a relational action simply carried out in private" (Gergen, 2011, p. 106). Inner and outer relations constitute one's self, as Ken Gergen (1991/2000) describes, because "relations make possible the concept of the self" (p. 170). Social construction privileges inner relations, whether they be voices of known others or as *social ghosts*, or "relations with others who are not (or who may never have

been) in one's immediate social context" (Gergen, 2001, p. 123). As "I is a relational achievement" (Gergen, 2011, p. 133), I made sure that an examination of both external and internal relations was factored in my study design, as presented in Chapter 4. My research, in particular the sociograms, enabled me to take stock of my rich, relational inner life.

As I analyzed the sociograms and developed the written self-narratives, I realized that the inner voices of others were vast, and meaningful and beneficial to me. The left side of the quadrant—where inner relations were mapped—was just as populated as the right side where external relations were. Moreover, in the Performance Narratives, I found numerous examples where these inner relations helped me navigate my life in a world of social saturation. For example, in Successful Business Leader, I found myself imagining a conversation with my trusted high school advisor to solve a complex issue involving a direct report, HR, and my boss. In Infallible Daughter, I saw how the 7-year old Miss Smarty Pants fed my drive, resilience, and spirit despite steep hurdles at work and home. Mother showed me the perspective of my deceased grandmother created a determination to ensure I was creating a life on my terms and not others' expectations. These inner voices could be experienced as an imagined conversation or simply as intuition, a knowing, or a sense of self. In reflecting upon my Performance Narratives, it became apparent that when I was experiencing the good life, I was often relying upon these inner voices. They had experience. They have been with me for a long time. I listened to them and I trusted them.

My research also showed that I needed to be astute as to who was in my inner network and whom I trusted. Some inner voices were less useful to helping me navigate social saturation or in creating a good life. For example, in Successful Business Leader, the inner voices of a few former critical bosses and direct reports as well as the voices of "shoulds" were strong and negatively impacted my sense of self. When I let these voices guide me, I found my ability to co-create a good life was lessened. As I described in the Creative Outsider, I became lost in trying to adapt to a former boss' desire for me to be a creative *insider*, in self-editing to hide my creative impulses, and in demurring my vocabulary or

extroverted style so that others didn't feel intimidated by me. When I followed these dissonant voices, I didn't experience a flow in my work and felt a tension between these actions and my sense of who I was. I was playing a part I didn't really want to play, and despite a good effort, it often didn't result in a successful or satisfying performance. I wasn't able to be as effective and I certainly didn't enjoy myself.

The Performance Narratives showed me that experiences like these honed my ability to get to know my many inner voices, consider the context or motivations behind their messages, and then determine whom to follow based on what is most useful and life-giving for me. As I describe later in Successful Business Leader, "Over time, I increased [my awareness of the positive voices], and have developed my skill in amplifying what they are saying to me. This shift in listening—away from the judging voices to the empowering voices—has deepened my sense of experiencing the good life". Similarly, in Mother, some of my inner voices had me rejecting becoming a mother in the first place, which I understood later was really their rejection of traditional Motherhood; this realization led to me to co-create new rhythms of motherhood that work better for my family and me. Likewise, in Wife, the inner voices of my husband and my different cultural norms need to be sorted through, to determine which ones we want to act upon and which ones we want to set aside. Similar to *Emphasize Resonant Relations*, knowing which voices to listen to is important to this practice.

Contemplating the Performance Narratives in light of my inner network also revealed to me a new insight: being inconsistent and incongruent is okay. Thriving in a world of social saturation holds no requirement for consistency or congruency. Inconsistency and incongruency could even be reframed as *requirements* for a good life, as opposed to impediments. My research showed that the practice involves honoring all voices and all relations, but then considering what is useful in the moment, without worry about consistency. Less helpful voices can be set aside, as previously described with the boss and direct report voices, and they can come back in, as done with the voice of Infallible Daughter, whom I had set aside for years and are now bringing back into my life to hear her wisdom.

I found that the good life also allows for incongruency, without a need to hammer out, compartmentalize, or cover up the parts that don't "fit". As shown in Infallible Daughter, I interpreted the rock artifact as symbolizing an organic, asymmetrical state. Its incongruence is celebrated and expected, and there is no need to smooth down the jagged, tension-filled edges or polish the surface to conform to societal notions of "what is nice". Throughout the Performance Narratives, I realized I have a diverse group of inner voices that I can tap into. My collaborative actions with others seem to thrive when these different inner voices were able to come through, where quirks and unconformities were celebrated, where differences and contradictions co-existed, and where I didn't hide one performance or community from another in my life. The inner voices telling me to let go of consistency and congruency created new possibility in my life, as described in the concluding reflection in Creative Outsider:

> I am not a collection of parts but my self is all of these performances in one. I can be a feminist while doing traditional, gendered things. I can have my family as a priority along with my career ambitions. I can be a successful Creative Outsider as my profession. I can move fluidly in the academic and business world. I can live in the US and Morocco. I can be a cool nerd.

The inner knowing associated with the practice of *Tap into Your Inner Network*—often referred to as "women's intuition"—is nothing new in the literature. Unfortunately for executive women, the role of women's intuition has largely taken a back seat in the business world. Intuition is defined by Merriam-Webster as the "the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference". Modernist as well as women and work literature generally agree that women are typified as having a differentiated strength as intuitive knowers, although it is inconclusive if this strength is due to biology, culture or some other reason (Boucouvalas, 1997, p. 8).

While numerous studies have shown the benefits of intuition (Biali, 2012, online), in an executive role, intuition is considered less

valid for a community where facts, data, and rational thought are privileged. Even more, in the business community, the term "women's intuition" holds significant, negative connotation. As transpersonal psychology scholar Marcie Boucouvalas (1997) points out, the literature shows "males prefer use of the term 'hunch' or 'gut feeling' and often refrain quite strongly from using the term 'intuition'" (p. 8). While more recently, research has elevated the value and possible role of "trusting your gut" in business, strong disagreement remains as to if, when, and how to apply gut feeling to strategic and high-pressure decisions (McKinsey & Company, 2010, online). For executive women, *Tap into Your Inner Network* may not be a comfortable practice, and as such, they may be inclined to proceed with caution. My research encourages executive women to embrace their inner voices and leverage them to as a benefit and advantage in creating a good life without a viable script.

It is also important to note that the literature generally treats intuition as something that happens in the mind, and as the literature review demonstrated, mind-based activity comes out of a bounded, individualistic self. Hearing other voices in the head—imagined or otherwise—is often associated with having some type of psychiatric disorder (Fernyhough, 2013, online). In clinical psychology and some related fields, accessing the multi-voiced self is becoming more acceptable (Hermans, 1996, p. 31). A psychology theory that is slowly being introduced to leadership development and executive coaching is the dialogical self theory. This theory reflects a constructivist paradigm; it takes a relational stance and considers inner conversations as a way for psychological processing and meaning making to occur within the individual mind. Hubert Hermans (2001) describes, "the dialogical self is based on the assumption that there are many I-positions that can be occupied by the same person." (p. 249), where the I-positions reflect the "society of the mind" (van Loon, 2017, p. 37). Dialogical self, however, differs from *Tap into Your Inner Network* in a significant way: the node of relations. Both dialogical self and *Tap into Your Inner Network* share the view that one's self is a dynamic, temporal, multi-voiced, co-created construction (van Loon, 2017, p. 14-15, 24). They also both view inner dialogue as a process by which the self "attempts to establish coherent

connections among life events" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 19, citing Cohler, 1979 and Kohli, 1981; Hermans, 1996, p. 37). These two approaches differ, though, at the node where these coherent connections are made; for dialogical self, the node of coherent connections occur in the individual mind whereas *Tap into Your Inner Network* is based on the social construction idea that the node of coherent connections occur via collaborative action with others. For executive women, it is important to treat *Tap into Your Inner Network* practice as a relational one, where the burden of knowing doesn't rely on "you" but rather, has leverages vast inner relations. In a relationally demanding world with little helpful guidance, executive women may find this perspective a source of validation for the value and role "knowing" can provide.

 Tap into Your Inner Network is a meaningful relational practice for executive women in a world of social saturation. It has provided me with relational resources to help navigate social saturation. It has led me to see myself as being undivided and whole, accepting the invitation to incoherence and recognizing the interdependence of multiplicity across my performances. As I concluded in Creative Outsider, "My whole self is the unique concoction…with all its contradictions and inconsistencies…The good life isn't about finding congruency or integrating or making things balance. The good life is about living in the *whole-ness* of differences".

Summary of Learning

 In contemplating how one creates a good life, this research resulted in two key outcomes for executive women's consideration: A new story about a good life that is thriving in a world of social saturation and eight relational practices to help in doing so. First, the research revealed a new story, that my good life is being created through *relational performances thriving in a world of social saturation*. In this new story, my self is made up of the ever-changing, relational performances as I engage in with others, and with that, the good life is being created as I go along with them in conversation and action. A summary of the key points are shown in Figure 6.1 on the next page.

For executive women, this conceptualization of themselves and the good life may be more useful when living and working in a world of social saturation. This story offers that executive women are in motion, creating a good life through their rich, saturated, relational lives. The good life isn't a distant goal that must be strived for; it's in ongoing co-creation now. Executive women may find a useful way to go forward is letting go of living life as an independent, self-determinate individual. In addition, this new story invites executive women to consider the stance by which they encounter and navigate social saturation. Executive women may consider that their role isn't to contain social saturation, but to allow it to be, enabling them to thrive in their lives. More life-giving potential for the self and a good life becomes possible through this new story.

Figure 6.1 **Summary: A new "good life" story for executive women**

Relational Performances Thriving in a World of Social Saturation

From Individual Achievements to **Relational Performances**

- My "self" can be seen as a being, co-created through my ongoing, relational performances
- The good life happens through ongoing, conversation and collaborative actions. What I am doing now makes my life meaningful

From Being an Embattled Self to **Thriving in a World of Social Saturation**

- A good life is to be created within the context of a world of social saturation
- Thriving means being immersed openly in the rich, relational life of social saturation

Second, the research identified eight relational practices—the things one does with others—that foster the ongoing co-creation of a good life. Executive women can find guidance on how to co-produce and co-perform the good life through these relational practices uncovered in the research *1.) Emphasize Relational Resonance, 2.) Generate Prosocial Surroundings, 3.) Bring Family Out of the Shadows, 4.) Negotiate Velvet Ropes, 5.) Speak Truth to Power, 6.) Use Tools for Co-Planning, 7.) Co-Create Relational Rituals,* and *8.) Tap into Your Inner Network.* A summary tip sheet for executive women is provided in Figure 6.2 on the next page.

Figure 6.2: **Summary: Good Life Tips for Executive Women**

Relational Practice	Definition	Tips
Emphasize Relational Resonance	*Consciously and deliberating identifying which relations create a sense of wholeness and meaning, and then cultivating the resonance in these relations*	• Find people who resonate with you • Narrow the number of relations that you engage in • Nurture your choices, giving only what's necessary • Recognize that multiple priority relations can co-exist • Know that relations can change over time • Ask how your relations can be resources for each other
Generate Prosocial Surroundings	*Leveraging the various environmental components of relational performances in a way that fosters a mutually beneficial collaborative exchange*	• Be aware of what you are trying to do together • Find the optimal setting or make adjustments that foster collaborative action • Wear what works • Bring supporting objects • Amplify the scene with small details • Be deliberate—do only what is necessary
Bring Family Out of the Shadows	*Privileging family in work conversations and actions, and integrating family and work domains when navigating social saturation*	• Treat the spouse and kids as important as the boss • Shift conversation and action to equalize family in a work context • Include family in work planning decisions • Consider the "devoted worker" as an artificial concept created for the benefit of the employer • Determine to what extent the devoted worker concept is useful as you create your good life
Negotiate Velvet Ropes	*Agreeing temporary, visible rules and boundaries when in exchange with others*	• Be clear in the boundary or action needed • Collaborate with others to identify and create useful rules and actions • Use visual signals or cues when possible • Build in flexibility or shared understanding of exceptions as needed over time • Cut to the chase in your language, avoiding inefficient apology or explanation • Be aware of unintended signals you might be sending
Speak Truth to Power	*Reframing or introducing unexpected or unconventional information openly into conversations, so that the direction of the relational exchange can be altered*	• Become more attuned to gender and ideal worker assumptions and norms that are less useful • Examine your own potential co-conspirator behaviors • Use questions and offer alternatives to help engage and redirect others • Start small • Expect discomfort and be brave
Use Tools for Co-Planning	*Using physical objects in a visible, deliberate, and consistent way in conjunction with other people to help manage, transport, and exchange information*	• Identify tools already in use, and expand their functionality to include others in planning and action • Consider time management as a coordinated, relational activity; Get others involved • Ensure selected tools are visible, easily accessible, and actually used by others • Incorporate the selected tools in conversations • Use each tool consistently and in a reliable way • Be sure the tools integrate work, family, and other personal needs
Co-Create Relational Rituals	*Noticing and creating everyday patterns of exchanges between others*	• Emphasize small or mundane moments over big events • Notice when rituals happen, as well as where there are opportunities to co-create new ones • Cherish the rhythm to the ritual, whether it be scheduled or unplanned • Listen for life's sweet invitations • Be aware of the intention behind the ritual to co-create meaning about what matters
Tap into Your Inner Network	*Getting to know, trust, and rely upon the range of relations present in inner life, with no requirement for consistency or coherence.*	• Take stock of the many voices in your rich, relational inner life across performances • Prioritize the voices that are most helpful and life-giving • Set aside less useful, dissonant voices, but be open to bringing them back when needed • Celebrate inconsistency and incongruence within your sense of self and across your collaborative actions

Performing the good life in a world of social saturation sees executive women moving from the pressures of consistency to welcomed incoherence; from fragmentation to interdependence; from compartmentalization to fluidity; from firm and fixed to perpetual motion; from achievement and acquisition to learning and evolution. The new story for a good life and the eight relational practices differ from and at times, even contradict, much of the existing literature. For executive women, these practices may offer relevant and helpful alternatives to the less useful direction currently out there as presented in the literature review. These findings also made me wonder if using these practices could create a new, relational power for women. Rather than women wasting their time on outdated and unhelpful messages, could these findings offer executive women new knowledge, inspiration, courage, and practical support that allow them to thrive in social saturation…perhaps even better than anyone else?

Implications for Future Research and Practice

In his book, *The Foundations of Social Research*, Michael Crotty (1998) describes the researcher's desire for her conclusions to "stand up" (p. 13). He laments that this soundness is typically absent in the pursuit of human knowledge, instead offering that, "At best, our outcomes will be suggestive rather than conclusive. They will be plausible, perhaps even convincing, ways of seeing things—and, to be sure, helpful ways of seeing things—but certainly not any 'one true way' of seeing things" (Crotty, 1998, p. 13). I agree. This dissertation examines a white, American executive woman and her relational network's way of seeing things. This limitation calls for additional research to find out how my findings might translate and be used by other women with different life experiences and communities. It also calls for the exploration of other practices that might be out there to enable people to create a good life in a world of social saturation. Furthermore, given the significant role my culture played in this research, it would be important look across cultures in order to determine how different cultural norms interact with social saturation and the creation of a good life. For sure, additional research

with increasing numbers of women is needed to include more voices of executive and non-executive women. Finally, as men, too, share in social saturation and are part of women's relational networks, including their experiences may uncover additional stories and practices; their participation in research might even help make gender role differences a little less different. This dissertation serves as a starting place for the question: How do people experience and perform well in a world of social saturation? In addition to the need for further research on my research topic, my findings also invite a number of new directions for scholars and practitioners to consider for both theory and praxis. This section first discusses the implications to theory, followed by a discussion on the implications to praxis.

Implications to Theory

Research is intended to address a "real life issue…a problem to be solved, a question that needs to be answered" (Crotty, 1998, p. 13). The findings in my dissertation suggest three ways research could be approached differently when developing theory. First, my research suggests that scholars evolve the paradigms executive women use, particularly in the business and sociology arenas, in order for their research to be relevant to people with multiple roles living and working in a world of social saturation. Second, my research points out that more study is needed around multiplicity and social saturation. Third, the benefits from applying social construction principles in this dissertation invite scholars to use inclusive methods that involve the subjects and their relational networks as active participants.

1.) Upgrade business and management theory for a postmodern world

In terms of business and management theory—the basis for popular press that executives rely upon—a world of social saturation calls for a re-evaluation of classic management theory, especially regarding strategy, organizational behavior, and leadership. As shown in the Debut, strategy is a flashpoint for executives, where social saturation creates volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity when making strategic plans and decisions. A recent study showed that most senior

executives are concerned about their ability to cope under these new circumstances (Adjei, 2017, online). Moving from a mechanistic paradigm toward a relational paradigm that accommodates a world of social saturation may identify new, more useful strategic frameworks and theories. Futurist Bob Johansen recently identified ten skills for executives in dealing with demands of today's world, including areas such as tapping into one's maker instinct, dilemma flipping, immersive learning, and bio-empathy (2012, p. 3). While a noble start, unfortunately, with one exception (smart-mob organizing), his proposal remains in the domain of the individual rather in relations with others. It would be fascinating to see what a social construction approach to business strategy study would create, in moving from a stance of objectivity to the relative, as well as taking a relational point of view.

My findings suggest that in terms of organizational behavior— topics such as work identity, employee performance management, and turnover, job satisfaction, and employee engagement—could also be addressed more by using social construction as a means to create relevant theories that support company and employee joint success. There is some emerging research using a postmodern paradigm already underway, as described in the literature review, such as Wrzesniewski and Dutton's notion of job crafting (2001, p. 179), Litano and Major's whole life approach to career management (in press), and Baruch and Cohen's alternatives for organizational identity (2007, p. 241). With the rise of the gig economy and as more employees begin to reject the ideal worker persona as being seen now with millennials (Ehrenfreund, 2016, online), organizations will need to find ways to co-create new relationships with their workers to ensure their mutual success. To help address this need, this dissertation calls for an accelerated use of social construction assumptions when studying organizational behavior topics.

Finally, in terms of leadership, my research implies further study to see how conventional leadership theory might shift to a fluid, collaborative concept fit for today's challenges. Leadership theory has begun to embrace social construction ideas, including concepts such as relational leadership and improvisation. There are also some novel theories around appreciative leadership (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, &

Rader, 2010), affiliate leadership (Gagnon, Vough, & Nickerson, 2012), and leadership as a process of influence (Raelin, 2011). I assert that more business and management scholars consider exploring the value in upgrading their stance to the postmodern in order to generate new theories designed to help executive women and men navigate through the challenges of working in a world of social saturation.

2.) *Increase the study of multiplicity and social saturation*

In addition to evolving business management paradigms, the findings from my dissertation invite sociology scholars to prioritize multiplicity and social saturation as research topics. There is a dearth of research on this topic and instead, outdated cultural beliefs—rather than hard evidence—tend to permeate the paradigms executive women use. For example, as described in the literature review, Barnett and Hyde (2001) found that holding multiple roles is presumed to be bad or harmful, despite existing studies showing the opposite (p. 785). Similarly, being able to do both work and family well is presumed to be negatively correlated, again despite contradictory evidence (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 786). Much more research on multiplicity as well as the experience of social saturation is needed in order to generate mainstream theories that can help people be effective in navigating life today. In addition, my research highlights that more study is needed regarding how executive women can be effective and thrive in social saturation. As shown in the literature review, the current messages to executive women leave them with an unappealing quandary in creating a good life: suck it up or opt out. Furthermore, the literature also showed that because of the gaps in research, current American public and workforce policy is out of step with social reality. To be sure, this dissertation calls for more study around the experiences, issues, and support needed for executive women and their families living a world of social saturation.

3.) *Involve subjects and their relational networks as co-researchers*

The impact of using a relational methodology in my research indicates that future theory development could benefit from incorporating subjects as active participants in research. My hope is that the success in

using of a subject-inclusive method in this dissertation encourages scholars to consider doing the same in their own research. It is commonly understood that action or participatory research can be viable approaches to research. Moreover, as shown in the methodology section, social construction supports the elevation of subjects as co-researchers (Bodiford & Camargo-Borges, 2015, p. 6). My own experience demonstrated the benefit of subject participation as well as involving co-researchers; as shown in the Reflection, these techniques resulted in a richer data set. Most significant, my observations when doing the literature review found that the research available on executive women— albeit limited—was being done by people with no direct executive or business experience. I argue that the voices of executive women and their real world experiences need to be brought more fully into the fore of research.

Lastly, given executive women's heavy relational life, my research recommends that scholars include executive women's relational networks, systems, and processes in their study designs. In my research, involving my community as co-researchers—including my spouse, children, parents, and colleagues—provided new voices and perspectives that strengthened the quality and value in the data. Most significant, as social construction research aims to be useful and generative, participating in research holds future-forming potential. As I described in Reflection, I found being involved in this research became a performance that accelerated good life actions; leaving my job of 20+ years and starting my own consulting business. While this desire had been brewing in me prior to embarking on research, the collaborative actions through my co-researchers and my learning seemed to make this desire real more quickly than I originally anticipated. I experienced what McNamee (2010) writes, "As we engage with each other in inquiry, we not only create a sense of who we are but also a sense of what is valued. We create—we perform together—a world, a lived reality" (p. 15). Involving subjects as well as their relational networks can lead to more useful and relevant research when developing theory for a world of social saturation, and create future-forming, collaborative action among the participants themselves.

Implications to Praxis

  The dissertation outcomes imply a change in theory; they also imply a change in praxis. The findings suggest a number of practical areas that could be different in executive women's lives: how they work, how they lead, and how they engage others for resources and support. This research calls for a normalization of flexible work, a reshaping of contemporary leadership development efforts, and a shift away from self-help to relational engagement as a means of personal betterment. To thrive in a world of social saturation, alternative discourses are needed across organizational and personal life.

<u>*1.) Normalize the Notion of Flexible Work*</u>

  My findings signal one area for major reform, that is, the use of flexible work programs offered by organizations. As described in the literature review, the limited research on flexible work programs have shown them to be ineffective in allowing executive women to navigate their multiple roles across work and family. Despite their good intent, these programs run counter to the devoted worker persona, stigmatizing those who utilize them. My research recommends that rather than increase or alter flexible work programs, these programs go away completely. Instead, organizations should take steps across their strategy, structure, people and rewards processes to normalize flexible work as simply the way work gets done. My research argues that organizations don't need to fix flexible work programs; they need to fix the devoted worker ideal that does not seem fit for today's world of social saturation. This approach would require widespread change in organizational practice, ranging from office and work hours, to compensation and performance management, to communication systems, to decision-making and operations. It involves an overhaul of American organizational culture, including with the conversations employees and their leaders have with each other. As Whitney (1998) describes, "[o]rganizations are social constructions—repetitive patterns of communication and story telling" (p. 315) and to change this institution means changing "the nature and quality of participation and interaction

among the many organization stakeholders. It is to change who talks to whom" (p. 314).

As a starting point, experimenting with the use of some relational practices identified in my research, such as *Bring Family Out of the Shadows, Speak Truth to Power, and Negotiate Velvet Ropes,* may help shift some of this conversation going on in organizations. In addition, the use of appreciative inquiry has been shown to be effective in generating new participatory action that creates more life-affirming organizations (Whitney, 2008) and may help generate new pathways going forward. Moreover, the standard bearers of institutional power—organizational policy, strategy and leadership—must be also be included in collaborative action as partners in change. There are a number of companies that are experimenting with different approaches like these to work. For one, the global tax company, Ryan LLC, implemented full-flexibility as standard practice in 2008, and have realized significant improvement in turnover and productivity. They function as a results-only workplace and employees select work hours. Non-exempt staff can select from bank of 30 hours to work each week, and salaried staff can work when and where they prefer (Dixon, 2016, online). There is also an opportunity for editors in mainstream media to play a role in taking on the devoted worker ideal via the type of stories it covers and the messages it sends. As shown in the literature review, the media's idealization of the stay-at-home mom has "promulgated a new feminine mystique" (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008, p. 512) versus tackling core issues facing women working in social saturation. Emerging, influential popular press is encouraging, such as Tim Ferriss' *4-Hour Workweek* (2007), Bridget Schulte's *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time* (2014), and Arianna Huffington's *Thrive* (2014). But, much more is needed. Altering America's deeply entrenched value on the devoted worker appears essential for executive women to be able to thrive in social saturation.

2.) Reshape Leadership Development

My findings also imply a change in how leadership is developed from the vantage point of the organization as well as the executive

woman. As previously mentioned in "Implications to Theory", my research suggests an upgrade to the concept of contemporary leadership, where the notion of leadership shifts toward a fluid, collaborative concept suited for a world of social saturation and a postmodern sensibility. As organizations consider the type of skills they are building among their leadership, their training and support efforts need factor in the impact of social saturation on how executive women are able to be business strategists, able to navigate employee engagement, and their own demands living in multiplicity—in effect treating executives as whole people. A recent white paper from the influential Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) aligns with much of this view, recommending important shifts in leadership development, including a preference for two-way, network-centric, participatory, and collaborative leadership styles (Petrie, 2014, p. 12-13). The CCL sees leaders as needing to be interdependent collaborators and critique how most contemporary leadership programs have become too "individually focused and elitist" (Petrie, 2014, p. 6). Instead, they take a more relational stance, where leadership is viewed as "a collective process that is spread throughout networks of people" (Petrie, 2014, p. 6).

What's missing from the CCL's recommendation is recognition of the multiple roles executive women hold, and how these varied roles become enmeshed in work life. The CCL compartmentalizes leadership within the domain of business strategy and engaging employees, ignoring the very real entanglement other domains have with leadership effectiveness and work satisfaction. Leadership training and development programs would benefit from exploring how a whole person perspective could be incorporated, in order to support leadership in a world of social saturation. Leaders need to learn that social saturation is normal part of contemporary life and they need to be trained in how to manage and thrive in a relationally demanding world.

In addition, my research introduces a dilemma in considering the use of dedicated women's leadership development and mentoring programs in organizations as a means to elevate women's presence and performance in senior leadership. On one hand, as a former participant across my career in programs like these, designed to accelerate

performance as a female leader, I appreciated the ability to address the unique issues female leaders face and to have access to specialized skill-building resources. These programs helped strengthen my network among other executive women, and I cherished the support I experienced from the community. Some of these women remain my dearest colleagues and friends today. On the other hand, segregating this development as *women's* leadership—identifying female leadership as a subset of the norm—seemed to only reinforce my sense of otherness in the broader, male-dominated business community. Being part of a dedicated women's leadership program and being involved in formal women mentorships didn't help me fit in better. My challenges juggling home and work were a frequent topic in my conversations with female mentors, but were absent in any conversations with male mentors. These contradictions made me feel like I was toggling between playing two opposing characters in my work performance. It reminded me that being different is seen as being lesser. Moreover, events associated with the women's leadership program, such as the company's annual women's leadership conference, held a stigma in the organization: If you had time to go to this day-long conference, you probably weren't really dedicated to your work or had a truly important job in the first place. Sure, senior (male) leaders made guest appearances at these events, but my close colleagues and I rarely attended them, as we felt we needed to show that we had far more important, urgent work to do. Being part of a separate women's leadership community, it seemed that the more we talked amongst ourselves, the less we were introducing these critical topics in our conversations with men.

As I reflected on my research as well as my colleagues and my own experiences, and considered the parallels with what the literature showed regarding flexible work programs, it made me question the usefulness of organizational leadership programs dedicated to women. In the book, *The Heroine's Journey: Women's Quest for Wholeness*, Maureen Murdock challenges women to go beyond duality, writing that "We live in a dualistic culture which values, creates, and sustains polarities—as an either/or stratified mentality that identifies and locates ideas and people at opposite ends of a spectrum" (1990, p. 169). Murdock

continues, "In dualistic thinking, we treat each other as an object outside of ourselves, some thing to better, to control, to distrust, to dominate, or to own. Dualism breeds suspicion, confusion, misperception, contempt, a lack of trust" (1990, p. 169). Certainly, as practitioners, we face the challenge of how to transcend duality. We can't ignore women's differences, but how do we make the differences okay? How do executive women become the standard bearer of institutional normalcy? These are important, practical questions that require further exploration.

3.) Shift Away From "Self-Help" to Relational Engagement

Finally, this research invites executive women to shift away from self-help and toward relational engagement when pursuing personal development. The literature review revealed the importance American society places on the self-determinant individual, where self-improvement and self-actualization is a means to earning the good life. Indeed, a simple search on Amazon will result in countless self-help books at the ready to tackle any deficit in personality or performance. As discussed in "Have it all, Superwoman", these cultural messages push executive women to look inward, focusing on fixing themselves, as they perceive the burden of social saturation as something that rests solely on their shoulders. While women do rely on their community of sisterhood for support and encouragement (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 411), nonetheless, personal improvement is considered an individual pursuit.

The eight relational practices coming out of my research challenge this individualistic approach to betterment and instead, encourage executive women to view their relational life for collaborative action to create new local knowledge and a better good life reality. It has been shown that relationally based approaches, such as appreciative inquiry, have been promising in bringing about change (Rogers & Fraser, 2003, p. 79-80; Grant & Humphries, 2006, p. 401), whether that be related in work teams, families, or communities. My research calls for an elevation of relationally based practices, with executive women becoming more aware and more skilled in applying these practices to bring about the outcomes they want to see in their own lives. Executive women like me are already doing so much; in referencing titles of recent

books for women, we *are* being bossy pants, we *are* leaning in, we *are* being okay with dropping the ball—but we also need to realize, it's just not on us to thrive. Through conversations and collaborative action, we can be co-creating solutions in conjunction with our relational communities to make life better in a world of social saturation.

Summary of Implications to Theory and Praxis

The findings from the autoethnography research hold a number of implications across theory and praxis, as presented in Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.3: **Summary: Implications to Theory and Praxis**
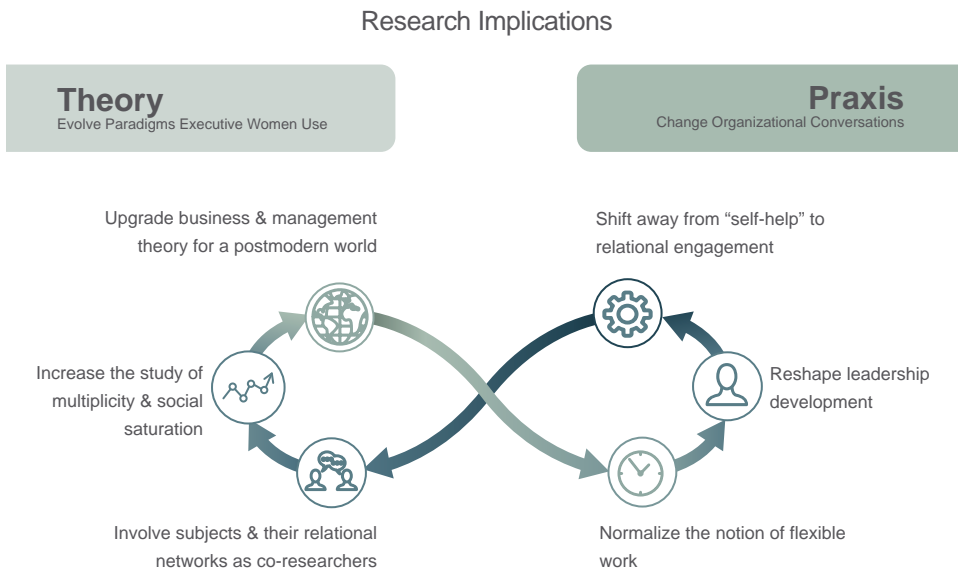
My research asks scholars to evolve the paradigms executive women use in moving through their lives, ranging from business management theory to sociology. Scholars are also encouraged to include both the subjects and their relations to become active study participants in creating the future through research. My research also suggests to practitioners in organizational and leadership development that changes

to flexible work and leadership programs are warranted in order to help executive women thrive in a world of social saturation. Finally, my findings encourage executive women to engage in relationally based approaches as part of their own personal growth and development, where collaborative action creates a new, more life giving reality.

Final Thoughts

I began writing this chapter in the last weeks of the 2016 US election season. I had followed Hillary Clinton since her early days in politics. While in college, I recall her emergence on the national stage as a potential first lady in her husband's Presidential campaign. Many late night discussions among my female friends—aspiring career women like me—revolved around our deep connection to her, someone who was breaking the mold of a contemporary woman, someone who boldly asserts she isn't interested in "baking cookies", someone who wants to work along side her husband as his equal, taking on central challenges of the times. She entered the White House the year I started my first full-time "real" job, and my friends and I often looked to her as a role model for how to create a good life as an executive woman. In the years that ensued, we were inspired by her confidence and her desire for a significant and meaningful design for her life. We watched as she put up with critics who didn't see the value of an active First Lady, preferring she be more demure. We related to the ongoing commentary about her wardrobe and her demeanor rather than her smarts or effectiveness, as it seemed to reflect some of the conflicting feedback we were receiving as part of our indoctrination in corporate life. We saw how she balanced motherhood with the demands of a global, public life, and how she made the personal choice to stay in a marriage with a philandering husband. As she began to pursue her own ambitions as a Senator and later, President, we chalked up the public perceptions of her as being "untrustworthy" to what Ken Gergen calls a partial performance (2011, p. 203, 205)—the societal consequences of not performing as expected in one's role—in this case, the performance being her gender. We related to the double standards applied to her, as we often experienced them in our own lives.

Encouragingly, the events and public discourse during the few months prior to the election hinted that Americans might be at a tipping point for how gender and work intersect. Clinton's male rivals—both in the primary and the national election—were taken to task for how they interrupted and talked over her while she was speaking. Offensive "hot mic" conversations from the Republican candidate unleashed a wave of women speaking up about groping, innuendo, and outright sexual assault that occurred on the job. Fox News chief Roger Ailes—someone seemingly untouchable in the media world—was dismissed from his job for years of sexual harassment. Federal Judge Aaron Perskey received the ire of women and men around the country for his lenient sentence given to a star Stanford swimmer convicted of raping a fellow student. Going into election night, it seemed, her likely win would be that final crack in the glass ceiling. Her win would be the denouement. Accompanying it, I had been crafting the dissertation conclusion seeing parallels with the research and my own journey.

Surprising to nearly everyone, there was a setback. Like many women around the country, we were jarred in seeing her lose. But what's more difficult to fathom is that she didn't lose on merit or preparedness. She lost to a man with no relevant experience, a man who arrogantly dismisses the expertise of others without possessing the knowledge himself, a man who is neither versed on the basics of geopolitics nor interested in its complexity and nuance, a man who consistently denigrates other races and religions, and a man who is unashamed in treating women as objects of his entitlement. While the causes and factors of her loss continues to be analyzed, I can't help but wonder: Why was he able to get a "free pass"? Does society really *not* want a woman in charge that badly? My hope is that this setback continues to agitate societal forces in a way that finally brings about change in the gender-work dynamic, some of which is already coming about in the #MeToo public outcry against sexual harassment at work.

As an executive woman, while sad and disappointed, Clinton's loss does not dissuade my ambitions for a good life. I have exciting work projects that will continue to build my own consulting practice, expanding my network and impact. I have a vision for how my Ph.D.

research can be used to help others, even more emboldened by the recent turn of political events. I love my husband and have plans for a long life together. I thoroughly enjoy being in the midst of raising my kids. I will continue to thrive in those little, good life "relational rituals", always seeking relational resonance with velvet ropes in hand to navigate social saturation. For sure, participating in this research as a subject has offered me a new awareness and assuredness that is life giving and whole.

Mary Gergen (2001) suggests that with a social construction paradigm, "the postmodern admonition to avoid closure is honored…Nothing is meant to serve as 'the last word'. One of the advantages of this approach is that it invites others to develop similar ideas in an entirely different manner" (p. 5). Likewise, I offer no last word. I continue…performing with others the good life.

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American executive women today enjoy more choices than at any other time in history, yet as they live and work in a world of social saturation, societal norms and shortcomings create impossible expectations. Executive women are in need of a viable script for successfully navigating a relationally demanding world. Using autoethnography, this Ph.D. dissertation research addresses the significant question: **How can executive women create a good life in a world of social saturation?**

Benton's study surfaces a new, generative story about one's self as relational performances thriving in a world of social saturation, where the good life is embodied in action, or something we "do" in an ongoing way with others. She also identifies eight relational practices that hold potential to create a good life. This book adds a fresh perspective to the limited body of research on executive women and the contemporary context of social saturation. It also challenges conventions in company policies and practice, including leadership development and flexible work programs, as well as in executive women's own approach to growth and betterment.

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