Article

Authentic Talent Development in Women Leaders Who Opted Out: Discovering Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge through the Kaleidoscope Career Model

Jennifer Knowles [1,*] and Lisa Mainiero [2,*]

1   School of Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80521, USA
2   Charles F Dolan School of Business, Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT 06824, USA
*   Correspondence: jennifer.knowles@colostate.edu (J.K.); lmainiero@fairfield.edu (L.M.)

Abstract: We investigated the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge as viewed through the lens of the Kaleidoscope Career Model to discern the career motives of women who opted out and then returned to the workforce. We also were interested in comparing women and men in their leader practices. We triangulated quantitative and qualitative methods to explore these phenomena. First, in Study 1, 2009 individuals completed both the Kaleidoscope Career Self Inventory (the KCSI) as well as an abbreviated version of Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (the LPI). Participants rated their needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge on the KCSI as well as their leader practices of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, modeling the way, enabling others to act, and Encouraging the Heart. Women were found to exceed the leader practices of men, and women were most interested in authenticity. In Study 2, situational mapping and life history process was used to determine themes of eight high-achieving women who opted out. We interviewed an additional 15 women to deeply understand and assess their opt-out and re-entry experiences as well as "career shocks" they experienced upon returning to the workforce. Our second study offers a robust, deep, penetrating look into social ascription processes and endemic discriminatory social structures that hold women back from achieving advancement. To stop this "brain drain" of talent, we propose a series of actions for human resource professionals to develop the authentic leadership talent of women who reenter the workforce.

Keywords: authenticity; talent development; women leaders; social ascription processes; leadership; human resource development; balance; challenge; KCM; systemic discrimination

1. Introduction

Social ascription processes (Debebe 2017; Reskin 2012) differentially shape the internal and external conditions that influence the sorting of individuals into roles and occupations, leading to systemic racism and sexism that is perpetuated through endemic norms and behaviors. By reinforcing hierarchies based on race, gender, and other social identity groups, social ascription processes sustain power relations. This leads to a self-perpetuating cycle of endemic discrimination and micro-aggressions that lead women to leave the workforce as they believe opportunities for advancement are rare. Three categories of reasons have been posited for why there remains such a large gap in women's lack of advancement to the executive suite: (1) stereotypic thinking associated with the development of women's talents, career identities, goals, or ambition that uncover broader social ascriptions about women and men in the workplace (Heilman 2001; Heilman et al. 2004; Koenig et al. 2011), (2) social structures causing systemic discrimination that prevents the authentic talent development of women leaders (Clark and Reed 2007; Eagly and Carli 2007; Kirchmeyer 1998, 2002), and (3) the complexities of work–family balance issues (Hewlett and Luce 2005; Kossek et al. 2017). The combined efforts of these three categories create a series of "push" and "pull" factors that cause women to opt out of their careers (Stone 2007; Stone

and Hernandez 2012) such that the balance of power relations in organizations remains firmly in the hands of men.

In the first category, a persistent stereotypic "think manager, think male" attitude in succession planning decisions showcases an endemic social ascription process that results in confirming the balance of power between men and women in most firms (Heilman 2001; Koenig et al. 2011; Rudman and Phelan 2008; Powell and Butterfield 2003; Schein 1973, 2001; Tharenou 2001). For example, a survey of 200,000 managers by Bain and Co. discovered that 43 percent of women aspire to top management in the first two years compared with 34 percent of men in entry level positions; however, over time, women's aspiration levels drop more than 60 percent while men's aspirations remain the same (Artabane et al. 2017). Forty-two percent of women surveyed said that fulfilling work that was flexible was key to their future ambitions. As noted by Debebe (2017), social ascription processes create conditions for eroding self-efficacy by denying learners opportunities for learning and mastery of skills. While there may be stereotypical perceptions that women are less ambitious than men, in reality, women may either be more ambitious than perceived or beaten down by discriminatory social structures; such social ascription processes may be pervasive and life long, causing women to abandon their ambition.

Another area in which social ascription processes suggest a persistent trend against women concerns the tension in leadership styles between the communal qualities consistent with the gender stereotype of women versus the predominantly agentic qualities expected in leaders. Female leaders face a double bind such that women are expected to be communal because of the expectations inherent in the female gender role, and they are also expected to compromise their careers for their families (Eagly and Carli 2007; Eagly and Karau 2002). At the same time, to be successful leaders, women are expected to be agentic because of the expectations inherent in leadership roles (Eagly and Carli 2007; Ruderman and Ohlott 2002; Schein 1973, 2001) and to focus on career centrality to receive the full corporate blessing of leadership training and advancement. But as displays of confidence and assertion can appear incompatible with being communal and relational, women are sometimes seen as lacking the stereotypical directive and assertive qualities of good leaders (Eagly and Carli 2007; Heilman et al. 2004; Powell and Butterfield 2003; Rudman and Phelan 2008). Later field studies show no differences; a major meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (2003) found that while the differences in leadership styles between male and female leaders was small, women tended to exercise more transformational styles of leadership than male leaders and therefore might be seen as more effective in leadership roles. Therefore, social ascription processes arising from stereotypic thinking may cause women to be seen as less effective in leadership roles while they are actually just as effective, and perhaps more so, than men.

The second category of reasons for why there remains such a large gap in women's lack of advancement to the executive suite concern systemic discrimination against women. Women experience differential mentoring and training opportunities as opposed to men (Fagenson-Eland and Baugh 2001; Thompson and Lyness 1997). For example, a study by the Center for Work Family Policy showed 89 percent of women did not have a sponsor to move them forward in their careers, and 68 percent did not have a mentor (Hewlett and Luce 2005). A lack of experience and advice from higher ups leads to women often advancing in an isolated vacuum, with mere lip service paid to their development (Kossek et al. 2017; Ragins et al. 1998; Thompson and Lyness 1997; Lyness and Thompson 2000). Discrimination in pay and responsibility (Judiesch and Lyness 1999; Kirchmeyer 1998; Thompson and Lyness 1997; Schneer and Reitman 1995, 1997; Weyer 2007) has not diminished over decades, resulting in women's work perceived as less valued.

Other studies confirm persistent, systemic discrimination in firms that is life long, pervasive, and difficult to overcome. Employers may discriminate against women by restricting their advancement opportunities and limiting leadership development and mentoring assignments due to the assumption that women may not focus on their careers to the same continuous extent as men (Greenhaus et al. 2018; Kossek et al. 2017; Shapiro et al. 2008). Chan and Anteby (2016) completed a study that showed task segregation

was gender based and that women performed less valued tasks in their departments. Joshi (2014) showed that women's expertise was not recognized and was less likely to be perceived as valued than men. Only when more women were part of a team was their expertise recognized (Cohen and Broschak 2013). Ibarra (2003) demonstrated that women receive fewer returns from their networks and alliances, which proportionately included more women than men. Clark and Reed (2007), reporting for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, discovered that when women exit their place of work, this was often due to being dissatisfied as a result of working in a culture that focused on typical male traditions and culture. Social structures and persistent social ascriptions lead to systemic discrimination that creates conditions to erode self- efficacy by denying employees opportunities for mastery of skills (Debebe 2017). Taken together, these are subtle forms of systemic discrimination that leads to women's lack of advancement to the top of their firms, and their decision to opt out.

A third set of reasons concerns the demands of work–family roles, recently exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is well known that the bulk of household responsibilities and caregiving of children and elders falls more to women than men (Hochschild [1989] 2003; Kirchmeyer 2002; Osterman 1996; Ruderman and Ohlott 2002; Schneer and Reitman 1997; Thompson and Lyness 1997). For example, Stone (2007) examined the reasons why women opt out of the workforce and divided the reasons for opting out into "family pulls" and "workplace pushes". "Family pulls" were often due to family obligations and newborns. A husband's absence of helping with household responsibilities as well as taking care of the children were a reason why women referenced 60 percent of the time that they left the workplace (Stone 2007). Padavic et al. (2020) completed a recent study where they noted that family issues in firms are framed distinctly as a women's issue, but it is not. Certainly, men's family structure and ideology influence women's success at work (Carnaghan and Greenwood 2018; Desai et al. 2014), furthering the pervasive mentality that work–family issues are the domain of women.

Work–family issues also result in career pattern differences between women and men in terms of career centrality. We know that individuals who display high career centrality are often rewarded with leadership training and career advancement. Therefore, the stereotype of the successful career as continuous full time career engagement may pose a detriment to women trying to engage in dual career and family roles and responsibilities that benefit from career interruptions to serve family needs (Brett and Stroh 2003; Kirchmeyer 2002; McEldowney et al. 2009; Osterman 1996; Padavic et al. 2020; White 1995). Women's career patterns differ sharply from men's, involving patterns of discontinuous employment to manage family responsibilities (Kossek et al. 2017; Shapiro et al. 2008). Padavic et al. (2020) suggest there is a hegemonic narrative that maintains the power balance in favor of men's long hours regarding 24/7 work, causing women to utilize work–family balance issues as a social defense. Further, the central paradigm against a women's career is judged, using language such as "opting out" or "mommy track", assumes a deviation from an accepted norm (Shapiro et al. 2008) that may preclude leadership advancement to the executive levels. Employers may discriminate against women by restricting their advancement opportunities and providing limited leadership development and mentoring assignments due to the assumption that women may not focus on their careers to the same continuous extent as men (Greenhaus et al. 2018, p. 297).

Therefore, women are subject to social ascription processes that may arise from endemic, closeted or upfront discriminatory social structures in male dominated organizational cultures that may either preclude the advancement of the talents of women and/or lead to a loss of self-efficacy concerning career centrality for women who must handle multiple responsibilities at home and at work. This dual study has three purposes: (1) examine women as leaders, (2) discover why women opt out in the workplace and (3) understand their experiences upon re-entry into the workforce. We triangulate expressed needs for authenticity, balance versus challenge based on the Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005; Mainiero and Gibson 2017) that include why women opted

out, and what they need upon returning to the workforce, to ascertain how to develop the talent of mid-career women. We seek to discover whether there is a correlation with known effective leader practices as practiced by women and men in the workplace. Kouzes and Posner's (2002) leadership practices have been chosen as the focus of the current study as the model of exemplary leader practices does not focus on the standard agentic-communal dimension of leader behaviors, nor interpersonal or task-oriented leader behaviors. Instead, Kouzes and Posner's (2007, 2011) model deliberately focuses on behavioral actions taken in leadership roles—called "exemplary practices"—that result in high performing leadership behaviors. Mainiero and Sullivan's (2005, 2006) model has been chosen as a referent in this study to examine three underlying parameters—authenticity, balance, and challenge—to set forth a prescription for authentic talent development for women in the workplace.

2. The Kaleidoscope Career Model

The Kaleidoscope Career Model was developed by studying over 3000 U.S. professional workers in a total of five studies that consisted of three surveys, focus groups and interviews. The intent was to examine motives associated with career transitions (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005, 2006). Patterns in the careers of both men's and women's careers related to career transitions were studied. Mainiero and Sullivan related the career paths to a kaleidoscope. Like a kaleidoscope where the glass fragments change shapes and create new patterns, women shift their career patterns by rotating and reprioritizing different facets of their lives. The kaleidoscope acts as a metaphor for them to rearrange their career patterns, often due to family roles according to their temporal priorities (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005, p. 111). Women largely rejected the standard male career pattern of a standard twentieth century linear stage format (Levinson 1978; Super 1957) instead preferring to create their own discontinuous career choices and patterns respectful of their family priorities. Other researchers have seconded this theme (O'Neill et al. 2008; Padavic et al. 2020; Valcour et al. 2007). According to the Kaleidoscope Career Model (the KCM), three central parameters that frame the kaleidoscope of career decision-making during times of transition.

2.1. Authenticity

The individual seeks to develop congruence between values aligned with the individual's genuine self and the values of the employing organization or work context. Authenticity may be displayed in many forms, such as purposeful work, spirituality, choosing one's path regardless of political obstacles, crisis management, and/or pursuing a career associated with greater engagement and meaning.

2.2. Balance

The individual strives to reach equilibrium between work and non-work (e.g., family, friends, elderly relatives, and personal interests) demands. The need for balance generally is displayed by reducing work hours to reduce the stress associated with family demands; family demands may include caregiving of children, spouses, and/or eldercare responsibilities.

2.3. Challenge

The individual pursues stimulating work that allows for engagement, learning, and growth, as well as career advancement. Challenge is defined as the individual's need to discover stimulating work, learn new skills, develop expertise, sustain motivation, and increase engagement in the workplace.

In the visualization of the Kaleidoscope Career Model (the KCM), three parameters combine and shift throughout one's career and lifetime (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005, 2006; Sullivan et al. 2009), creating uniquely different career patterns for men and for women. While all three parameters remain active over the course of the career cycle, often one parameter rises into the ascendency at a time of career transition. Consider the shifting sands of a kaleidoscope; as one color predominates, the others recede into the

background, but then become elevated in the next turn of the dial. Some Kaleidoscopic career patterns are characterized by challenge in the forefront, while authenticity and balance are relegated to the background. Other Kaleidoscopic career patterns pivot on balance, such that challenge and authenticity remain a lesser focus, while still in the picture, just at lower levels of import. These parameters are measured by the Kaleidoscope Career Self-Inventory (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005; Sullivan et al. 2009).

3. Gender Based Alpha and Beta KCM Career Patterns

Early in the careers of both men and women, the KCM patterns are fairly typical. Both genders place an emphasis on challenge. However, in mid-career and late career, pattern differences between women and men become more apparent (Mainiero and Gibson 2017; Sullivan and Mainiero 2007a, 2007b). Early on, both men and women tend to focus on discovering stimulating work experiences, so challenge rises to the forefront as the strongest parameter while the other two parameters remain strong. Women prioritize balance more in mid-career due to demands of family, whereas the focus of men in mid-career is increased authenticity and greater challenge (Mainiero and Gibson 2017). These motives are countervailed by career plateaus or layoffs, necessitating a career change on the part of men as well as women. During the late career stage, women express needs for authenticity as balance recedes and challenge re-emerges as a priority. At this stage, men prioritize balance in their lives (Mainiero and Gibson 2017). The Alpha Kaleidoscope Career Pattern is the typical male pattern mentioned above, sustaining a trajectory of advancement. The pattern more often ascribed to females is the Beta Kaleidoscope Career pattern in which women are more likely than men to take a career interruption to opt out of their careers to stay home and raise their children. Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) make the point that opposite gender-defined patterns also exist; that some women follow an Alpha pattern while some men follow a Beta trajectory; however, in their studies, more women than men followed a Beta KCM pattern while more men than women identified with an Alpha KCM career pattern in their 2006 research studies at that time.

Other researchers have also written on this theme of gender-based career centrality. Schwartz (1989) wrote a controversial article about two career paths for women, those who prioritize family over career can be described as "work and family" or family driven careerists who would not receive the same leadership training or advancement of those deemed "career centric". Hewlett et al. (2010) suggested that many high achieving women sacrificed their ability to have children in order to meet the demands required of them to advance in their careers. In fact, in White's (1995) study of 48 high achieving women who had a high career centrality, women either accommodated their family responsibilities to their work lives or remained childless in order to succeed. There may be a prejudice against those who can lead and manage projects on a discontinuous basis as members of a contingent workforce representative of twenty-first century employment (Boyce et al. 2007). Firms may stigmatize these employees and withhold leadership training from such workers, who (more often than not) are women working in project-based responsibilities or part of a contingent based workforce.

Understanding the relationship between leader practices, gender, and career patterns may be fruitful in disentangling some of these issues. Shapiro et al. (2008) challenged the relevance of linear careers that suggest a psychological contract that exchanged lifelong employment for a work primary commitment. Instead, they view women as being at the leading edge of career self-agency while facing a double bind exacerbated by persistent socialized gender schemas that may affect promotion and advancement. Exploring gender-based differences in leader practices combined with an understanding of career patterns and motivations might serve as a partial means by which to address some of these questions.

4. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

The study of leadership is vast, immense, and articulated from many perspectives, as ample research exists on the topic. Kouzes and Posner's (2011) five exemplary leadership practices model, as detailed in *The Leadership Challenge*, representing three decades of research on leadership, was chosen to frame this study. The five leadership practices reflect behaviors rather than styles or orientations associated with leadership (Kouzes and Posner 2007, 2011). When operating at their best, leaders:

4.1. Model the Way

Leaders model the way by being clear about guiding principles and clarifying values. They help to generate agreement around common principles and ideals and earn respect through direct involvement and action. Behaviors associated with this leader practice include setting a personal example of expectations, communicating agreed-upon principles and standards, building consensus, and following through on commitments.

4.2. Inspire a Shared Vision

Leaders focus on a collaborative consensual vision to motivate others. Once they create the vision, they enlist others to share in and implement the vision. Behaviors associated with this leader practice include futuristic thinking, communicating a vision for the future, showing enthusiasm and positivity, and speaking with conviction.

4.3. Challenge the Process

Leaders search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve. They experiment and take risks to challenge existing processes. Behaviors associated with this leader practice include: Finding opportunities for change and transformation, experimenting and taking risks, accepting failure as a learning experience, setting goals, and taking the initiative.

4.4. Enable Others to Act

Leaders foster collaboration, build trust, and make it possible for others to be productive. Empowering others is a key value. Behaviors associated with this leader practice include: Fostering cooperative relationships, supporting the decisions that others make, empowering others to work on projects, and fostering teamwork.

4.5. Encourage the Heart

Leaders recognize contributions of others and create a culture of celebrating values and victories. They demonstrate genuine acts of caring and encourage constituents to act upon what is in their hearts. Behaviors associated with this leader practice include praising and recognizing the efforts of others, motivating others by celebrating accomplishments, and expressing appreciation for the contributions of others.

5. Gender and Leadership Practices

Kouzes and Posner (2002) completed extensive psychometric analyses on their Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and found only slight differences based on gender. This scale consists of a 30-item assessment that provides a way for individual leaders to measure the frequency of their own leadership behavior (Kouzes and Posner 2002). In their early research, the authors indicated there were no significant gender differences in modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, and enabling others to act. However, female managers engaged in the leadership practice of encourage the heart significantly more often than males and also to some degree, modeling the way (Kouzes and Posner 2002, p. 10). Other researchers have also studied gender and the five leadership practices (Carless 1998; Clisbee 2004; Gallagher et al. 2014). In a gender-based study on the leadership styles of school district superintendents, while there were no statistically significant differences, the mean scores of females were higher than males (Clisbee 2004). Among student populations, the Kouzes and Posner model has been extensively studied,

yielding results that did not vary by gender across all five of the leader practices (Posner 2004) although women tend to be rated more highly on the practices and rated their sorority sister leaders as more effective (Adams and Keim 2000; Gallagher et al. 2014).

5.1. Research Questions

Utilizing Kouzes and Posner's (2011) five practices of exemplary leadership alongside the three parameters of the Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005) as the theoretical foundation of this exploratory research, we propose the following research question that may elucidate prescriptions for women's leadership and future authentic talent development in the workplace:

Research Question #1: How do the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge correlate with Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership?

We sought answers to these questions: Do women utilize the five exemplary leadership practices as much as men? If so, why do women opt out of their careers once they have become seasoned, high achieving business professionals? When women re-enter the workforce, what do they need to develop their authentic talents given that their lives have changed? We utilize both a statistical assessment of leader practices as well as the KCM parameters concerning motives in career during a time of transition motives combined with a qualitative approach to understanding the underlying reasons why women opt out and then re-enter the workforce. We are interested in "getting to the bottom" of what women are thinking as we learn deeply about opt out and re-entry experiences. Once we understand this process, we hope this triangulated method will shine a light on possibilities for authentic talent development. Therefore, research question #2 reads:

Research Question #2: Can practices for authentic talent development be discerned from the parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge for women who have opted out but wish to return to the workforce as leaders?

5.2. Sub-Questions Concerning the Opting Out and Opting in Processes Included

Theme #1: What were the experiences of professional women that led them to opt out of the workforce?

Theme #2: What are the experiences of professional women while they were opted out?

Theme #3: What are the experiences of highly successful career women when they return to the workplace after opting out?

Theme #4: How do the Kaleidoscope Career Model parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge factor into their experiences of career re-entry?

We felt that answers to these questions could only be achieved through qualitative methods. Therefore, we used a life history approach combined with Clarke's (2005) situational mapping analysis to better understand the phenomenon of opting out and re-entry.

6. Method

Two studies, one quantitative, the other qualitative, frame this research investigation. Study 1 addresses statistical assessments of the Kaleidoscope Career Model and its parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge for men and for women. It also includes an abbreviated scale taken from the original LPI associated with Kouzes and Posner's (2011) assessment of leader practices alongside other leadership items to determine gender-based differences in leader practices. Study 2 is a qualitative approach to understanding why formerly high achieving women opt out and their re-entry experiences associated with the KCM and the three parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge. High achieving women were defined as "women who are highly educated, previously worked as professionals or managers, and are able to be financially supported at home" (Stone 2007). We hope that a triangulation of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, will elucidate themes for the authentic leadership talent development of women.

6.1. Study 1 Research Sample and Survey Administration

The data for this study were obtained through an online internet survey posted on a market research firm's website, Greenfield Online, in 2014. Respondents had a diverse array of backgrounds and self-selected into participation. Over 2000 individuals (2009) completed the survey over four weeks of administration during 2014. There were slightly more female respondents (52%) than men (48%), the majority of respondents were Caucasian, most had at least some college, and they worked in a wide variety of industries, including manufacturing (14%), financial services (12%), retail (10%), education (9%), healthcare (8%), and a variety of other industries. Only 52% of respondents were currently employed, while the remainder were unemployed or between jobs. The data from all 2009 respondents were included; however, since the survey directions gave specific details on how to respond if respondents were not currently in a formal leadership role office setting, so as to reflect on a past leadership experience while employed. Twenty-two percent of respondents were in early career (within the first 10 years of working life), 13% of respondents were in early to mid-career stage (having worked at least 10–15 years), 21% were in midcareer (having worked at least 15–25 years), 19% were in late midcareer (having worked 25 plus years), and 25% were in their late career (within 5 years of the projected retirement date). Almost 40% had completed a 4-year college degree or participated in advanced graduate studies. Fifty-two percent identified as women; 48% identified as male. There was unfortunately no category to represent intersectionality in this survey. Forty-seven percent of respondents were married, 25% were single, 20% were separated/divorced/widowed, and 8% were living with a partner. Fifty-eight percent of respondents had children, with 86% of them have one or two children. The average age was 47, with the youngest respondent being 18 and the oldest was 85. Table 1 indicates the demographics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants.

Characteristics	% of Sample	Characteristics	% of Sample
Female	52%	Industry	
Male	48%	Manufacturing	14%
Caucasian	84%	Financial services	12%
Black	9%	Retail	10%
Asian	3%	Education	9%
Native American	1%	Health care	8%
Other	3%	Government	6%
	3%	Hospitality & food services	5%
<High school diploma	3%	Transportation	4%
High school diploma	19%		
Some college	29%	Communication	3%
2 year degree	14%	Other	28%
4 year degree	20%	Has children	58%
Some post graduate education	4%	No children	42%
Married	47%		
Single	25%		
Separated/divorced/widowed	20%		
Living with a partner	8%		

6.1.1. Study 1 Measures

Gender (coded 1 = male, 2 = female) was measured by asking respondents to indicate their gender.

KCM parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge. The KCSI (the Kaleidoscope Career Self-Inventory) was posted on the website of the market research panel to determine the strength of the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge at different points during career transitions. The KCSI has been used in a variety of studies, such as Sullivan et al. (2009) and Mainiero and Gibson (2017) and has demonstrated consistently reliable scales for the three parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge. Using a five-point

scale ranging from 1 = "This does not describe me at all" to 5 = "This describes me very well", individuals responded to five items per parameter. Challenge items for the KCSI include: "I continually look for new challenges in everything I do", "Added work responsibilities don't worry me", "I thrive on work challenges and turn problems into opportunities for change", "Most people would describe me as being very goal-oriented". Balance items on the KCSI include: "My work is meaningless unless I can take time to be with my family", "Achieving balance between work and family is life's holy grail", "I constantly arrange my work around my family needs", "If necessary, I'd give up my work to settle problematic family needs", "Nothing matters to me more right now than my family". Authenticity items on the KCSI include: "I want to have an impact and leave my signature on what I accomplish in life", "If I could follow my dream right now, I would", "I hunger for greater spiritual growth in my life", "I hope to find a greater purpose in my life that suits who I am", "I have discovered life crises offer perspectives in ways daily living does not", "I have discovered a meaningful calling in life", "I feel I have a unique purpose to fulfill", "I know I have achieved my purpose in life". Coefficient alphas for the authenticity, balance, and challenge scales were 0.86, 0.83, and 0.86 respectively; other studies have reported similar reliabilities. Specific items for the KCSI are reported in Appendix A.

Leadership Practices. Two sections of leadership statements were included that corresponded to Kouzes and Posner's (2011) leader practices. In the first set of 20 statements, participants were asked if they were in a leadership role at their firm, in order to consider how they would act as a leader in the office. If they were not currently in a leadership role, participants were instructed to think about how they would act if they had leadership responsibilities within an office. Respondents had to rank the statements "When I am in a leadership role" from 1–5, with 1 meaning, "This does not describe me at all", to 5 for "This describes me very well". In the second set of leadership questions, respondents were asked, "When I am in a leadership role", and ranked responses from 1–10, with 1 for "Almost never" to 10 for "Almost always". For encouraging the heart, a sample item read: "I praise my workers when they accomplish important milestones". For challenging the process, a sample item read: "I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities". For modeling the way, a sample item read: "I demonstrate conviction in my values to 'walk the talk'". For inspiring a shared vision, a sample item read: "I talk optimistically about the future of the firm". For enabling others to act, a sample item read: "I provide frequent feedback on how people are doing". Thirty-three items originally were included; these items were reduced through factor analysis to better differentiate which items loaded on each of the five factors. These items appear in Appendix B.

Demographic Variables. Demographic variables were selected for inclusion as control variables because they offer insight on factors that have the potential to influence career paths. The variables were: age (measured as a continuous variable), race (1 = white, 2 = other), marital status (1 = married, 2 = not married), children (1 = yes, 2 = no), and income (anchors ranged from 1 = up to $20,000, 4 = $60,000–$80,000, to 8 = $200,000 or greater).

6.1.2. Study 1 Findings

Varimax rotation principal axis factor analysis. Principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to assess the underlying structure for the 33 leadership items of the Career, Leadership, and Family Issues Questionnaire. The goal of varimax rotation was to simplify the columns of the unrotated factor-loading matrix (Pett et al. 2003). There were five factors that were requested, due to the five constructs from Kouzes and Posner's (2011). The Leadership Challenge: model the way, enable others to act, encourage the heart, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process. Based on the results in the rotated component matrix, the items divided into Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices. Items were removed that were >0.80 in the correlation matrix as high loadings are considered undesirable (Morgan et al. 2013, p. 125). A total of 18 general leadership

items were removed, leaving streamlined scales associated with the Kouzes and Posner five leadership practices. Table 2 displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors, with loadings less than 0.42 removed to improve clarity.

Table 2. Principal axis factor analysis Study 1.

	Rotated Component Matrix [a]				
	Component				
	Encourage the Heart	Enable Others to Act	Model the Way	Inspire a Shared Vision	Challenge the Process
I praise my workers when they accomplish important milestones.	0.799				
I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make to my employees.	0.768				
I find ways to reward my workers for a job well done.	0.767				
I make certain that the people I work with adhere to the principles and standards that we have agreed on.	0.747				
I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with.	0.726				
I provide frequent feedback on how people are doing.		0.747			
I inspire others with optimistic plans for the future.		0.716			
I encourage the development of others through stretch goals.		0.670			
I offer to coach others to aid their skill development.		0.557			
I listen carefully to the concerns of others.			0.814		
I demonstrate conviction in my values to "walk the talk".			0.802		
I am enthusiastic about our mission for the company.				0.769	
I talk optimistically about the future of the firm.		0.438		0.720	
I experiment and take risks even when there is a chance of failure.					0.856
I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities.					0.559

[a] values suppressed if less than 0.42.

The first factor, which indexed the leader practice of encourage the heart, had strong loadings on the first five items, four items loaded on enable others to act, and two items appeared to represent each of the remaining three factors: model the way, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process. The items that remained included at least two items from Kouzes and Posner's original LPI scale on each separate factor that were correlated to similar leadership items; therefore, these scales serve as an approximation of the original LPI scales with original LPI items embedded within. Note: This questionnaire was shortened by the market research firm as they had constraints on how many questions could be asked of participants. Further discussion is included in the limitations section of this paper and suggestions for improving future research are provided.

All instruments, specifically those that examine behaviors, are subject to measurement error (Pett et al. 2003). As a check of reliability, Cronbach's alphas were computed (Cronbach 1990). The alpha for the five-item scale, encourage the heart, was 0.946. Similarly, the alpha for the four-item scale, enable others to act, also produced high reliability with a 0.915 alpha. The results for the two item scales, model the way and inspire a shared vision, as well as challenge the process, had very similar results with alphas of 0.876 and 0.869, and 0.876, respectively. These results all indicated highly consistent reliability (Morgan et al. 2013) despite only two items being used for two of the leader practices.

6.1.3. Study 1: Findings

The researchers sought to explore if a relationship existed between the KCM subscales of authenticity, balance, and challenge as associated with Kouzes and Posner's five leadership factors, both individually and collectively. Women had slightly higher means for authenticity than men (females, M = 3.20, males, M = 3.04, $p < 0.001$, $t = -3.26$). Women also had higher means for balance (females, M = 3.24, males, M = 3.04, $p < 0.01$, $t = -4.15$). There were no significant differences by gender on challenge, suggesting that both males and females desire challenging work. Table 3 provides a comparison of male and female responses on the leadership practices.

Table 3. Comparison of Male and Female Respondent Responses on Leadership Practices Study 1.

VARIABLE	M	SD	t [a]	df [a]	p	d
Enable			−3.25	1950.00	0.001	0.14
Male	7.17	2.20				
Females	7.47	2.03				
Inspire			−3.83	1962.65	0.000	0.17
Male	7.16	2.36				
Females	7.55	2.22				
Challenge			−1.45	2007.00	0.145	0.06
Male	7.18	2.25				
Females	7.32	2.15				
Collective Leadership			−3.49	1912.26	0.001	0.16
Male	7.34	2.05				
Females	7.64	1.79				
Authenticity			−3.26	2007	0.001	0.14
Male	3.06	0.94				
Females	3.2	0.87				
Balance			−4.15	2007	0.001	0.19
Male	3.04	1.06				
Females	3.24	1.04				
Challenge			0.92	2007	0.36	NS/0.04
Male	3.26	1.04				
Females	3.22	0.99				
Collective KCM			−2.51	1945.7	0.01	0.11
Male	9.37	2.66				
Females	9.66	2.43				

[a] Figures adjusted because variances were not equal.

The leadership practices enable others to act, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process were normally distributed and the assumption of linearity was not markedly violated. The three largest effect sizes included enable others to act, followed by the next three with encourage the heart. Kouzes and Posner's (2011) leader practices show a strong degree of correlation, ranging from r (2009) = 0.71 to a high of 0.86, similar to what has been reported on the psychometric scaling of the LPI questionnaire (Kouzes and Posner 2002). As expected, the largest correlation with both leadership practices and KCM parameters was the leadership practice challenge the process with the KCM parameter challenge, R (2009) = 0.57, $p < 0.001$. According to Cohen (1988), these results are large or larger than normal. Because the leadership factors model the way and encourage the heart were

both slightly skewed, using an absolute value of skewness of 1, the Spearman rho statistic was calculated for these two leadership practices. The skewness for model the way and encourage the heart were both slightly skewed but within the recommended ranges by Morgan et al. (2013). The KCM parameter of challenge closely correlated with leader practice enable to act = 0.52, model the way = 0.50, and inspire a shared vision = 0.48, respectively each having large or larger than typical effect sizes (Cohen 1988). The KCM parameter of balance was represented in all five of the lowest correlations with the leader practices. Correlations ranged from 0.27–0.32 all three at medium or typical effect size level, in stark contrast to the KCM parameter of challenge, described previously.

Multiple regressions. In addition, we examined whether or not there were collective effects associated with the KCM parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge and each of the five practices of exemplary leadership, and also in reverse. Multiple regressions were conducted to assess the collective effects of the variables studied and the direction of the effects. The highest percent of variance related collective leadership practices with the KCM parameter challenge, $F(5,2003) = 210.30$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.587$, and the adjusted R^2 was 0.34. The second highest percent of variance related the collective KCM parameters with the leadership practice of challenge the process, $F(3,2005) = 325.35$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.572$, and the adjusted R^2 was reported as 0.326. This demonstrates that there is a strong predictive ability between the KCM parameter of challenge and Kouzes and Posner's leadership practice of challenge the process. Other relationships that had large effect sizes were enable others, inspire a shared vision, and model the way, with adjusted R^2 figures of 0.28 and 0.23 and 0.23 respectively. The weakest relationship was the collective effects of the five practices of leadership and the KCM parameter of balance, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.11.

The combined and individual leadership practices items yielded significant gender differences (females: M = 7.64, males: M = 7.34; $t(2009) = -3.49$, $p < 0.01$). Female participants scored significantly higher than males on the entire instrument. Enable others to act and inspire a shared vision also resulted in females scoring statistically significantly higher than males (for Enable: females: M = 7.47, males: M = 7.17, $t(2009) = -3.25$, $p < 0.01$; for Inspire: females: M = 7.55, males: M = 7.16, $t(2009) = -3.83$, $p > 0.001$) while challenge the process did not yield statistically significant differences between females and males. However, given the large sample size the effect size for each of the five differences was much smaller than typical according to Cohen (1988). In addition, collectively the KCM parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge resulted in significant gender differences (females M = 9.66, males M = 9.37, $t(n = 1945) = -2.51$, $p < 0.05$).

6.1.4. Summary of Results, Study 1

The purpose of this study was to explore gender differences between male and female responses on the five practices of exemplary leadership and for the KCM parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge, both individually and collectively. We need to know: (1) if gender differences in leader practices exist, and (2) whether women and men differ on needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge. We found that female participants generally scored significantly higher than males on both leadership practices as well as the KCM parameters. We expected there would be a strong relationship between challenge and leader practices. We believe these results suggest a strong proclivity on the part of women to lead. Women also scored higher than men on both leader practices and needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge. This suggests that authentic talent development for women should include leadership training as well as an understanding of the KCM parameters, especially authenticity as well as needs for work family balance, that loomed large in this study.

6.2. Study 2: Qualitative Approach to Women's Reasons for Opting Out and Re-Entry Experiences

Research Question #2 asked, "Can practices for authentic talent development be discerned from the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge for women who have opted out but wish to return to the workforce as leaders?" This research question involved

an understanding of the reasons why women specifically opt out of the workforce, and their re-entry experiences, to determine what women careerists are looking for at different stages of their careers. Included are subthemes that further examine the opting out phenomenon and returning to work as a leader after opting out. Therefore, a qualitative methodology was used to complete a "deep dive" career history of high achieving women to discern what motivated them to return to the workforce.

To answer these fulsome research questions, two groups of women from the same high-achieving women population were conducted in 2018. The study began with seeking women who had opted out of the workforce but were high achieving women. A life history interview qualitative methodology was used to closely examine the experiences of eight professional women who had opted-out and also re-entered the workforce. These women were studied in terms of the KCM parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge for their reasons for opting out. The second group concerned 15 professional women from the same population who also had opted-out and returned to the workforce. Both groups were administered the KCSI to understand ascendant parameters at the time of the re-entry process.

6.2.1. Study 2 Research Sample and Interview Administration

Selecting an applicable site population, setting, and phenomenon is important in designing a study (Marshall and Rossman 2006). The first researcher lived in a large master planned community in the Western United States from which participants were identified. The group, consisting of over 3000, began as an online platform to connect community moms with other moms. This network used a Facebook group, emails, and a website to support each other. The second researcher provided oversight on the study, answering questions about the KCM and qualitative research practices, as questions evolved.

Purposeful sampling was used in for both sub-groups of women such that all of the participants met the following criteria:

- Mothers who after having kids exited the workplace.
- "High Achieving Professional Women" is based on Pamela Stone's research and includes women who are highly educated, previously worked as professionals or managers, and able to be financially supported at home (Stone 2007).
- Presently worked a minimum of 24 h each week in a U.S. organization.
- Member checking opt-in to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1986).
- Aged between 37–45.

The first group consisted of eight participants, which provided a suitable sample that reflected distinction in the people, setting, and phenomenon (Dobbert 1982). This group included 2 lawyers, 2 investment bankers, 2 managers, 1 university professor and a social worker. These eight participants in the sample participated in an intensive life history interview process to examine in detail their life histories, career trajectories, decisions to opt out, experiences once opted-out, and the re-entry process.

For the second group of women drawn from the same population, short, structured phone interviews were completed with 15 additional women to examine the career shock phenomenon and KCM parameters. These women completed a short form of the original interview questions through a phone interview format and also answered questions concerning career shocks upon opting-out and re-entry. This group included women who had served as managers, educators, lawyers, and one lobbyist. In both studies, no one returned to their same organization after opting out. In the first group of women, half of the women (N = 4) changed professions upon re-entry, working on part time projects or in their communities. In the second group, nearly half of the participants (N = 7) changed professions upon re-entry and became entrepreneurs, teachers, community administrators, and one woman became a nurse.

6.2.2. Study 2 Interview Process and Data Collection

For the first qualitative study, lengthy, intensive, face-to-face interviews were conducted to assess why they left the workforce, the experiences they had while out of the workplace, and what they encountered upon re-entry. An in-depth, deep-dive life history interview method was utilized (Linde 1993).

Life history events were collected for each individual participant that included various stages of their lives: early family memories, kindergarten–12th grade, university, and beyond on their professions. Participants were asked about their school experiences, college experiences, decision to follow a career path, subsequent career moves in their careers up until the point they opted-out, the reason they opted-out, their decision to re-enter the workforce, and their current life and career outcomes. Sample questions included: "What led to your decision to opt out?", "What challenges did you face upon re-entry?", "What are the pros and cons of your experiences in opting out/re-entry?" "Are you in a similar type of position now prior to opting-out, or not?".

Following Corbin and Strauss (2008) in their update of grounded theory methods, participants were encouraged to tell stories about life events. We intended a conversation that would explore the variables under study so in-person conversational interviews in a local, neutral coffee shop took place with the eight participants. After the interviews, the participants received an email to answer additional demographic data.

For the second group of women, interview data was gathered from an additional 15 women who agreed to participate in limited structured phone interviews at their convenience to ascertain more specific information about personal and career shocks in the opting-out and re-entry process. A post was sent out electronically to the community forum; these women were incentivized to receive a gift card of $30 to participate in short, structured phone interviews. A subset of original interview questions was asked to discern general career progression, the decision to opt out, the experience while opting-out, the decision to re-enter the workforce, and particular emphasis was placed on the concept of career shocks (see Ackermans et al. 2018) upon re-entry. Women were asked, in addition to the questions concerning opting-out and re-entry experiences, about career shocks with this definition: "A career shock is defined as disruptive and extraordinary events that are, at least partially, outside an individual's control and which trigger an active choice process with regard to one's career. Examples of such events include a promotion or job offer or a job loss . . . ", "Tell me about your experience in coming home after opting out to a life different than you imagined. Did you experience any clashes with reality, or shocks?" and "Tell me about your experience re-entering the workforce. Did you experience any career shocks, or clashes with reality, upon re-entry?" All eight women in the first group completed the KCSI assessment; an additional 13 women in the second group agreed to participate via email for a total of 21 assessments. Given that the women were from the same community mother's group in the same location, with the same criteria applied for sampling for both groups, there seemed no reason to separate groups of women based on the KCSI results. Therefore, the data was combined to gather a more complete picture of the KCM parameters upon re-entry in both studies. The KCSI has been tested in several populations for scaling for authenticity, balance, and challenge parameters at 0.84, 0.81, and 0.80, respectively (see Mainiero and Gibson 2017; Sullivan et al. 2009).

6.2.3. Study 2 Qualitative Data Analysis

In this study, the unit of analysis was each individual professional woman, centered on her own lens of her experiences, and focusing on her situational context. Utilizing both situational and positional maps, as introduced by Adele Clarke, provided a way to analyze qualitative data that supplemented typical grounded theory and offered a different approach to gathering and analyzing data (Clarke 2005). The benefits of situational analysis include enhanced reflexivity of the researcher, moving beyond the interviews to include analyses of discourses, and helping to analyze absent positions (Clarke 2005). Themes on opting out and re-entry were derived from this process. Both researchers

analyzed the data, with one primary researcher taking the lead, as suggested by Clarke (2005), defining situational maps that offered a pictorial representation of the data; the secondary researcher checked the data for sense-making purposes (see Roulston et al. 2008, on reflective interviewing and interpretation).

The primary researcher, who collected data onsite, "lived" with the data and created individual ordered situational maps for each interviewee. The maps were produced and were then shuffled around, placed next to each other as well as above and below each other, using transparency paper. Then, a meta-situational map was generated to find themes and categories. Themes, colors, and tallies were used to better understand the phenomenon. The maps were reviewed and reconfigured over many iterations to better understand the phenomenon. The secondary researcher also reviewed the maps and data as themes came forth.

Analysis of the second group of women benefited from the coded maps determined by the coding of the first group. Responses from the second group of 15 women were coded into categories and thematic elements already established. As interviews took place, responses were coded for the new sample initially by the primary researcher and affirmed by the secondary researcher. There were no outliers of additional themes or data that did not "fit" from the second group.

6.2.4. Study 2 Findings

The final iterative color meta map of the data analysis process is shown in Figure 1. The color orange corresponds to reasons women left the workplace. The color blue corresponds to the understanding of what it was like when the women were not in the workplace. The color green demonstrates the themes of what they faced when trying to rejoin the workplace. The color pink shows how the KCM parameters were reflected through the interviews. The four sub-themes relate to the broader Research Question #2: Can practices for authentic talent development be discerned from the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge for women who have opted out but wish to return to the workforce as leaders? Sub-themes are listed below.
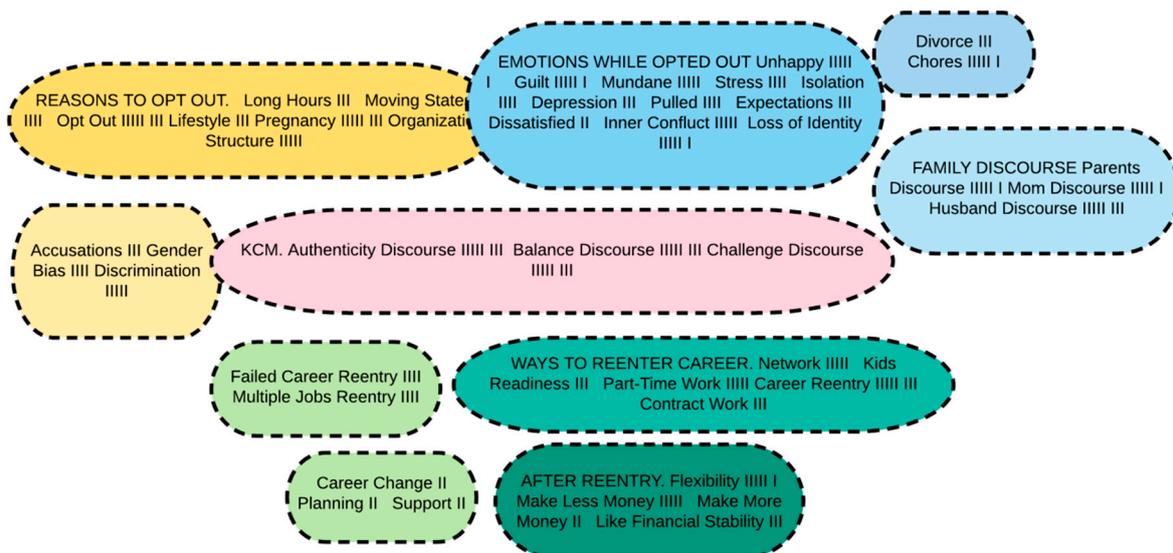

Figure 1. Primary researcher's evolved meta situational map.

Sub-Theme #1: What factors led professional women to opt out of the workforce?

The sub-themes that emerged from the data correlated with previous research that shows that women leave firms due to gender discrimination, lack of organizational structural supports, and childcare/eldercare issues. While seven women told stories about gender discrimination and advancement, the majority of women indicated displeasure

with work–family integration and flexibility issues (N = 15) as well as childcare balance issues (N = 19), that led to their decision to opt out.

Sub-Theme #2: What are the experiences of professional women while they were opted out?

The sub-themes that emerged included: (1) negative emotions while opting out, and (2) proactive community actions. Here the experiences of women who left their jobs suggested a change of identity, "known as my daughter's mom" that prompted many women in the community setting to seek opportunities within the community, either through volunteering at school or getting involved and taking leadership roles in PTA groups. The majority of professional women continued to stay busy even though they had open time (N = 19); many of them networked with parents from their children's play groups, exercise classes, or preschool activities. Some also took classes to keep their skills fresh.

Sub-Theme #3: What occurred when the professional women attempted to return to the workforce?

The phenomenon is discussed in four sections which correspond to the themes. In almost every situation, a series of events culminated that resulted in rejoining the workforce. The series of events upon re-entry varied. Most women experienced discrimination (N = 22), as well as lower salaries (N = 20) and many experienced unhealthy work environments (N = 14).

Sub-Theme #4: How do the KCM parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge impact reentering the workforce after opting out?

Sub-Theme #5: What kinds of career and personal shocks did professional women experience upon opting out and also re-entry?

Decision to Opt-Out. Interview data was coded with respect to the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge as active factors in decision making associated with the transitions of these women. The ascendant parameter was determined to be the most frequently and strongly mentioned parameter in the interview as agreed by both researchers and the participant. Below are some quotes alongside frequency tallies, that describe the three KCM parameters and their impact on making the decision to opt out. Figure 2 demonstrates the parameters in pie chart format.
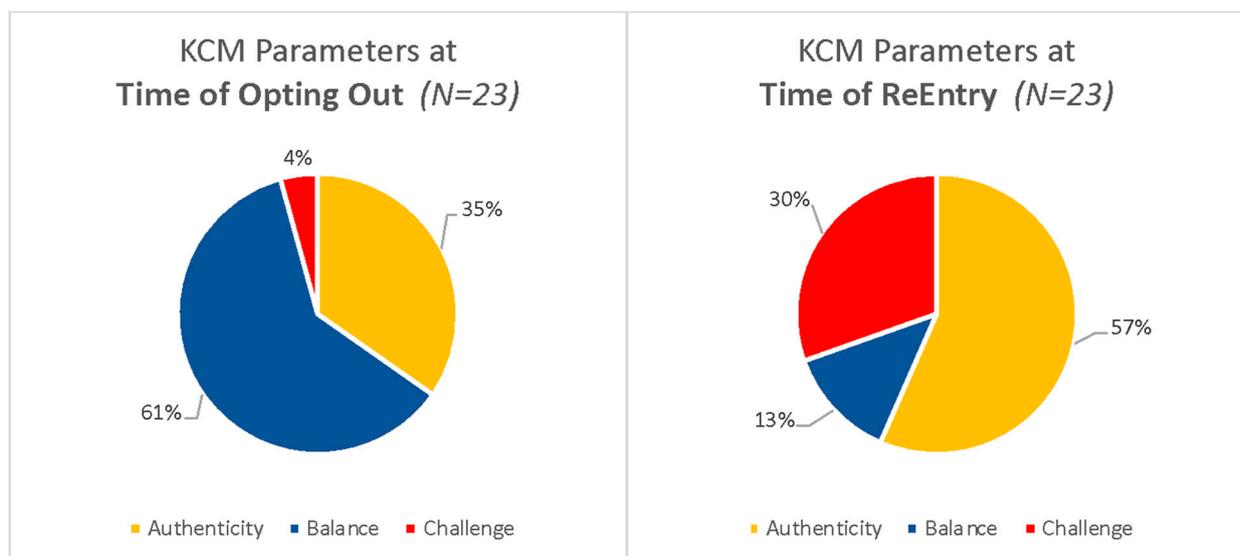

Figure 2. Ascendant KCM parameters from coded interview data at Time 1 (opting out) versus Time 2 (re-entry).

Authenticity as a Factor in Opting Out (N = 8)

"My father died. This changed my core and forced me to look at what was most important in my life. Suddenly, achieving that promotion did not seem so important".

"I had a miscarriage. While my doctor said it wasn't related to my high stress at work, I disagree. I needed to relook at my life and figure out what was my priority".

"I feel torn. If I have passion at work and a meaningful role, I am home less. To be authentic, finding the right workplace is key and there are certain industries I now stay away from".

Balance as a Factor in Opting Out (N = 14)

"Everyone said I could do it, working full time and being a mom. It hit home when a co-worker said 'My son doesn't recognize me and cries . . . ' And when thinking about it, I realized my boss had three nannies. Was this how I wanted to live my life? . . . I needed to take a pause and reboot".

"I went back to work after I had my first child. I thought I could do it all. The stress and demands at work were too much for me when I had a little baby at home who needed me. I decided to quit".

"My husband worked all the time. While I was planning on going back to work, when my maternity leave was up, I just couldn't go back. I knew that being the primarily parent would fall mostly on me, even if I was working full-time. I would always carry the mental load of parenting. And things like housework were also my responsibility. I called my old boss and said I was not returning".

Challenge as a Factor in Opting Out (N = 1)

"I couldn't keep up with the demands of my job anymore. The challenges that were required of me at work and the demands of my life at home caused me to be stretched too thin".

"When I returned from maternity, I moved to a less demanding job that required less hours. I was so bored and unstimulated. I made less money. After a while, I asked, "Why am I doing this? I missed the challenge of my old position but knew I could never go back".

Re-Entry Experiences. Re-entry sub-themes associated with the Kaleidoscope career model emerged from the data in terms of the authenticity, balance, and challenge parameters. Several women sacrificed challenging work for balance and flexibility. Some quotes include:

Authenticity as a Factor at Time of Re-Entry (N = 9)

"I am absolutely living an authentic life. I feel fulfilled now that I've created my own business. I don't have to worry about corporate stuff anymore—biting my tongue, eye rolling, watching my male co-workers get promoted more than me. My job enables my lifestyle".

"I chose a new job, a new career. Now my profession fits with my life. I can be there for my kids and also earn money for myself. Sure, I miss aspects of my old job, especially pay and sometimes I'm bored, but I'm doing it my way and my family thanks me".

"When I went back to work, it didn't feel like I was doing authentic work. Finding a role that fits will make me feel more authentic".

"After reentering my career, I feel authentic, but I would like to be even more authentic to myself, but it's hard".

Balance as a Factor at Time of Re-Entry (N = 3)

"Balance is attainable, but I can't hold onto it for very long. This morning I was up at 4:30 a.m. with my son. Balance is a constant struggle and juggle. Sometimes balance is present, sometimes it is not. If someone is sick, things fall apart".

"When I went back to work, I couldn't get everything done. Everything started slipping. I forgot stuff at my daughter's school, I forgot doctor's appointments, I didn't have time for friends".

"Even now that I entered the workforce, my balance is falling apart. I'm bitter at my husband because he doesn't help out. He doesn't feel value at home, so he immerses himself at work".

"And I still did all the housework and chores. We had issues of labor. I was the primary breadwinner and my husband felt emasculated. We have since divorced".

Challenge as a Factor at Time of Re-Entry (N = 7)

"Sometimes I don't feel utilized at work. I sacrifice challenge for balance".

"I have less drive now. I am at the right level of challenge for my life right now. I will not advance anytime soon but that is okay. I enjoy being home with my family".

"I am not as focused and invested as I used to be. It is hard to compartmentalize work and family. My job does not showcase my strengths but now I have independence and flexibility which is more important".

KCM Parameter Results. Women in both groups completed the KCSI assessment with reference to what motivated them to return to the workforce (the re-entry process). Figure 2 presents two pie charts that represent the graphic results from the KCSI across both groups. For women who had re-entered the workforce, all but one participant sought authenticity. In the second group, 10 of 13 participants scored highest in authenticity for a combined total of 17 of 21 participants who took the KCSI. Authenticity, according to the KCM, is defined as internal values being aligned across the individual's external behaviors and the values of the employing organization (Mainiero and Sullivan 2006). Authenticity may be displayed in many forms, such as purposeful work, spirituality, choosing one's path regardless of constraints, and/or pursuing a career that offers greater engagement or meaning. One woman said, "*When I went back to work part time, it didn't feel like I [was] doing authentic work. Finding a role that fits you well makes me more authentic*".

The second most desired parameter was challenge, defined as a need for stimulating work and career advancement. Five of eight participants who took the KCSI in the first group indicated that challenge was their secondary motivating factor. Among the second group, eight participants who took the KCSI stated challenge was their secondary motivating factor. One participant stated, "*I feel like I'm not showcasing my strengths. I miss pieces of my old job prior to having kids. I have some challenges but not enough*". Another said, "*Sometimes I don't feel utilized at work. I sacrifice challenge for balance*". Several women said that "*okay with having less challenge as long as they made up for this deficiency in either authenticity or balance*".

Sub-theme #5: What kinds of career and personal shocks did professional women experience upon opting out and also re-entry?

We were interested in the re-entry experiences of women to determine what women might need in terms of talent development upon their return to the workforce. We utilized the concept of "career shocks" from Ackermans et al. (2018) to address their re-entry experiences. Career shocks are extraordinary events that are, at least partially, outside an individual's control which trigger an active choice process with regard to one's career. Career shocks may represent a major antecedent of career development trajectories as reactions to external events, such as an unplanned pregnancy or elder career issues, may

influence career decision making ([Ackermans et al. 2018](#); [De Vos and Van der Heijden 2009](#)). We categorized a number of "career shocks" expressed by the women in the second group, seen in Table [4](#). We discovered two types of shocks: (1) opting out shocks and (2) career re-entry shocks. Data was determined based on the 15 phone interviews from the second group of women. Participants were specifically provided a career shocks definition, and then asked if they experienced "any clashes with reality, or shocks" pertaining to opting out and re-entering the workforce.

Table 4. Career Shocks (Study 2 N = 15).

Opting Out Shocks	% of Sample, N	Career Re-Entry Shocks	% of Sample, N
Knowledge of pregnancy	26% N = 4	Discrimination	53% N = 8
Birth of child	13% N = 2	Pay inequity	86% N = 13
Miscarriage	20% N = 3	Difficult getting interviews	80% N = 12
Lack of flexibility after return to career from maternity LOA	40% N = 6	Judgement by others	100% N = 15
Geographic move	40% N = 6	Harassment	20% N = 3
Lack of balance	80% N = 12	Need for authenticity	53% N = 8
Childcare expenses	73% N = 11	Need for career change	53% N = 8

We discovered that the two primary career shocks that led professional women to leaving the workforce were lack of balance and childcare expenses. Women had difficulty managing both a professional life and raising a child, which ultimately led to a negative career shock. One woman stated, *"I opted out for two years, but it set me back twenty years in my career".* The high cost of childcare expenses was also a shock to many women (N = 11). *"Paying for childcare for multiple children used up nearly all of my paycheck. I was working for childcare and that didn't seem right to me. I had no idea childcare would be so expensive",* said one Mom in the study. Women left the workforce due to knowledge of pregnancy (26%), lack of flexibility (40%), the cost of childcare (73%).

We found women also experienced numerous career shocks as they attempted to re-enter the workforce. In the majority of cases (N = 14), women experienced pay inequity. In most cases, women were taking salary cuts of 30–70% of what they were making prior to opting out. *"I was making only a fraction of what I made before. I tried negotiating but felt I didn't have any negotiating power compared to women who had never opted out",* said one participant. *Only one woman earned more at re-entry than opting out by switching to a higher paying* industry. Women expressed the feeling they had to work even harder than their peers to prove that they were taking their jobs seriously. *"I made sure that I took sick time or left early, and I had to remind my co-workers that I was always there to get the work done. I shouldn't have had to do this, but I felt like my counterparts were judging me and I had to pull my own weight",* said one professional who re-entered. Nearly all the women (N = 12) experienced difficulty getting interviews despite long professional resumes. During the interview process, one woman said, *"I was getting passed up for jobs by kids fresh out of college. Hiring managers didn't care that I had fifteen years of experience prior to opting out".* In some cases, participants did not get interviews for months. Another woman said, *"After trying to get a job in my field for over a year with no success, I gave up the interviewing process and decided to start my own business".* Over half of the participants (53%) cited discrimination once they re-entered the workforce. One woman experienced her male co-workers telling her clients, *"You don't want to listen to her. She is a mom and doesn't take her job seriously".*

6.2.5. Study 2 Summary of Findings

The eight women in the first group had unique and rich stories to tell about the process of opting-out and re-entry. Many experienced many similarities and left the workplace because they felt they had no other choice but to acquiesce to workplace "pushes" and family "pulls". As one participant stated, *"Taking off three years with my kids has set me back thirty years".*

When these individuals made a decision to return to work, they discovered a rough landing in back into their careers. One woman's comments resonated with many women in both samples, saying I was *"overqualified and under experienced"* upon her return to work. The experience of re-entry led to a new series of career shocks associated with discrimination, pay, judgement from others, and the need for flexibility. One woman commented, *"A mother's responsibilities at home and with the kids don't end when she goes back to work fulltime"*. Another stated, *"I was making 60% less than what I made before in the same industry for similar hours. But I was so glad that someone actually wanted to hire me after so many hiring rejections or companies just ignoring my application, I gladly took the pay cut. I figured that I had to start somewhere"*.

Looking at the triangulated qualitative and quantitative data capturing dual points in time—the decision to opt out versus the decision to re-enter—suggests the dynamism and movement originally suggested by the original KCM model. The KCM proposed the three parameters are in motion at different points in time across the career cycle (see Mainiero and Sullivan 2005, 2006). Here in this study the decision to opt out, according to the qualitative data, was pointedly focused on the desire for greater balance (N = 14 combined). The decision to re-enter the workforce, as measured by the KCSI, was centered on finding a more authentic career trajectory as the central pivot (N = 13, combined), while retaining flexibility (balance) and discovering more stimulation (challenge). This was further verified through the coded interview responses. Challenge also was a factor upon re-entry as these professional women desired greater stimulation, impact, and effort than simply staying home. This triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods allows us to showcase one of the major theoretical constructs of the KCM; that like a kaleidoscope that shifts and change, the parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge, do the same throughout the career cycle.

7. Discussion

The primary purpose of this article was to elucidate how social ascription processes lead women to experience sufficient micro-aggressions by members of the power coalition to opt out of the workforce (Debebe 2017). Many of the women interviewed in Study 2 felt they had "no choice" but to opt out, that the discrimination against them was so omnipresent that the power relations associated with advancement worked against them. Such social ascriptions, combined with endemic corporate cultures that favor men, serve as "pushes" that cause women to leave the workforce (Kossek et al. 2017). This leads to a self-perpetuating cycle of systemic sexism in organizations in which women, as a cultural identity group, feel compromised. While it is commonly assumed that work–family balance issues cause women to opt out, that assumption does not disclose the whole picture. In these two studies, interviewees expressed how they felt they had leadership potential, yet the decision to opt out affected their careers, as it became difficult for them to return to the workforce.

Women *are* leaders. Women showcase strong leadership potential as accorded through the five exemplary practices of the Kouzes and Posner (2011) model, and other studies, such as the meta-analysis performed by Eagly and Carli (2007). In Study 1, collectively in this large sample, women ranked themselves higher on the Kouzes and Posner (2011) corresponding leader practices than men. In terms of individual leader practices, enabling others to act and inspiring a shared vision resulted in women scoring statistically higher than males, while challenge the process did not yield significant results. Several research studies have echoed women not only self-report but also exhibit stronger leader practices than men and may be more transformational in their leadership styles than men (Eagly et al. 2003; Eagly and Carli 2007).

In the qualitative second study we offer a picture of the toggling of career decision making, the clash with reality, and the decision to reenter the workforce with reduced expectations. Women achieved greater balance and flexibility, and reduced stress upon opting out. Through qualitative methods, we offer a more nuanced, complete picture of

the experiences of the opting out and re-entry process. Personal shocks were described as feeling isolated, undervalued, worried about returning to work, and bored at home. Career shocks upon re-entry included continuous discrimination, feeling overqualified, pay inequities, projects that lacked challenge, judgement by peers and supervisors, harassment and the need for flexibility. What emerged from this study is an understanding of how external shocks create a subjective awareness of career and contribute to new career trajectories and paths as a result (Hirschi 2010; Hirschi and Valero 2017). Upon opting out, professional women expressed feelings of isolation, grappling with the clash of reality between their former career identities as professionals, now being seen as "just Mom". This created a disruptive subjective experience that led, in many cases, to the decision to re-enter the workforce. However, upon re-entry, there were more career shocks associated with discrimination, lack of challenge, and pay. For this reason, most participants chose to work in their communities, change careers, or focus on entrepreneurial initiatives rather than return to their former employer.

The KCSI across both studies showed authenticity was the primary parameter in the re-entry experiences of these women. August (2011) explored the relevance of the KCM to women's later life career development among 14 women in late career. While her results demonstrated all three parameters are live for women, the definition of authenticity varied considerably, and was on the rise for older women. In Cabrera's (2007) survey of 2000 international businesswomen graduates, mid-career women wanted balance while authenticity increased across the life span as age increased. This trajectory was hypothesized by the original KCM model (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005) and replicated by Mainiero and Gibson (2017). The KCM is a dynamic model of careers; the three parameters ebb and flow based on the needs of the individual at different points in time. This study shows that career pivots are subject to external events (family medical crisis, unplanned pregnancy, change in boss, transfer to a new inconvenient location), and such events create the need for adjusted career decision making. As such, an analysis of external control events as career and personal shocks enhances our understanding of the dynamism of the KCM model, and explains how chaotic, unplanned events and experiences may subvert an expected career trajectory.

7.1. Implications for Authentic Talent Development

Debebe (2017) argues that social identity ascription processes constrain individuals' capacity to construct authentic talent trajectories—those aligned with intrinsic interests and values. Debebe (2017) defines authentic leadership and talent development as "a process whereby individuals discover what they are good at and love to do and use their talents to express their values" (p. 420). Applying this concept to the context of leadership, she argues that the development of talent fuels the leader's inspiration. This may involve helping women discover the place where their passion meets destiny (Robinson 2009, 2013). In this first study, we found that women were capable of, and willing to, utilize these five exemplary practices of leadership. The second qualitative study showcased all the constraints women had that explained their reasons to opt out, and the difficulties of re-entry.

This suggests a prescription for authentic talent development upon re-entry. Women are, for the most part, strong leaders—as strong as men on the five exemplary practices. Upon re-entry, women want authenticity. They do not want to be shoved aside or judged for their choice to leave the workforce. We found high achieving women wanted to shine and develop their talents further, enriched by their experiences in their homes and their communities, but beaten down by social systems of discrimination, lack of flexibility, pay inequity, judgements, and stereotypic thinking arising from deep seated and endemic social ascription processes.

Women should not be written off as strong leaders who once had potential but decided on a career interruption. Human resource professionals should invent career path possibilities that allow for opting out and the ability to develop leadership talent despite

discontinuous careers. Workload preferences and challenges may differ over time, and the expectations of employees may be altered with experience, which could be a reason why leadership responsibilities may be perceived differently (Giri and Santra 2009). In fact, career development is lifelong and full of transitions and opportunities. The value of the Kaleidoscope Career Model suggests an ebb and flow of career ambitions according to the relevant parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge, that determine shifting career emphases over time. The results of this study in combination with other studies may suggest that women have a great deal of untapped leadership potential that is undervalued in corporations. Women may re-engage in their careers at different points in the career cycle, seeking more challenge and authenticity than balance once family issues are resolved. As the KCM parameter of challenge is strongly associated with the five leader practices, human resource practitioners should make note to develop authentic leadership talent for women when women return to the workforce after a career interruption.

Authentic talent development involves common elements associated with authentic leadership, such as self-awareness, understanding the true self, self-regulation and consistency, and moral leadership (George 2003; Sparrowe 2005). Good leaders must align their behavior with their true selves (George 2003; Luthans and Avolio 2003). Women who have opted out have already aligned themselves with their true circumstances. These women did not wish to be disingenuous by constantly toggling between work and home responsibilities. Instead, they took an ethical approach, stood up for their priorities, and reduced their work commitments so they could breathe. Women who re-enter the workforce should be acknowledged to respect their newfound self-awareness, discuss "trigger events" that have shaped their authenticity, and solicit feedback from others on their strengths and talents. Human resource professionals can create reentry programs that capitalize on this newfound drive for authenticity and focus on each woman's talents and strengths.

Padavic et al. (2020) make the point that social ascriptions and the dominant male defined culture causes women (and men) to utilize work–family balance narratives as a social defense against 24/7 continuous work hours. In the era of COVID-19 and mobile employment, there is a possibility that some workers will remain mobile employees. We need career paths that carry the "new normal" expectation of opting out for a period of time without penalty for advancement. Some women have experienced burnout in the context of the pandemic, as they had to develop coping mechanisms such as disengagement, denial, and energy conservation to handle dual responsibilities of family balance and career (Aldossari and Chaudry 2020). Shapiro et al. (2008) suggest that human resource professionals should create a culture that supports career self-agency. This may suggest the need for new, improved, authentic leadership training programs for seasoned employees who are returning to the workforce after a career interruption, or leadership training to leverage the untapped talent of solid Beta careerists who may be called upon as pinch hitters or project managers when the firm grows beyond current levels. While they may not be considered for promotion at the rate of typical Alpha careerists who have paid their dues in the 24/7 work life as they rose up the career ladder, Beta careerists in late midcareer could become mentors, lead special projects, teach in leadership development classes, or even lead task forces that cross functional lines. These individuals would also be well equipped to address issues of work-life balance for burned out Alpha careerists, and also highlight engagement issues in the workplace (DeLong and Vijayaraghavan 2003).

The present combined set of studies elucidates women want authenticity, balance, and challenge in their careers. This suggests that women want to work from their strengths, gifts, and talents, and offer genuine contributions to their firms to have an impact on projects and programs. Whether they have opted out, remained at home, or returned to the workforce, women offer special strengths and talents that should be leveraged in the workplace. Make note that women were seen in Study 1 as stronger leaders than men, who were comfortable exercising the five exemplary leader practices associated with Kouzes and Posner's (2011) framework. Human resource professionals should examine the KCM in terms of career stages and ascertain whether the parameters of authenticity, balance, and

challenge suggest new career trajectories. For example, a woman who is most motivated by the balance parameter may prefer to utilize her talents on a smaller project where she could work mobile from home. Another woman who is motivated by challenge might prefer more time in the office where she can showcase her talents and have an impact. All women are interested in authenticity in their careers. Career coaching could be offered to determine the right trajectory for each woman who returns to the workforce so she can showcase her authenticity and offer her experiences, gifts and talents to others. For example, esteemed Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has commented how the experience of being a mother of five taught her to handle the disparate demands of the entire House of Representatives (see USA Today 2007, https://www.speaker.gov/newsroom/usa-today-nancy-pelosi-speaks-mom, accessed on 1 February 2021).

For women to discover their authentic talents as leaders, there needs to be impactful talent development programs as well as flexible work initiatives. CEOS, executives, human resource professionals, and mid-level managers must:

1. Develop new tailored career tracks that emphasize the needs for authenticity, balance and challenge,
2. Celebrate the "new normal" post COVID-19 that contemporary career paths will allow for mobile work and telecommuting options that do not discourage advancement,
3. Administer flexible work schedules, such as reduced hours, job sharing options, alternative work arrangements,
4. Recognize that those who opt out for a temporary career interruption for family reasons can return to their former jobs with enhanced skills, ready for future leadership development,
5. Create mentoring and coaching circles so that managers can develop a variety of employees at different stages of their careers,
6. Champion high achieving women who have opted out for balance reasons for upper-level positions when they return,
7. Hardwire the infrastructure for contemporary career paths based on merit and performance, including examining job descriptions and organizational charts to ensure equal opportunities exist,
8. Revisit the mission, vision, and values of the organization to ensure authentic talent development programs are part of the company's strategic direction.

In addition, the literature on social ascription processes points to how mechanisms within organizations breed endemic discrimination that is powerful. The four types of mechanisms responsible for ascriptive inequality are intrapsychic, interpersonal, societal, and organizational (Reskin and Bielby 2005). Debebe (2017) discusses PsyCap as a means by which women can develop a mindset to fight sexism. By developing resilience, self-efficacy, hope, and optimism as a mindset, women and other cultural identity groups can forge their own career paths by ignoring sexist norms. In part, this is what the women in Study 2 were articulating—that they developed their own alternative, more flexible opportunities rather than re-enter the former firm.

Executives must catalyze the talent, leadership potential, and ambition that might otherwise go unappreciated. Executives should visibly reward and champion employees who serve as role models for others as healthy, balanced workers who may have taken an opt out career interruption, returned to the workforce, and then, after further leadership development, advanced to the C level suite. Once there are programs and visible rewards, women leaders will rise to the ascendency of their firms, and the brain drain of talent will cease to exist.

7.2. Study 1 and 2 Limitations and Future Research

Study 1 was undertaken as a means to discover linkages between the variables to determine if there was an intersection between the KCM career parameters and also the leader practices as shown by Kouzes and Posner's (2011) specific leader behaviors. While correlations were found between the KCM parameters and the Kouzes and Posner leader

practices, their meaning is restricted to association only, and therefore is not at all definitive. Individuals self-selected into an internet survey as part of a large market research panel as voluntary participants. This resulted in a surprisingly large and robust sample representing a variety of backgrounds and industries, with nearly half of respondents not currently working, between jobs, or unemployed. Generating a sample from an online community via the internet can be problematic, and self-selection can be problematic, resulting in a variety of biases (Wright 2006). Unfortunately, it was not possible to assess intersectionality through the survey panel as non-binary options did not exist as checkmarks. While web surveys provide the researcher easier access to groups in a time effective and cost-effective manner, there are several downsides to internet sampling as described by Couper (2000). For example, the market research organization that housed the survey viewed the original set of survey questions as too long and as a result, several specific leadership questions were eliminated. In internet samples, respondents can easily lie about any information they report on the survey, so there is no guarantee of accuracy (Wright 2006). The single survey method can result in common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). To eliminate the risk of common method bias, while 33 items were originally included, the number of items was reduced through exploratory factor analysis of the leadership practice items, resulting in fewer items directly taken from Kouzes and Posner's (2002) LPI scale. While the scales used were more than sufficient for the purposes of this exploratory study, 18 items were eliminated in the factor analysis, making the variables used in this exploratory study and its scales less robust.

Study 2 is subject to the limitations of qualitative measures. Sample sizes were purposefully kept small in order to capture a more intimate discussion of the opting-out and re-entry experiences of professional women. A larger, longer, broader longitudinal study for both opting out and the re-entry process is needed across various populations to confirm the accuracy of the themes cited within. The researcher's nature of self-reporting and analysis of situational interview data is limited to knowledge that emerged from continuous mapping of those data in this specific dataset among this community of mothers. The qualitative processes of data analysis used in this study were iterative and intimate. Another researcher "living with the data" may develop alternative mapping and themes. Finally, Study 1 took place in 2014 while Study 2 took place in 2018; another set of studies post pandemic may discover many work-balance issues have been resolved through mobile work, allowing women to achieve in their careers.

7.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include a mixed methods longitudinal research study broadening the sample size across a more varied population including different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds. Follow up interviews and focus groups on career shocks and adjustments during career transitions would provide even richer qualitative data; for example, focus groups could reveal more tensions of a continuum as the stories unfolded. Quantitative data could be collected at Time 1 women who are making the decision to opt out) and Time 2 (women who made the decision to re-enter the workforce).

Future research would benefit from specifically addressing some of the questions raised in this study for those who identify themselves as Beta Kaleidoscopic careerists who value balance more than challenge. Specific questions could be asked about ambition, whether or not they would value additional leadership training upon a return to the workforce, and whether or not they wish to ascend the career ladder. One recommendation for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study that addresses differentials in the kaleidoscopic parameters to capture ebb and flow over time. The benefit of a longitudinal study is that developments or changes in the characteristics of the sample would have been detected, beyond a single moment in time (Bauer 2004, p. 79), a particularly relevant characteristic for analyses of career stages, and career patterns could be traced across the life cycle.

8. Conclusions

The Kaleidoscope Career Model (the KCM) can serve as a helpful lens by which to understand the career themes and motivations of women, and also men, during times of transition in their careers. Authenticity, balance, and challenge play a key role in the lives of the professional women who successfully re-entered their careers after opting out. This study adds to the growing literature about social ascription processes, combined with endemic social structures, create a pull-and-tug effect on career decision making; that career progress is not linear; instead, it can be chaotic, shaped by opportunities, crises, constraints and subject to external events, such as the pandemic, that shape the trajectories of modern careers. The value of the KCM is to suggest that the three parameters are dynamic, liquid and variable over time; choosing a Beta Kaleidoscope pattern may merely be a temporary stopgap in a career to settle family concerns with hope to return to a more career-centric Alpha Kaleidoscope pattern at a later point.

In the 21st century, mobile nonlinear careers have become the norm. There will be more evidence of discontinuous career paths, career zigzags, career interruptions that prioritize family needs, and even opt-outs for stress reduction. Human resource professionals will need to manage and invent new career paths and training of authentic talent development at each career stage. There is much untapped authentic leadership potential on the part of women and other discontinuous employees that deserve to be highlighted, nurtured, and developed. Executives should be mindful of these changes in the corporate landscape and create opportunities for all employees, regardless of career stage, gender, or opting out, to lead and advance when ready, regardless of age or career resume. In addition, executives and human resource professionals must examine endemic norms associated with systemic sexism in male defined organizational cultures that may prevent women and other cultural identity groups from developing their authentic talents. Training is needed to raise awareness of the self-perpetuating cycle of discrimination defined by male organizational norms. Greater awareness of the covert mechanisms of social ascription processes will ultimately benefit corporations and the employees who work within them. J.K. and L.M.

Appendix A. KCSI Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge Scales

Authenticity

I hope to find a greater purpose to my life that suits who I am.
I hunger for greater spiritual growth in my life.

I have discovered that crises in life offer perspectives in ways that daily living does not.
If I could follow my dream right now, I would.
I want to have an impact and leave my signature on what I accomplish in life.

Balance

If necessary, I'd give up my work to settle problematic family issues or concerns.
I constantly arrange my work around my family needs.
My work is meaningless if I can't take the time to be with my family.
Achieving balance between work and family is life's holy grail.
Nothing matters more to me right now than balancing work with my family responsibilities.

Challenge

I continually look for new challenges in everything I do.
I view setbacks not as "problems" to be overcome but as "challenges" that require solutions.
Added work responsibilities don't worry me.
Most people would describe me as being very goal-directed.
I thrive on work challenges and turn work problems into opportunities for change.

Response Scale

1 = This does not describe me at all
2 = This describes me somewhat
3 = This describes me often
4 = This describes me considerably
5 = This describes me very well

Appendix B

Leadership Items from Kouzes Posner LPI

I praise my workers when they accomplish important milestones.
I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make to my employees.
I find ways to reward my workers for a job well done.
I make certain that the people I work with adhere to the principles and standards that we have agreed on.
I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with.
I provide frequent feedback on how people are doing.
I inspire others with optimistic plans for the future.
I encourage the development of others through stretch goals.
I offer to coach others to aid their skill development.
I listen carefully to the concerns of others.
I demonstrate conviction in my values to "walk the talk".
I am enthusiastic about our mission for the company.
I talk optimistically about the future of the firm.
I experiment and take risks even when there is a chance of failure.
I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities.

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