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Career Reentry Strategies for Highly Educated Stay-at-Home Mothers

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Walden University

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Walden University

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Cheryl Guc

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Career Reentry Strategies for Highly Educated, Stay-at-Home Mothers

by

Cheryl M. Guc

MS, Walsh College, 1993

BS, Wayne State University, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Organizational Psychology

Walden University

September 2017

Abstract

Most stay-at-home mothers wish to return to the workplace; yet, the majority are not successful. There is a looming labor shortage and increasing organizational initiatives to increase female participation at most levels, providing opportunity for this talent pool. The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the reentry strategies of networking, volunteerism, additional education, and additional training upon the reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. In conjunction with the theoretical framework of the social cognitive career theory, self-efficacy, as measured by the New General Self-Efficacy Scale, was also examined as a reentry strategy. Survey research was used to gather data from previous stay-at-home mothers who had successfully reentered and stay-at-home mothers currently in the job search process ($N=157$). Logistic regressions and Pearson correlations were used to determine significant relationships between network size and self-efficacy upon reentry success; however, network size was negatively correlated with reentry success. The results of this study can be used by highly educated, stay-at-home mothers contemplating workplace reentry as well as vocational counselors who assist this group of job seekers. Highly educated, stay-at-home mothers can use the results of this study to improve their chances of effectively transitioning back into the workplace while also altering the perception of the traditional, stay-at-home mother.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family; to my husband, Bill, and especially to my beautiful daughters, Courtney, Sydney, and Gwen. This has been a very long journey, but I hope that through it all, I did not lose sight of the roles that mean the most to me, that of wife and mother. For my girls, I hope this research has provided you with some of the tools to help you make the best choices for you and your loved ones at defining moments in your life and that you will be able to chart your own path regardless of what society prescribes. I hope each of you becomes a strong woman in your own right, with your own thoughts, ideas, opinions, and passions. I hope that each of you are able to discover your unique and individual gifts, and are able to use them wisely and to their greatest extent. And finally, I hope that each of you can find joy in just being you.

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First and foremost, my success in this endeavor would not have been possible without the grace of God. Through Him, all things are possible. To my committee chairperson, Dr. James Brown, thank you for having the patience, energy, and expertise to help me endure through this arduous process. Your quick wit, humor, and invaluable experience brought positivity and light during each and every step of the process and for that, I am forever grateful. My sincerest appreciation is also given to the additional members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Stephen Burgess and Dr. Marlon Sukal. Your knowledge of the subject matter and expert guidance with this process were vital in my achievement of this educational goal. Finally, this study would have been very different without the foresight and vision of those who are passionate about the lived experiences of reentry women, especially the founders and staff at iRelaunch.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The feminist movement, easier access to higher education, and organizational efforts to promote a more diverse labor pool have resulted in increased opportunities for women in the workplace (Boris & Orleck, 2011; Kaiser et al., 2013; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). In 2010, women represented 57% of the graduates completing their bachelor's degrees, 60% of those earning a master's degree, and 52% of those earning their doctoral degree (NCES, 2011). Educated women have set the stage for a greater presence of women in the workplace. In 2010, women accounted for 47% of the total labor force and represented 51% of the total number of workers in managerial, professional, and other related fields (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2011). Traditional, gender-specific occupations (i.e., teaching, nursing, and social work) continue to attract females (Wermeling & Smith, 2009); however, previously male-gendered careers such as law and medicine have seen increasing female representation to the point where these occupations are now considered gender neutral (Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, & Keyser Wentworth, 2007). Despite the accomplishments women have made with their career development, successfully balancing the spheres of work life and personal life becomes more complicated when professional women begin having children. Professional consequences of motherhood include reductions in pay and lost opportunities for advancement or additional responsibilities (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, & Grunow, 2009; Atkinson, 2010; Jones & Schneider, 2010; Theunisse, Verbruggen, Forrier, & Sels, 2011). In addition, tactics used

to balance work and home responsibilities, such as reduced schedules and telecommuting, are known to generate perceptions that working mothers are less devoted to their careers than parents who work traditional, full-time hours (Atkinson, 2010; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey, 2008; Jones & Schneider, 2010; Mavriplis et al., 2010).

When the demands from inflexible workplace cultures and policies become too much to handle, some professional women choose to opt out of the workplace in lieu of caring for their children (Jones & Schneider, 2010). As a result, their role shifts from that of a respected, contributing citizen in corporate America to a less glamorous role as a stay-at-home mother. These highly educated, previously employed women run the risk of being passed over upon their reentry into the workplace as their skills as homemaker and mother fall short of organizational staffing needs and requirements.

Background of the Study

Although women have made progress towards a more egalitarian role in society over the last 40 years, gender-based stereotyping still exists (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). The label of stay-at-home mother is still associated with visions of women cooking and cleaning, caring for their husbands and children, and organizing play groups and attending story time with their children at the local library. This perception of stay-at-home mothers is often accompanied by the assumption that these women have chosen homemaking and motherhood as a career and have little aspiration to work outside of the home (Coleman & Franiuk, 2011). This may be true of some stay-at-home mothers, however a subgroup of stay-at-home mothers exists in the United States who are

highly educated and had promising careers before they chose to stay home to care for children (Boushey, 2008; Ericksen, Jurgens, Garrett, & Swedburg, 2008; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Vejar, Madison-Colmore, & Ter Maat, 2006). Contrary to popular belief, 24.5% of stay-at-home mothers have completed a bachelor's degree, while another 7.4% have earned a master's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The absence of many highly educated, stay-at-home mothers from the workplace should be viewed as indeterminate, as their desire to return to work increases upon the gradual independence of their children (Ericksen et al., 2008; Wiese & Ritter, 2012).

Current research on the career aspirations of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers is limited. Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that 93% of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers eventually wish to return to their careers. However, Hewlett and Luce noted that less than half of these women actually secure a position proportionate with their past experience. An opportunity for these highly educated, stay-at-home mothers to successfully reenter the work force may exist as the BLS (2012) predicted that the labor force will continue to shrink through 2030, and occupations requiring a master's degree will increase by 21%. However, successfully reentering the job market will require stay-at-home mothers to examine their professional skills and take inventory of how their career development has progressed during their absence from the workplace.

Employing career reentry strategies, such as professional networking and obtaining additional education or training, may provide the contacts and skills a highly educated, stay-at-home mother needs to successfully relaunch her career. Despite the

benefits of staying at home, lack of time and excess income may prevent the mother from using and consequently benefitting from these strategies (Mavriplis et al., 2010).

Conversely, volunteerism may be more cost effective and less demanding of a stay-at-home mother's time; however, scholars have not provided information on the effectiveness of volunteerism as a career reentry strategy.

Current research on highly educated, stay-at-home mothers is limited. Some scholars have depicted this group of women as highly dedicated to their families, yet still aware of their long-term career aspirations (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012; Rubin & Wooten, 2007). From a mental wellness standpoint, the highly educated, stay-at-home mothers struggle to reclaim their self-esteem and reestablish their feelings of self-worth they once had when they worked outside of the home (Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Vejar et al., 2006). Based on the results of previous research and the existence of a gap in the literature on the topic, it is imperative to identify ways for this population to appreciate the value of their role as a stay-at-home mother, while also employing strategies to maintain their career marketability during their temporary absence from the workplace.

Problem Statement

Highly educated, stay-at-home mothers may struggle to reenter the workforce as their dated skills and perceived ambiguous professional commitment pose a challenge to potential employers (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Jones & Schneider, 2010). Therefore, it may be beneficial to understand and discover which career reentry strategies result in more favorable outcomes when stay-at-home mothers attempt to reenter the workplace.

Although previous researchers have shown that networking for employed professionals

yields positive career moves (Hoye, van Hooft, & Lievens, 2009), networking has not been one of the career reentry strategies employed by highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. In addition, research has not been conducted on the effects of volunteerism and additional education or training as potential career reentry strategies for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. In this study, I addressed that gap in the literature. I investigated whether networking, volunteerism, and additional education or training contribute to successful career reentry for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the career building activities of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their ability to reenter the workplace. There is an absence of current literature regarding the outcome of a job search by stay-at-home mothers when they employ career reentry strategies, such as networking, volunteerism, and additional education or training. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to fill that gap and determine what activities assist highly educated, stay-at-home mothers to successfully relaunch their careers. In addition, scholars have not explained the effect that long periods of workplace absences have on the career reentry attempts of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Aisenbrey et al. (2009) found that career penalties occur even during women's brief absences from the workplace. Therefore, I also considered how the length of workplace absence impacts a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to find a job.

Although the research regarding highly educated, stay-at-home mothers is almost nonexistent, research on stay-at-home mothers as a larger group is more available. These

researchers have portrayed stay-at-home mothers as hands-on and active in the lives of their children, but researchers also highlighted that these women are more depressed and have less self-esteem than their working counterparts (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Vejar et al., 2006). Therefore, a secondary purpose of this study was to contribute knowledge and information about highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and to differentiate this group of women from the majority of stay-at-home mothers who are less-educated and less focused on establishing a career outside of the home.

Nature of the Study

In this quantitative study, I analyzed a group of educated, professional women who previously exited the workplace to care for their children. I examined the relationship between the professional strategies these women employed during their workplace absence and their success with career reentry. Therefore, the data that were collected focused on the professional and social networks of each woman, the volunteer opportunities each woman was engaged with, and any additional education or training pursued during her time as a stay-at-home mother. This information was gathered using web-based surveys. Using previous conference participants from return-to-work experts, iRelaunch, working mothers were surveyed about the time they spent out of the workplace and how professional and career development activities, such as networking, volunteerism, and additional education or training affected their ease and ability to return to the world of work. Results of the survey questions were designed to reveal the impact of each activity on a successful career reentry for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Research Questions

In the primary research questions in this study, I sought to determine which factors contribute to a successful transition back into the workforce for highly educated, previously employed, stay-at-home mothers. The goal of this research is to address the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between length of workplace absence and the ability to reenter the workplace for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?
2. What is the relationship between network size and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at home mothers?
3. What is the relationship between the number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure employment upon her decision to reenter the workplace?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the completion of additional education and a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to successfully reenter the workplace?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the success of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's career reentry attempts and the completion of relevant, professional training during her workplace absence?
6. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

Theoretical Base

Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognition career theory (SCCT) provided the theoretical framework for the study. SCCT provided the structure for the present investigation as I focused on the relationship between personal goals, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy in relation to career decisions. Better understanding of these relationships can provide information to help highly educated, stay-at-home mothers use career reentry strategies to increase their success.

As a complement to the SCCT, Lent and Brown (2013) developed the social cognitive model of career self-management. This model focuses on ways that individuals manage career-related tasks over their life span, including career decision made when faced with unplanned life events, such as becoming a stay-at-home mother and unemployment. According to the model of career self-management, individuals have the means and the desire to take control over their personal career development and accomplish career goals. Therefore, the original SCCT and the more current model of career self-management are appropriate for use in the present study as a majority of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers express the desire to reestablish their career (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

It is important to note how some of the major facets of the original SCCT were considered and applied in the present study. One of the building blocks of the SCCT is the identification of personal goals. Jones and Schneider (2010) found that most women who pursued postsecondary education and began their careers planned to remain actively involved in the workplace, and only 15% of those highly qualified women had intentions

to leave the workplace after they had children. Of the women who left the workplace to become stay-at-home mothers, almost all had aspirations to return to work expressing the desire to find an employer with a more family-friendly work environment upon career reentry (Cabrera, 2009; Jones & Schneider, 2010; Mavriplis et al., 2010).

Another building block of the SCCT is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to complete tasks and accomplish goals. While employed, working mothers may exhibit high levels of self-efficacy; however, when these women become stay-at-home mothers, self-esteem and self-confidence begin to waver as intellectually challenging, work-related responsibilities are replaced by routine, domestic tasks (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012; Mavriplis et al., 2010; Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Rubin & Wooten, 2007). There is a limited amount of literature regarding highly educated, stay-at-home mothers' self-conceptions, but scholars have focused on stay-at-home mothers previously employed in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, medicine, law, and business and suggested that women in these groups exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy, which positively effects their career reentry decisions (Herr & Wolfram, 2009; Mavriplis et al., 2010).

The third building block of the SCCT addresses an individual's outcome expectations, which are defined as the predictions of performing certain behaviors (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2005). Outcome expectations refer to the question "what will happen if I try?" The purpose of the present study was to determine the effect of career strategies on a highly educated, stay-at-home mothers' career reentry attempts. Will a job search be more successful for a stay-at-home mother if she is actively networking, volunteering, or

pursuing additional education or training? Therefore, by addressing the purpose of the study and answering the research questions, outcomes from employing career reentry strategies for stay-at-home mothers can be determined.

The components of the SCCT provide a foundation for this study as I considered several facets of career development. In addition, the model of career self-management supports the study of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers by targeting individuals during various stages of their life span. The model of career self-management also prescribes the use of related behaviors that can positively impact career development.

Definition of Terms

Career reentry: To return to a satisfying, challenging, and income producing position in an organization.

Full time work: A paid position that requires an individual to work 40 hours or more per week.

Gainfully employed: Working for a wage.

Highly educated: Having earned a master's degree or higher.

Opt-out: An individual's choice to leave the world of work.

Part time work: A paid position in which an individual chooses to work less than 40 hours per week.

Previously employed: An individual's prior status in the labor force, having worked in a paid position that used his or her education and skills in a manner that was beneficial to the individual and the organization for which he or she worked.

Stay-at-home mother: A mother who has decided to forgo paid work outside of the home in order to care for her children full time.

Assumptions

The results of this study rely on several assumptions. A general assumption of the study was that all participants were truthful and honest. I preserved the participants' anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study, potentially eliminating their desire to provide false information.

In conjunction with the theoretical framework provided by the SCCT, I assumed that the participants possessed a personal goal to return to work. Although Lovejoy and Stone (2012) found that stay-at-home mothers who intended to return to work often chose alternative careers with a different employer, a majority of the participants in that study expressed a desire to rejoin the labor force. I did not differentiate between the participants' choice to pursue full-time or part-time employment, only that they were ready to return to work.

The final assumption of the study was related to the participants' motivation to return to work. Several factors can have an effect on an individual's decision to go back to work, such as continued independence of children, spouse's career situation, and general status of the job market. However, one of the assumptions of this study was that highly educated, stay-at-home mothers have personal reasons for returning to work and that their decisions are determined solely by the circumstances of other individuals.

Limitations

This study was limited in its focus on highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), only 7.4% of stay-at-home mothers possess a master's degree and are considered highly educated. Although the majority of stay-at-home mothers do not qualify as highly education based on the educational definition of this study, almost 25% of stay-at-home mothers have earned their bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). It is likely that less-educated, stay-at-home mothers have made contributions to the world of work before voluntarily leaving it. The inclusion of stay-at-home mothers with bachelor's degrees would most likely have an effect on the results of the present study, but their exclusion allows for a concentrated focus on high-achieving individuals as evidenced by their pursuit of graduate-level education.

The design of the study itself also produced limitations. In addition to criterion sampling based on educational level, I employed purposeful sampling. Only highly educated, stay-at-home mothers from the Midwest region of the United States were surveyed. The inclusion of stay-at-home mothers from only one section of the United States is likely to have had an effect on the study's results, limiting the extent to which the results can be generalized across the larger national pool of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

I did not consider the differences in career reentry success based on where the stay-at-home mother completed her education, resulting in a delimitation of the study. The strength and reputation of an Ivy League education, for example, may have a positive effect on a career reentry, but due to the sampling method of this study, highly educated,

stay-at-home mothers were studied in aggregate. I did not differentiate between stay-at-home mothers based on where they earned their graduate degree.

Significance of the Study

The number of articles published about women's roles in the workplace has increased significantly over the last 30 years, covering topics such as women in leadership, workplace gender inequities, female career paths, and traditionally feminine personality traits and their effect in the workplace. However, the topic of stay-at-home mothers, specifically highly educated and previously employed mothers, is seldom studied. Scholars tended to focus on the organizational factors that affect working mothers' decisions to leave the workplace (Herr & Wolfram, 2009; Jones & Schneider, 2010) or career redirection upon their return to work (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). In older studies relating to stay-at-home mothers, researchers described the social and psychological effects of the transition from working to staying at home (Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Vejar et al., 2006). These studies do not address the issue of career reentry despite the high number of stay-at-home mothers who wish to return to work (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). This gap in the literature was addressed by my attempt to define the relationship between the professional activities of stay-at-home mothers and their ability to reenter the workplace.

Although women are equally represented in the workplace in relation to their male counterparts, their full potential may be concealed amongst jobs of lower skill level. Known as the hidden brain drain, it is common for women to forgo high-paying, challenging jobs for more satisfying, part-time positions that are family-friendly, more

flexible, less skill intensive, and lower paying (Boushey, 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). As employers determine the economic loss to their organizations that occurs when working mothers self-select out of higher-level positions, reduce their hours, or leave the workplace altogether, the need to find mutually beneficial work arrangements for mothers/parents and the organization should become a corporate priority. In turn, modifying work options for working mothers and fathers may promote work/life balance in lieu of having to choose between work and family.

Summary of the Dissertation

In this study, I attempted to determine which activities are most beneficial to the long-term career development of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Literature on highly educated, stay-at-home mothers is limited, and the research regarding career reentry for this group of women is virtually nonexistent. Therefore, I attempted to fill the gaps in the literature and assist highly educated, stay-at-home mothers in their transition back to the professional world.

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the background, purpose, and significance of this study focused on highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their career reentry strategies. In Chapter 2, I review current literature and summarize recent research on women and their role in the world of work, including the transition from working mother to stay-at-home mother and the career reentry strategies of networking, volunteerism, and additional education and training. In Chapter 3, I discuss the chosen methodology of the study including the steps taken to create the study. In Chapter 4, I review the results and observations of the study. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the findings from the previous

chapter in relation to the study's research questions and provide suggestions for future research on the topic of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their career reentry strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Gender-related issues in the workplace such as pay inequities, glass ceilings, and discrimination have posed challenges for women trying to navigate through the corporate ranks. The workplace challenges that women face seem to multiply upon the birth of children, often times leaving these women with a difficult decision to choose between work or family. This choice contradicts the notion that women can “have it all,” suggesting that climbing the corporate ladder and successfully raising a family are mutually exclusive. For the small population of highly educated, working mothers who choose to leave the work force to stay home to raise their family, life becomes less hectic, yet more personally fulfilling (Herr & Wolfram, 2009; Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Tracy & Rivera, 2010). However, when the time is right for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother to return to work, she may find it difficult to secure employment as absence from the workforce and potentially outdated skills are a concern to some employers (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). In Chapter 2, I integrate research and theory that are relevant to educated, working mothers who opt-out of the workplace to become stay-at-home mothers. A review of the literature helped guide the purpose of the study, which was to determine which career reentry strategies are more beneficial when highly educated, previously employed, stay-at-home mothers attempt to transition back into the work force.

Chapter 2 contains three sections. In the first section, I explore the history of women and work including the career development of women, motherhood and its effect

on work, and the transitions out of and back into the world of work for mothers. In the second section, I review Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career theory, which served as the theoretical framework for the study. The third section concludes the chapter with a summary of the existing research, establishing a framework and foundation for the present study.

This literature review is based on a collection of peer-reviewed articles from Walden University's electronic databases including PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, ProQuest, Academic Search Premier, and SOC Index. The list of search terms used to locate relevant literature included *stay-at-home mothers*, *working mothers*, *women and work*, *work-life balance*, *women and career development*, *opt-out*, *career reentry*, *networking*, *volunteerism*, *continuing education*, and *professional development and corporate training*. The search terms were used individually and in various combinations to yield greater results. Finally, the search was limited to literature published within the last five years of the date the search was conducted.

Women, Work, and Motherhood

Career Development of Women

The pace and intensity of career development varies by individual, but generally, a career path trends upwards upon the completion of college (Bona, Kelly, & Jung, 2010). According to Super's (1975) self-concept theory of career development, career development is a continually changing, life-long process that is influenced by personal experiences and an individual's self-concept. College-educated women may have high expectations for their career upon graduation from college; however, for the women who

eventually marry and have children, the conflicting demands outside of work often result in a nonlinear career path (Coogan & Chen, 2007). Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) suggested that professional women in the modern workforce create a career model that includes part-time work and periods of unemployment, especially during child-bearing years. Career development for these women remains flat or temporarily stalls until a better balance between work and life is achieved. Despite the numerous advancements towards a more egalitarian society, some working mothers find themselves face-to-face with recurring gender-based issues that force them to choose between supporting feminist ideals or temporarily regressing back to traditional gender roles.

The Effects of the Second Wave of Feminism

Half a century ago, Friedan's *feminine mystique* (1963) transformed women's attitudes about their roles as housewives and mothers. At that time, 49% of all mothers stayed at home to care for the family (Pew Research Center, 2014), and women represented only 38% of the civilian work force (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). For the women who stayed home, Friedan stimulated a social and political movement as these mothers began questioning if there was more to life than cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the family. Their awareness of the educational and career opportunities outside of the home triggered a climate of change that sought gender equality over discrimination. With the support of women like Steinem, the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s were dedicated to broadening educational opportunities for women, strengthening the role of women in the workplace, and working towards pay equity. Through the creation of governmental acts such as Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and the

Civil Rights Act of 1964, women and other minorities were provided equal access to the educational and employment opportunities previously only available to White men.

As a result of the increase of women pursuing degrees and working outside of the home, unexpected social issues such as child care and work-life balance became concerns for many women (Boris & Orleck, 2011). Despite these life challenges, women continued to further their education, become more prominent in the corporate world, and take an active role in political and social activities. However, by the late 1990s, women's presence in the workplace began to level off, signaling a shift in attitude and behavior towards the feminist movement and ideals (Herr & Wolfram, 2009). Cotter et al. (2011) argued that despite the developments made over 20 years, further progress towards egalitarianism stalled in favor of women reverting back to traditional female roles. Although part of the blame for the standstill in women's labor force participation can be tied to a slow labor market (BLS, 2012), other factors like unreliable and costly childcare and the challenges of balancing work and life had driven working mothers to voluntarily leave their careers.

Women's Investment in Education

The enactment of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 affected women's access and pursuit of higher education. The success of the governmental act can be seen through the increase in women's degree completion rates over the last 4 decades. In 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 43% of all college graduates earning a bachelor's degree were women. By 2011, women surpassed men in bachelor degree completion, accounting for 57% of all graduates (Digest of Education Statistics, 2011).

The same pattern is evident in higher level degrees as the increase in women's degree completion in 1970 and 2011 were 38% and 60% respectively for master's degrees and 8% and 51% respectively for doctorates (Digest of Education Statistics, 2011).

Although the number of women on college campuses has increased, the NCES (2009) reported that women have not yet begun to diversify from the college majors that traditionally align with female career paths. For the 2011-2012 academic year, the NCES (2012) reported that the four most popular bachelor's degree for women were psychology, business administration, nursing, and elementary education and teaching. Pursuit of these degrees eventually fills the pipeline for traditionally female careers as teachers, nurses, and social workers. At the graduate level, education and social work are popular degrees that women choose; however, a master's degree in business is the most popular choice as 11% of female graduate students pursue this path (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Whitmarsh et al., 2007), allowing them to have the educational credentials for leadership and management roles in their respective industries.

Colleges, universities, and the federal government have been persuading college students, especially women, to pursue degrees in any one of the STEM careers. In 2009, only 24% of the STEM workforce was women (U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics, and Statistics Administration, 2011), prompting educational institutions to encourage women to pursue degrees in these underrepresented fields. Through combined initiatives, the educational and political sectors plan to create educational opportunities and support programs to increase the number of women in STEM programs by 1 million over the next decade (White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2011).

Increasing the number of women in the STEM pipeline not only increases the number of women in these fields, but it also impacts the gender pay gap as women in STEM careers earn 33% more than women in other career fields (U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics, and Statistics Administration, 2011).

Women's Increased Presence in the Workplace

In 1970, approximately 30 million women participated in the civilian work force (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau noted that the number jumped to 75 million, allowing women to have a 47% share of the overall labor force. The BLS (2012) estimated that between 2010 and 2020, the number of women in the labor force will grow at a rate of 0.7% compared to a rate of 0.6% for men.

The evolution of women's place in the work force is also evidenced by their leadership progression and the fact that women hold almost 40% of the total management positions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Despite these increases, women still struggle to reach the top corporate ranks. The percentage of women in Fortune 500 CEO positions has hovered between 3% and 4% over the last 5 years ("Women CEOs of the S&P 500 | Catalyst," n.d.). Women's representation in board rooms was also flat, remaining around 16% for the past 2 years ("Women on Boards," 2014).

Although women may not be well represented at the top ranks of the corporate sector, their numbers are more optimistic in the area of small business ownership. In 2011, women-owned businesses accounted for 30% of small business ownership in the United States, generating over a trillion dollars of revenue and employing over 7.7 million workers (Bosse & Taylor, 2012). In addition, the Department of Labor (2010)

reported that the growth rate of women-owned was increasing at one and a half times the national average.

Motherhood and its Impact on Work

Women have achieved many successes towards equality over the last 50 years; however, one aspect of the feminine role has not changed. Once a woman becomes a mother, managing the many aspects of life becomes challenging as priorities often times begin to shift. According to Ganginis Del Pino, O'Brien, Mereish, and Miller (2013), the vocational development of women is influenced by family. Thus, upon the arrival of children, career-oriented women become conflicted between their jobs and their traditional role of mother and homemaker (Medina & Magnuson, 2009).

Professional Effects of Motherhood

Working mothers seem to be trapped in a professional dilemma. Working mothers face challenges as they can be perceived as less committed to their jobs if sick children, school vacation days, unplanned snow days, or sudden family emergencies interrupt a typical work day or force working mothers to abandon their work responsibilities. Furthermore, Okimoto and Heilman (2012) found that working mothers who are committed to their careers are often perceived as self-oriented and less dedicated to their children. Waumsley and Houston (2009) concluded that employees with children endure more negative career effects than childless workers, with working mothers suffering disproportionately due to traditional gender roles and expectations (Ranson, 2012).

Gender stereotyping against working mothers also occurs during the hiring process. In a 2013 study by Correll, Benard, and Paik, college students were asked to rate

a pair of potential employees based on their resumes, personal fact sheets, and notes from screening interviews. After determining that the applicants were equal in skill, Correll et al. indicated that one applicant was a parent. Although both applicants were being considered for the same job, mothers were less likely to be hired, and when they were seen as the favorable candidate, the salary offered to them was over \$10,000 less than that offered to a childless woman (Correll et al., 2013).

Waumsley and Houston (2009) found that anticipated job commitment and anticipated career achievement were negatively affected by parental status. Both mothers and fathers were seen as less dependable than nonparents; but, parenthood was generally not as severe a liability for men as it was for women (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008). Aisenbrey et al. (2009) concluded that parents who chose to temporarily leave the workplace faced an increased risk of a downward move and reduced the likelihood of an upward move with their organization.

Motherhood also has an effect on women's earning power. Jones and Schneider (2010) found that women who leave the workplace or reduce their hours due to children forgo \$1 million over the course of their career. In the event that a working mother decides to temporarily exit the workplace, Theunisse et al. (2011) found a positive correlation between length of employment interruption and decrease in wages as there is little or no accumulation of professional skills during an absence from the workplace. Working mothers can also expect to decrease their earning potential by 37% if they chose to withdraw from the workplace for 3 or more years (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Jones & Schneider, 2010).

Work-Life Balance

One of the most widely researched challenges of working parents is their inability to reach an appropriate balance between their responsibilities at work and their obligations at home (de Vaus, 2009; Hoffnung & Williams, 2013; Omori & Smith, 2010; Smith, 2010). Although working fathers also experience this challenge, the difficulties associated with work-life imbalance are more complex for women, and women experience these difficulties for longer periods of time (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) claimed that working on evenings and weekends, extensive work travel, and stressful commutes during nonwork hours are sources of stress and overload for working mothers who are primarily responsible for children and domestic duties. Stress and overload can lead to burnout, depression, and job dissatisfaction (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2010). Furthermore, Brykman (2007) found that the imbalance faced by working mothers fosters a feeling of guilt and conflict between the competing roles of career woman and mother.

Options for Working Mothers

The driving force for working mothers to make changes in their professional lives stems from the imbalance between their responsibilities at work and at home (Mavriplis et al., 2010). However, changes that improve the situation at home often result in the forfeiture of opportunities at work. Therefore, the challenge for organizations is to find a way to support working mothers and fathers with options that recognize a working parent's role in the workforce and encourage and promote life balance.

Options to manage work-life balance range from maintaining the status quo to leaving the workplace to focus on nonwork roles and responsibilities. Each option has its personal benefits as well as its drawbacks. However, regardless of which option a working mother chooses, the end result should provide meaningful engagement, providing individuals with a sense of purpose, fulfillment, stimulation, and an outcome that aligns with personal values (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquina, Butterfield, & Koert, 2010).

Continue status quo. Despite the increasing challenges that working mothers face with work-life balance, the U.S. Census (2010) reported that women's labor force participation rates have not fallen due to the presence of children at home. In order to maintain their family's standard of living, most working mothers have to remain employed (Jones & Schneider, 2010). Less than 20% of the households in the United States follow the traditional format where the male is the breadwinner, leaving a majority of households that are either equally supported by male and female breadwinners or where females provide a majority of the family income (Cabrera, 2009).

Although financial concerns can influence a mother's decision to continue work or stay at home, the role and involvement of the spouse in domestic responsibilities is important as well. Gimenez-Nadal and Sevilla-Sanz (2011) found that in most developed countries, women spend 6 hours a day on housework and childcare, whereas men spend half that. However, in 2008, Boushey found that fathers were devoting 4 hours more to parenting than they had in the previous decade. Fathers are taking a more active part in their domestic role. Through increased paternal involvement, the opportunity for working

mothers to find a healthy work-life balance becomes more attainable. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) concluded that professional women who are able to manage work and life responsibilities are more successful, financially stable, have happier marriages, and are generally more satisfied with life.

Alter work arrangements. Options such as flex-time, telecommuting, work-at-home, and part-time work offer working parents a mechanism to improve work-life balance. Smith (2010) reported that 27.5% of all full-time workers took advantage of alternate work arrangements some time during the course of their careers.

The Employee Benefits Survey from the Society for Human Resource Management (2011) reported that organizations that offer flexible working arrangements vary in number and the programs offered. Fifty-three percent of the companies surveyed offered their employees the opportunity to work a flexible schedule while 35% allowed their employees the option to compress their work week (“2011 Employee Benefits Research Report”, 2011). The opportunity to work from home on an ad-hoc basis was offered by 45% of respondents whereas telecommuting on a full-time basis was only practiced by one fifth of the organizations that participated in the survey (“2011 Employee Benefits Research Report”, 2011).

The reduction in working hours to a part-time schedule is viewed favorably and used most often by working mothers (Baxter, 2011). In 2010, approximately 20% of all employed workers worked part-time, while 26.3% of employed women with children under 18 chose to reduce their work hours (Department of Labor, 2010). In contrast, only 6% of men with children under the age of 18 worked part-time (U.S. Census, 2010). As

the age of children decreases, the number of women who work part-time increases. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 30% of employed women with children under 3 years old chose to work less than full-time.

Although flexible working arrangements are often favored by working parents, Hibrecht et al. (2008) concluded that temporal flexibility does not necessarily restore the imbalance between work and life. From a domestic perspective, Baxter (2011) found a weak relationship between the flexibility of work hours and time spent with children. Baxter noted that participants used work-time flexibility to address other nonwork responsibilities such as household chores, community obligations, and caring for other family members (e.g., aging parents). Although part-time employment offers a more flexible work schedule for working parents, there are also professional drawbacks. Stone (2013) found that two-thirds of participants who worked part-time acknowledged that they often worked almost full-time hours but at a part-time pay. Additionally, part-time status has been linked to limited advancement opportunities and the stereotype that part-time workers are less devoted to their careers (Atkinson, 2010; Mavriplis et al., 2010).

Although alternative work arrangements can assist employed mothers to balance work and life, Tracy and Rivera (2010) concluded that organizational policies and culture still reward and favor long hours, face time, and traditional upward career models versus flexible, family-friendly practices. In a 2009 study by Waumsley and Houston, 32% of the respondents agreed that people with flexible work arrangements are less likely to advance in their careers while 42% of the respondents felt that leaving work on time versus staying later negatively affects their career.

Opt out. In 2003, Belkin coined the term *opt out* to describe the mass exodus of college-educated women in the labor force returning home to care for their children full-time. Belkin surveyed students from Stanford's graduating class of 1981 and found that 57% of all mothers had spent at least 1 year out of work to care for their children while 25% of mothers in that class had stayed home for 3 or more years. Belkin also noted that only 38% of the women from Harvard Business School's classes of 1981, 1985, and 1991 were working full-time. These numbers were disappointing to the proponents of the feminist movement; however, they failed to tout the accomplishments of working women as a whole. In later research, Boushey (2008) found that although many mothers were exiting the workplace, it was not to the extent that Belkin (2003) indicated. Boushey (2008) argued that despite the 2% drop in women's labor force participation rate between 2000 and 2004, women's participation in the labor force experienced tremendous growth between 1975 and 2000, jumping from 59.9% to 73.7%. Nonetheless, Belkin (2003) ignited the debate between the competing and often times conflicting roles between mother and career woman.

Jones and Schneider (2010) asserted that the choice for working mothers to leave the workplace is more so the result of inflexible workplace cultures rather than a maternal desire to stay at home with children. Factors that push working mothers out of the workplace include long hours, lack of available mentors, gender discrimination, and the work itself (Herr & Wolfram, 2009; Jones & Schneider, 2010; Mavriplis et al., 2010). Although decisions to become a career woman or a stay-at-home mother evolve over time, Jones and Schneider (2010) found that only 16% of highly qualified women had

intentions to quit after they had children, supporting the argument that factors that push women out of the workplace are stronger than the factors leading them to stay at home.

Although most college educated mothers remain active in the workplace, Hewlett, Sherbin, and Forster (2010) found that 31% of highly educated, employed women with children have opted out of their careers at some point. This figure represents a 6% drop from Hewlett and Luce's original study in 2005. One major reason for the drop in opt-out figures is the economy. Many working mothers feel pressured to remain employed due to financial necessity. Hewlett et al. (2010) discovered a 28% increase between 2004 and 2009 in the number of professional women with nonworking husbands, making the opt-out option for that specific group of working mothers unlikely. Despite the lower number of women opting out, Hewlett et al. (2010) found that mothers who exit the workplace stay out longer than they did a decade ago, with an average absence of 7 years.

The Transition from Career Woman to Stay-at-Home Mother

Although the number of stay-at-home mothers has steadily decreased over the past 40 years, those numbers are now beginning to increase. The Pew Research Center (2014) reported that in 2012, 29% of all mothers did not participate in the workforce compared to 23% in 1999. The stay-at-home mothers in the Pew study included traditional stay-at-home mothers who were home to care for their families, mothers who were unemployed but looking for work, disabled mothers, and mothers who were attending school. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that traditional stay-at-home mothers were younger, had lower incomes, and were less educated than other mothers. Over 40% of traditional stay-at-home mothers were younger than 35 compared to 38% of

working mothers (U.S. Census, 2012). Forty-five percent of stay-at-home mothers reported household incomes of less than \$50,000, while only 25% were considered affluent, with an annual household income of \$100,000 or higher. The concentration of stay-at-home mothers who had only earned a high school diploma was high; however, working mothers who had completed some college represented the largest group within the population. Although stay-at-home mothers were less educated in comparison to working mothers, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reported that almost 32% of stay-at-home mothers were highly educated, with approximately 25% of stay-at-home mothers having earned a bachelor's degree and 7% holding a master's degree or higher.

Jones and Schneider (2010) reported that most educated women prefer to maintain a working status due to the pride and independence a career offers. Vejar et al. (2006) found that most professional women who opted out of the workplace experienced personal trials during their time away from their careers. Extreme changes in priorities, responsibilities, and adult interaction challenge these professional women to reinvent themselves when they transition from the workplace to stay-at-home motherhood. Rubin and Wooten (2007) reported that the most difficult challenges of transitioning from career woman to stay-at-home mother were related to loss of identity and loss self-esteem. The significance of the loss of self-esteem may have more of an impact upon a stay-at-home mother's reentry into a career (Erickson et al., 2008; Greer, 2013; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012), but its full implications to an individual's personality, behaviors, and motivations can best be explained using Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Gorman, 2010; Lonnqvist et al., 2009). Most women in Rubin and Wooten's (2007) study felt that there was no

validation from spouses or society in general for the role of stay-at-home mother, and the work and effort put forth often went unnoticed and unappreciated.

Another challenge that career women faced when transitioning to full-time motherhood was the lack of adult stimulation and interaction (Bean, Softas-Nall, Eberle, & Paul, 2016). Many stay-at-home mothers structured their days around their children's schedules optimizing time spent with them, making it unlikely and often times inconvenient to interact with other adults. Other stay-at-home mothers reported that they no longer had time to themselves as their days and night were filled with care taking and domestic responsibilities (Hilbrecht et al., 2008).

Career Reentry for Stay-at-Home Mothers

Hewlett (2010) found that on average, stay-at-home mothers were absent from the workplace for 7 years. Mavriplis et al. (2010) indicated that one of the factors that impacts the return to work for educated, stay-at-home mothers is the feeling of isolation due to lack of adult interaction. Greer (2013) defined this reentry situation as *people-oriented* career reentry as its emphasis is on the personal and professional relationships developed while at work. Other stay-at-home mothers may seek a *job-oriented* reentry in order to regain access to certain aspects of work such as responsibility, mental challenges, and teamwork. Finally, Greer identified *money-oriented* reentry in which the financial rewards of work are motivators for a stay-at-home mother's return. Among highly qualified women, nearly 46% of women on a career break wanted to return so they could have their own source of income, but they also cited the enjoyment and satisfaction that working and having a career brought to their lives (Greer, 2013). Women who are

driven by people-orientated reentry may find networking to be the most productive strategy for returning to work, whereas those who are more focused on a job-orientated reentry may benefit from strategies such as volunteerism or additional education or training. However, Greer suggested that personal, financial, and family constraints have a stronger influence over reentry orientation.

Regardless of the reentry orientation, the need to return to the work force in a timely manner is underscored by the consequences that accompany over-extended absences, namely wage penalties and lack of upward career mobility (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). Extended absences from the workplace may indicate to an employer that a candidate's skills are outdated or their professional or personal skills are undesirable (Shore & Tashchian, 2013; Theunisse et al., 2011). Shore and Tashchian (2013) indicated that an increasing number of employers have become unwilling to hire job seekers who are not working or who have been out of the workforce for a certain length of time, emphasizing the necessity for educated, stay-at-home mothers to reenter the work force after a sensible length of time. Although making hiring decisions based on age is unlawful, research has indicated that many women reentering the workforce feel that the combination of their extended absence from the workplace and their advanced age restricts their employment opportunities (Barsh & Yee, 2011; Greer, 2013). On a positive note, Aisenbrey et al. (2009) found that shorter workplace absences have little effect on the ability to reenter the workforce, as highly educated women who take shorter leaves are generally able to return to the same or a similar job. The enactment of the Family and

Medical Leave Act of 1993 provides new mothers with job-protection for up to 12 weeks in the event they wish to temporarily leave the workplace to care for their newborn.

Barriers Affecting Reentry

Despite the attempts to eliminate all types of discrimination in the hiring process, age may negatively affect the reentry attempts of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Shore and Tashchian (2013) found that employers were less likely to hire individuals who were older than 55. A majority of stay-at-home mothers are under the age of 44 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). However, the 13% of stay-at-home mothers over that age must compete with younger, less expensive, and highly skilled workers, making reentry attempts challenging, especially for those who take over-extended absences from the workforce.

In addition to age, stay-at-home mothers reentering the workforce have no control over the current economic conditions, which may serve as a barrier to their reentry success (Dahling, Melloy, & Thompson, 2013). Regional job opportunities vary from market to market, making reentry for some women more difficult than for others. Success at reentry is also influenced by the number of other job-searchers in an area, namely those who are unemployed and the college students looking to enter the job market for the first time.

Reentry Strategies for Educated Stay-at-Home Mothers

A follow-up to the original study by Hewlett and Luce (2005) confirmed the earlier findings. In the study by Hewlett et al. (2010), only 74% of women reentering the workforce actually found employment, of which 40% were able to secure full-time work,

24% returned to work part-time, and 9% became self-employed. Regardless of the intentions of the job search, Greer (2013) noted that many women who wish to reenter the job market are not prepared to compete against other job seekers as their job skills are dated, their professional networks have withered, and they lack a clear and specific plan on their reentry strategy.

Networking. Networking is a conscious effort by an individual to contact friends, acquaintances, and other professionals for the purpose of obtaining information regarding available job opportunities (Hoye et al., 2009). Ramos-Rodríguez, Medina-Garrido, Lorenzo-Gómez, and Ruiz-Navarro (2010) cited that 65 to 85% of jobseekers found jobs through networking, underscoring the importance for stay-at-home mothers to retain existing professional connections and seek new network connections while they are out of the workplace. Hoye et al. (2009) posited that the structure and composition of professional networks determine the intensity and outcome of a job search, stressing the value of a diverse network of current and previous contacts for those wishing to reenter the workplace. Beaubien (2013) suggested that job seekers should spend 80% of their time networking and 20% sending out resumes. Furthermore, Hoye et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between the time spent networking with the number of job offers received.

Stay-at-home mothers face several challenges that may prevent them from retaining old networks and creating new ones. Although it is often believed that stay-at-home mothers have ample time during the day to work on their professional network, the reality is that most of a stay-at home mother's time is spent caring for children and

household duties (Gimenez-Nadal & Sevilla-Sanz, 2011). Therefore, it is difficult for a stay-at-home mother to participate in networking activities without help and support from others.

A more contemporary method of networking is to access social media in order to maintain prior contacts or cultivate new networks, and this approach can alleviate some of the networking challenges faced by stay-at-home mothers. Dalton (2011) stated that online networking is ideal for stay-at-home mothers as it is self-scheduling and can be fitted around other activities and responsibilities. Moreover, social networking websites allow individuals to connect to others despite time, distance, and socio-economic differences. Not only are social networking sites used by job seekers, but organizations are also increasing their use of professional social networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn) during the hiring process (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Schuele and Madison (2010) found that 72% of companies plan to increase their use of social networking sites for recruiting. Professional organizations have also used social networking as a means to connect people with similar career interests. Industry-related sites such as imanet.org (The Association of Accountants and Financial Professionals in Business) and siop.org (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology) offer field professionals access to industry specific news, certification and continuing education requirements, professional event calendars and conference information, and opportunities to connect with peers and industry experts. Online communities such as these have the potential to be a valuable networking source for all job seekers in the respective fields.

Volunteerism. Although there is little research regarding the effectiveness of volunteerism as a job search strategy, there is an abundance of information on the value that organizations place on the act of volunteering. Madison, Ward, and Royalty (2012) noted an increase in the number of organizations that have formalized volunteer programs for their employees. The Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy's 2010 report found that 92% of the 171 organizations surveyed had formalized volunteer programs within their company, including 61 of the Fortune 100 companies. Benefits of corporate volunteerism include personal and professional development, greater sense of teamwork, decreases in work-related stress, and improved work-life balance (Longenecker, Beard, & Scazzero, 2012). The value that organizations place on volunteerism signals to job seekers that volunteerism is a desirable characteristic, and as a result, volunteering as a strategy may benefit stay-at-home mothers seeking to reenter the workforce.

Educated, stay-at-home mothers who wish to reenter the workforce may also reap unexpected rewards from allocating some of their time to volunteering. In addition to the perceived value to potential employers, volunteerism provides stay-at-home mothers with a vehicle to develop or sharpen skills, improve self-esteem, build confidence, and establish a network (O'Brien, Burls, Townsend, & Ebden, 2011; Shore & Tashchian, 2013). Kulik (2010) also found that volunteerism leads to a sense of personal well-being and individual growth among many women.

Additional education and training. In order to differentiate themselves from other job seekers, Schuele and Madison (2010) encouraged stay-at-home mothers seeking to reenter the workforce to be prepared to discuss activities that have allowed them to remain current in their field. Theunisse et al. (2011) stated that nonworking or unemployed individuals who further their education signal to employers an eagerness to learn and a motivation to advance their careers. Additional education and training for women reentering the workforce was found to increase confidence and self-esteem and improve job search skills (Greer, 2013; Schuele & Madison, 2010). Schuele and Madison also found that returning to school or pursuing additional training or certification can act as an avenue for professional networking, which improves the likelihood of a successful reentry. Although this approach to reentry implies an emphasis on job fit, Lovejoy and Stone (2012) noted that highly educated, stay-at-home mothers wishing to reenter the workplace also placed a high priority on organizational fit. The focus on person-organization fit results in a better match between the values and culture of the organization and those of the job seeker and often leads to greater career satisfaction (Posner, 2010; Reh fuss, Gambrell, & Meyer, 2012). However, having the skill set to match available job opportunities may provide reentry women with the leverage needed to make it past the first step in the hiring process.

Pursuing additional education and training as a means to be more competitive in the marketplace also poses potential challenges for stay-at-home mothers who wish to reenter the workforce. Barriers such as distance to the institution, lack of child care, course schedules and offerings, and high financial costs may prohibit some women from

furthering their education (Greer, 2013). In addition to these challenges, many mothers seeking to reenter the workforce may struggle with deciding which educational path or training program fits their short term needs and long term goals. Theunisse et al. (2011) stated that supplemental education or training must be relevant to past education and work experience to be considered valuable. However, general training courses such as career development workshops have also been shown to be extremely valuable, as individuals who participated in training courses and workshops were shown to be less stressed and more prepared for their job search than women who did not participate in similar trainings (Mavriplis et al., 2010).

Career Options During Reentry

Reintegrating highly educated, stay-at-home mothers into the workplace is essential due to the many benefits that women bring to an organization. There have been strong correlations between the number of women in senior positions or serving on corporate boards and the financial performance and overall health of an organization (Bansak, Graham, & Zebedee, 2011; Widmer, 2013). In addition, hiring stay-at-home mothers seeking to reenter the workforce may be a partial solution to filling the large number of expected job openings as baby boomers exit the workplace (BLS, 2012; Greer, 2013).

Stay-at-home mothers have several options upon their decision to return to work. The most convenient option for reentry would be to return to a former employer. This may be the easiest strategy; however, research suggests it may not be an option of choice for most women. Jones and Schneider (2010) found that while almost all of the subjects

in their study had intended to go back to work, 95% of them said they would not return to the same employer. Some of the reasons why women chose not to return to a previous employer included the lack of flexibility and the absence of a family friendly work environment.

Upon the decision to search for career opportunities with new employers, women reentering the workforce must rely on job search strategies such as networking, volunteerism, additional education or additional training. The act of networking will likely produce the most amount of job leads (Ramos-Rodríguez et al., 2010). However, volunteerism and additional education and training not only provide reentry women with marketable skills, but these strategies can also serve as vehicles for networking.

Temporary work arrangements. Reentry women who may not wish to immediately commit to a permanent position have several short term options for getting back into the workforce. Contract work, projects, and temporary assignments allow reentry workers opportunities to evaluate potential employers, use their previous skill sets, learn new skills, and create a larger professional network (de Graaf-Zijl, van den Berg, & Heyma, 2011). Miller and Miller (2012) stated that contract and project-based work have become more attractive to job seekers due to flexibility, minimal overtime, and the technological benefits of being able to connect from anywhere. Bonet, Cruz, Fernández Kranz, and Justo (2013) stated that working mothers value temporary work as it allows them to better manage the demands of work and life. de Graaf-Zijl et al. (2011) cited was the ability to transition into permanent work as a major benefit of temporary work assignments. Twelve percent of individuals in temporary work assignments

transitioned into permanent work after 6 months, while 43% of temporary workers transitioned into permanent work after a period of 6 years (de Graaf-Zijl et al., 2011). The use of temporary workers is popular, and research has shown that as many as 58% of U.S. companies expect to use temporary workers, ranging from basic administrative assistants to specialized workers such as lawyers, marketing professionals, accountants, engineers, and consultants (Miller & Miller, 2012).

Several companies have taken the concept of temporary work arrangements and shaped them into successful programs that fit their industry, work force needs, and employee desires. Goldman Sachs began their first *returnship* program in 2008 by providing reentry workers with paid opportunities to work in short term, nonbinding professional work arrangements in such areas as IT and operations. Goldman Sachs' returnship program has helped over 150 people around the world make a successful transition back to work. Other organizations, such as Morgan Stanley, Credit Suisse, and Deutsche Bank have followed suit and improved their reentry internship programs due to the successful utilization of this untapped talent pool (Cohen, 2012).

Demanding workloads and heavy travel requirements in public accounting make it difficult for working parents (particularly mothers) to continue in the field (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011). To retain top women talent in the accounting profession, many firms have developed policies to help families better manage work and life and also offer programs for individuals ready to reenter the workforce after an absence. PriceWaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) Full Circle program can be best described as a temporary leave arrangement versus a temporary work assignment. Participants in this

program are allowed to take up to 5 years off to devote to family and then rejoin the firm. During the time away from the firm, individuals have access to a coach, networking opportunities, and paid training and development opportunities (Demirdjian, 2009). These resources are provided in an attempt to keep skills sharp and relationships strong in preparation for reentry into the public accounting profession. PwC also offers the Flexibility Talent Network, which temporarily employs tax and audit professionals during the busy times of the accounting year, namely January through April. Other accounting firms such as Deloitte, KPMG, and BDO offer extended leave programs and return to work programs for employees and former employees interested in rejoining the accounting and financial professions (Fishman Cohen & Steir Rabin, n.d.).

Entrepreneurship. A majority of reentry women find full or part-time corporate positions, but approximately 10% of reentry women choose to start their own business. In the United States, there over 10 million women-owned businesses that create \$2 trillion of income annually (Nel, Maritz, & Thongprovati, 2010). According to the National Women's Business Council (2010), the rate of women who start their own business is twice the rate of men, indicating the desire for women to leave corporate America and work by their own rules. Rogers (2012) found that mothers ready to reenter the workplace who were not satisfied with their previous jobs or previous careers, found that self-employment was a better way to manage the conflict between work and life. The uniqueness of being a *momprenneur* is the ability to be the boss at work and at home. However, many mompreneurs also cite a sense of achievement, personal satisfaction, and the ability to earn an income as additional benefits of restarting a career as an

entrepreneur (Nel et al., 2010). Professional literature fails to document the specific industries most popular for mompreneurs to pursue; however, an overwhelming majority of start-up businesses by mothers focus on infant and child-inspired products. The National Women's Business Council (2012) reported health care, social services, and educational services as top industries for women-owned businesses; however, no indication was made as to whether the female business owners were mothers.

Although the benefits of being self-employed are numerous, many reentry women find entrepreneurship challenging. Ironically, the benefits and responsibilities of being self-employed may also force some mompreneurs to work endless hours, jeopardizing the seemingly elusive balance between work and life. Rogers (2012) stressed the importance of having or obtaining a business background in order to be successful with self-employment, and Nel et al. (2010) noted that most mothers who start a business face challenges due to a lack of industry knowledge, difficulty securing and managing financial resources, and problems properly allocating human resources.

Theoretical Framework: The Social Cognitive Career Theory

The theoretical lens for this study emphasizes the self-concept of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their strategies for career reentry. Although Lent et al.'s social cognitive career theory (1994) provided the primary framework for the study from a career development perspective, it is important to note the significance and application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as it relates to highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their motivation to reenter the workforce. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) suggests that motivation is influenced by individual needs that are hierarchical; lower

level needs influence individual's attitudes and behavior until those needs are satisfied. Once satisfied, the next level of need directs and influences behavior. For many highly educated, stay-at-home mothers, the two lowest level needs of Maslow's hierarchy (i.e., physiological needs like food and shelter and safety needs like personal and financial security) are met through financial support from their working spouse. These stay-at-home mothers may satisfy their next highest need (i.e., the need for belonging and love) through their relationship with their husband (Rubin & Wooten, 2007); dependence of their children (Medina & Magnuson, 2009); and adequate socialization with other adults (Kulik, 2010).

The next highest need in Maslow's hierarchy is esteem needs. These needs can be satisfied by recognition, achievement, self-respect, and respect from others. Rubin and Wooten (2007) found that most highly educated, stay-at-home mothers who left their careers to care for their family had diminished levels of self-esteem and a loss of their identity from the transition to being *just a mom*. At the time the stay-at-home mother is ready to reenter the workforce, her diminished self-concept may hinder her job search unless steps are taken to reverse or reduce her sense of loss. Maslow's (1940) theory holds that people are motivated to participate in activities that they perceive as helping them meet a need. Therefore, a highly educated, stay-at-home mother is more likely to employ any one of the reentry strategies highlighted in this study if the strategy can provide her with a sense of achievement, restore her self-respect, and revive her dormant professional identity.

However, reinventing a persona that projects a career-oriented, intelligent, skilled, and ambitious identity poses challenges for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers who voluntarily exited the workplace to care for their families. The difficulty in redefining oneself in this respect may best be explained using elements from Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In Goffman's view, individuals establish their identities through performances that are developed by the interaction between their environment and their audience. Therefore, the primary setting for a stay-at-home mother is the home and the audience for which she bases her performance is her children and spouse, making her identity more domestic in nature. Conversely, the woman's previously established identity as a career woman was often played out in an office or board room, with her audience comprised of motivated, bright, business-minded individuals.

Katz-Wise, Priess, and Hyde (2010) posited that when women undertake the role of stay-at-home mother, they psychologically adjust their identity by making family more salient than their career. Although the role of career woman can provide many opportunities to portray a successful, confident, and capable individual, a typical performance for a stay-at-home mother includes cooking, cleaning, caring for children, and other activities that lack the type of challenges and mental stimulation encountered in the workplace. As Rubin and Wooten (2007) noted, women who shed their professional identities in favor of their motherhood role lose their sense of identity and self-esteem. Although the role of stay-at-home mother offers much intrinsic value to a woman, Goffman (1959) may define this performance as false or contrived if a return to her

professional role is a better portrayal of a woman's true identity and offers her audience more of an honest performance.

The return to work for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother may help to redefine her identity; however, reentry challenges arise from her new audience's confusion between her contradictory appearance and manner. Goffman (1959) described appearance as a function to portray to the audience the performer's social status. Statistics show that stay-at-home mothers are less educated than other mothers (U.S. Census, 2012), supporting the stereotype that stay-at-home mothers are lower in social class. However, the manner in which a highly educated, nonworking mother portrays her domestic and professional roles can be inconsistent to society's expectation that most stay-at-home mothers are not formally educated and most formally educated adults are career-oriented and working. So why do educated mothers with a strong educational background and impressive professional credentials choose to forgo higher status for a role with lower perceived status, especially if it requires long hours of mindless tasks and no pay? This scenario is confusing to the audiences of the educated, stay-at-home mother, but more so puzzling to the stay-at-home mom herself, as she tries to determine which performance best aligns with her desired identity. Upon reentry, stay-at-home mothers must participate in activities that indicate to her audience that she desires and deserves to play a role in the labor force. These reentry activities, or strategies, may help the stay-at-home mother reestablish her career identity while also rebuilding her self-esteem. Meeting this need in Maslow's hierarchy allows the stay-at-home mother to progress to the next level of need in the hierarchy, self-actualization, in which she can present her

true identity via the performance and role she was destined to play. Through the application of Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals help shape a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's professional identity, positively affecting her self-esteem that was damaged upon her transition to full-time motherhood. Using the SCCT as a theoretical framework, the goal of this study was to determine the effect of certain actions and behaviors have upon the career reentry efforts of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT is built upon three building blocks which include self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. In addition, the ability to incorporate the effect of gender on career development makes the SCCT particularly relevant to the present study. According to the SCCT, gender affects and influences an individual's unique experiences over the course of a life span, which in turn affects an individual's attitude and outlook on work and life. Therefore, when a highly educated, working woman becomes a mother, the unique experience and new role has a profound effect on the other roles in her life. Although the function of raising children and caring for household responsibilities should be shared equally between parents, women take on the greater share of those duties often voluntarily sacrificing their careers to do so (Gimenez-Nadal & Sevilla-Sanz, 2011).

Due to several social, financial, economical, and personal changes over the past 20 years, Lent and Brown (2013) revised the SCCT to better accommodate the infinite directions of individual career development. In an attempt to better explain the process of career development, Lent and Brown (2013) adapted the SCCT to incorporate some

aspects of Super's developmental self-concept theory, which posits that career development is a life-long process (Super, 1975). Lent and Brown's (2013) social cognitive model of career self-management is a more effective tool that attempts to identify career self-management behaviors in varying life contexts.

Career self-management is achieved through adaptive career behaviors such as process skills, agentic competencies, coping skills, and self-regulatory behaviors that can be modified and changed throughout the life span (Lent & Brown, 2013). The life stages identified in the social cognitive model of career self-management mirrors that of Super's (1975) life stages and includes growth (birth to teen), exploration (teens to mid 20s), establishment (mid 20s through mid 40s), maintenance (mid 40s through mid 60s), and disengagement/decline (late 60s through retirement). Lent and Brown (2013) built upon Super's (1975) life stages to identify adaptive career behaviors across each stage that help an individual guide and direct their own career development. The present study primarily focused on reentry women in the establishment stage where managing work/life conflicts and preparing for career-related changes strongly influences career decisions.

Self-efficacy can be defined as an individual's belief in his/her ability to perform a specific task. In the early stages of the life span, young women and men prepare themselves for a career by pursuing higher education, formalizing career goals, and managing the transition from school to work. Individuals in this stage measure their self-efficacy by asking, "Can I be successful in school/work?" As individuals move into the early stages of the establishment phase, the focus shifts completely over to work, and self-efficacy is determined by reaching a personally defined level of career success. In

later phases of this stage, however, marriage and children add complexity to career development as the ability to manage work and life becomes more difficult. The time invested for parents to properly care for infants and young children is great and is often accompanied by changes in parents' sleeping patterns, interrupted daily schedules, and little or no personal time. The reallocation of time, which may heavily favor the young child(ren), ultimately affects the caretaker and his or her other life roles. Working parents, especially mothers, may question their efficacy as an employee as well as a parent. Partial dedication to both roles rarely produces a desired result, whereas full dedication to one or the other often results in an unintended sacrifice.

Self-efficacy is grounded in the question: Can I do this? However, outcome expectations ask the question: What will happen if I try? For highly educated, working mothers, the choice to exit the workplace to become a stay-at-home mother has many uncertainties. What will happen if I leave my job to care for my children? Will my new role be as rewarding as my career? Furthermore, as these mothers progress through the life stage and are ready to reenter the workforce, greater uncertainties arise as some aspects of the job search process are beyond their control. However, employing specific job search strategies during the career break such as networking, volunteering, or seeking additional education and training may provide stay-at-home mothers with the tools needed to achieve successful career reentry outcomes.

Personal goals are the final building block of the SCCT and rely on an individual's desire to engage in a specific activity or influence a particular outcome (Lent et al., 1994). When setting goals, individuals must balance their desire to have a

successful career against the sacrifices that must be made to achieve their goals. The personal goals of highly educated, working mothers can range along a continuum from staying at home to care for children and/or other family members to attaining a position in senior management. If a working mother's goal is to take on the traditional maternal role, she may decide to reduce her work hours or opt-out of the workforce altogether. Other working mothers may have more professional goals and ambitions that are more career centered. It is important to note that goals can be modified over an individual's life span as personal situations change, children become more independent, or an individual's outlook or attitudes change due to time or circumstance.

Summary of Literature Review

Research articles focused exclusively on highly educated, stay-at-home mothers were limited. However, research on topics such as motherhood, career development among women, and work-life balance were plentiful. An overarching theme of the related literature was that working mothers continue to struggle to a proper fit between their roles and responsibilities at work and at home. The literature highlighted negative aspects of the dual roles as work inequities continues to exist, the glass ceiling appears impenetrable, and work-life balance seems elusive (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011; de Vaus, 2009; Hoffnung & Williams, 2013; Nixdorff & Rosen, 2010). The available literature indicated that stay-at-home mothers, regardless of their level of education, experience low self-esteem and feelings of isolation (Rubin & Wooten, 2007), suffer from decreased well-being (Rizzo, Schiffrin, & Liss, 2013), and are viewed negatively by working mothers (Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick, & Harvey, 2008). Finally, the

literature described challenges facing reentry women that included wage penalties for longer lengths of absence (Aisenbrey et al., 2009) and skill degradation, which reduced the likelihood of being hired (Schuele & Madison, 2010).

It is vital to research the attitudes towards work and life of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their career reentry behaviors because their presence in both the work and the home settings produces value personally, organizationally, and socially. From an organizational perspective, women's presence brings diversity of thought, leadership, and personality traits equal to or better than those of men (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Women also contribute to overall organizational success (Bellou, 2011).

From a personal perspective, mothers who sacrifice their careers to stay at home bring value to the family by focusing on the care and well-being of its members. They also ensure the overall health and management of the household. It can be argued that highly educated, stay-at-home mothers who reenter the workforce offer potential employers valuable work skills such as planning, budgeting, communication, project management, and team building as a result of their years in managing a household and a family. However, the real value for organizations when hiring highly educated, stay-at-home mothers lies within the rare and valuable soft skills that are learned and developed while being a stay-at-home parent, skills such as patience, tolerance, maturity, and the ability to multi-task, to name a few.

Greer (2013) also found that stay-at-home mothers returning to the workplace were highly motivated to perform. These reentry women are focused on completing their tasks and doing their job well in hopes to reestablish their careers and prove themselves

as professionals. Despite the many benefits of appropriately exercising the skills and talents of women at different phases and roles of their lives, the available literature fails to outline the strategies needed for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers to successfully transition back to their professional roles once they are ready to do so. The goal of the present study was to fill that gap in order to discover the value that working mothers and highly educated, stay-at-home mothers offer at different stages of their life span.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship between the career reentry activities of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their ability to successfully return to the workplace. There was a gap in the information regarding highly educated, stay-at-home mothers, and most studies conducted on this population were qualitative in nature. Although a wealth of knowledge is gained through qualitative research, these types of studies are not designed to objectively identify relationships between the variables of interest. Therefore, a quantitative approach was deemed appropriate for the present study as this type of research can be used to describe the connection among variables by analyzing numeric data (Creswell, 2013). Using a quantitative approach, I examined the correlation between the career building activities of networking, volunteerism, and seeking additional education and training and the outcome of successful reentry into the working world for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Networking, volunteerism, and training acted as continuous variables and were calculated quantitatively (i.e., the number of people in the network, number of volunteer hours worked, and number of hours spent in relevant professional training). As a categorical variable, additional education was measured by the completion of additional degrees or postgraduate certifications. The relationship between job search self-efficacy and successful career reentry was also studied as it directly related to the study's theoretical foundation, SCCT. To measure self-efficacy, the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE) was used. The NGSE measures an individual's perception of his or her

ability to perform across a variety of different situations. In the present study, this referred to a participant's ability to employ job search behaviors that ultimately affected her ability to secure employment. The dependent variable, successful reentry, was measured by employment status, namely a participant's attainment of a paid position, commensurate with her skills, ability, and desire upon her decision to return to the workforce.

In Chapter 3, I explain the research design; review the research questions; restate the hypotheses; describe the setting, population, and sample; define the measures used; summarize the data collection and analysis procedures; and explain the measures taken for the protection of participants.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a nonexperimental, quantitative method employing a survey design. As the goal of this research was to provide numerical data on the successful return of stay-at-home mothers to the work force based on objective measures such as size of network, number of volunteer hours, additional education and training, and levels of self-efficacy, this design was deemed most appropriate (Creswell, 2013; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2012; Hoyer et al., 2009; Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Konstam, Tomek, Celen-Demirtas, & Sweeney, 2014; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). Items used in the survey were based on prior studies focusing on unemployed persons and their attempt at reemployment.

Creswell (2013) defined the components of research design as the intersection between philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and methodology. Based on these components,

a quantitative research design was best suited for this study. The present study was guided by a postpositivist worldview; I employed a survey as the strategy of inquiry, and I relied on data collection, analysis, and interpretation prescribed by quantitative research methods. A postpositivist worldview reflects the need to identify and evaluate the causes that influence outcomes and the objective measurement of reality (Creswell, 2013). The goal of this research was to describe the relationship between the success of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers when securing employment upon the decision to reenter the work force, job search self-efficacy, and the job search strategies practiced during her workplace absence (i.e., networking, volunteerism, and additional education and training). Objective measurement of these variables was best achieved through numerical analysis.

Creswell (2013) identified several strategies for inquiry, including experimental designs, nonexperimental designs, narratives, grounded theory studies, and case studies. Due to the need to efficiently collect a large amount of information in a relatively short amount of time, a nonexperimental survey design was deemed suitable for the present study. In addition, the correlational nature of the study allowed me to determine how variables were related, a task that was not measurable through qualitative strategies of inquiry. Finally, a quantitative research design was chosen based on my use of closed-ended questions and predetermined approaches for data collection. Existing surveys from previous studies that focused on networking, volunteerism, and additional education and training upon career reentry were used to form the basis of the present study's survey.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main focus of this study was to describe the relationship between the independent variables of networking, volunteerism, additional education and training, and self-efficacy and the dependent variable of reemployment success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Reemployment success was defined as participants' attainment of paid positions commensurate with their skills, abilities, and desires. Although I focused on career reentry variables, scholars have not acknowledged the effect of length of workplace absence on reemployment success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Based on a previous study of work force reentry, long lengths of workplace absence were operationally defined as nonparticipation in the paid work force for 3 or more years (Padula, 1994). On the basis of this definition, I asked the following:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between length of workplace absence and the ability to reenter the workplace for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

H_01 : No significant differences exist between a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's length of workplace absence and her attainment of a paid position commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_{a1} : Lengths of workplace absence in excess of 3 years for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother negatively impacts her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

Networking has been deemed as a career-related behavior that yields positive results on an individual's professional development, identification of business opportunities, and job searches (Dalton, 2011; Durbin, 2011; Hoye et al., 2009; Sharafizad, 2011). Networks, in the context of a job search, are made up of friends, relatives, and acquaintances who may help an individual identify job opportunities. Hoye et al. (2009) further defined networks by their structure and composition and posited that certain network characteristics foster job search behavior and ultimately produce positive outcomes in the form of job opportunities. The structure of a stay-at-home mother's network was defined by the size of her social and professional network (i.e., the number of people to whom an individual was connected; Hoye et al., 2009; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Based on previous studies, I asked the following:

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between network size and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at home mothers?

H₀2: The size of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's professional and social network has no effect on her ability to obtain a paid position equal to her skills, abilities, and desires upon her decision to reenter the workplace.

H_a2: A network of 100 or more physical and virtual contacts will have a positive effect on a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to secure a desired position upon her decision to reenter the workplace.

O'Brien et al. (2011) described volunteerism as a mechanism for gaining confidence and improving self-esteem through the process of acquiring new skills and refreshing outdated ones. Shore and Tashchian (2013) found a positive link between

volunteerism and reemployment, citing that volunteerism can be used to create a favorable impression with potential employers or to expand the size of a person's social network. Based on a previous study by Konstam et al. (2014), volunteerism was operationally defined by the number of hours that individuals invest in volunteer-related activities. Therefore, I asked the following:

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure employment upon her decision to reenter the workplace?

H₀₃: The number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother has no significant difference on her ability to obtain a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_{a3}: Greater number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother positively affects her ability to obtain a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

Wanberg et al. (2002) conceptualized a model of reemployment success. Factors of reemployment success such as job search intensity, a job seeker's economic need to work, and a job seeker's reemployment constraints were found to have an effect on job search efforts. Although these job search components were not addressed in the present study, other factors of reemployment success such as job seeker social capital and job seeker human capital are examined. The role of social capital in career reentry success has been previously discussed. Human capital, as defined by Wanberg et al. (2009), was

operationalized in the present study by level of education, tenure at last job, and a self-reported assessment of skills and qualifications. Higher levels of education have been associated with higher percentages of employment (“Want to Work?,” 2010) and faster reemployment rates up to 13.5 years of education (Wanberg et al., 2002). On the basis of previous literature, I asked the following:

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between the completion of additional education and a highly educated, stay-at-home mother’s ability to successfully reenter the workplace?

H_04 : The completion of additional postsecondary degrees or the completion of postgraduate certificate programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother has no significant difference on her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_a4 : There is a significant relationship between the completion of additional postsecondary degrees or postgraduate certificate programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to successfully reenter the workplace

Additional training to update prior skills can prove worthwhile in a job search. Tchibozo (2007) found that individuals who participated in training programs were more likely to find permanent work. Individuals who participated in training programs of 12 months or less in length formed the basis of the research question and hypothesis that states

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between the success of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's career reentry attempts and the completion of relevant, professional training during her workplace absence?

H₀₅: There is no significant difference between the number of months completed in relevant, professional training programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_{a5}: There is a significant difference between the number of months completed in relevant, professional training by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

Finally, self-efficacy related to job search behaviors represents an essential component in the present study. Rubin and Wooten (2007) found that educated, professional women who became stay-at-home mothers after the birth of their children experienced lower levels of self-esteem upon the transition. Antecedents of a job search, which include self-esteem and self-efficacy, were found to have a strong relationship to job search behaviors (Kanfer et al., 2001), and therefore represent a key variable in this study.

Research Question 6: What is the relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

H₀₆: No significant differences exist for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers to successfully reenter the workplace based on their level of self-efficacy.

H_{a6} : There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Population and Sample

The population under investigation in this study consisted of working mothers who had taken extended absences from their careers in order to stay at home to care for their family and then successfully reentered the working world. A purposive sample of this population was used, surveying interested participants who (a) were highly educated, holding a master's degree or higher; (b) were experienced professionals, having gained occupational experience before leaving the workplace; (c) freely chose to opt out of the workplace to care for young children at home; and (d) successfully reentered the workplace after 3 or more years away from the paid work force. Reemployment success was a self-reported measurement of the highly educated, stay-at-home mothers' reentry efforts. Participants were recruited throughout the United States based on their association with the iRelaunch social media group. iRelaunch is an organization that supports the talent pool of professionals who have taken a career break and are ready to return to the world of work. iRelaunch-sponsored events such as annual conferences, small group training, and individual coaching sessions provided this group of career "relaunchers" with the tools needed to effectively begin the reentry process. Since 2008, over 13,000 individuals have attended various iRelaunch return-to-work events, of which several thousand of those attendees have joined iRelaunch's LinkedIn and Facebook social media groups. Fishman Cohen and Steir Rabin (2014) reported that 93% of the

attendees of the iRelaunch conferences are women; 100% are college-educated, and 70% of the group have earned master's or professional degrees, primarily MBAs and JDs.

A minimum sample size of 322 participants was needed for this study using iRelaunch's LinkedIn group of 2500 members. The sample size was calculated by applying the standard error estimate, with a standard α -level of .05 and the recommended power of .80. A sample size of 322 participants was necessary to detect a small effect size from this study. According to Gravetter and Wallnau (2012), the power of a statistical test is the probability that the results will be significant and the test will identify a treatment effect if one actually exists.

Measures

The measures used in this study were based on prior studies on the correlation between the variables of interest and reemployment status (Hoye et al., 2009; Kanfer et al., 2001; Konstam et al., 2014; Wanberg et al., 2002). Due to the lack of quantitative studies on the reemployment success of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers, the measures were selected based on research related to job search efforts of unemployed persons. Likert scales were used to quantify each participant's experiences with the variables under study.

- Length of workplace absence: Length of workplace absence was measured by a single question: How long have you been absent from the paid work force to care for your children?
- Network size: Network size was determined by the self-reported number of individuals in a participant's personal and professional network who

might be able to assist in their job search (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.)

Previous researchers have defined a personal or professional network as a group of individuals who are able to provide information, opportunities, advice, or support regarding career-related matters (Seibert et al., 2001).

- Volunteering: Time spent volunteering was measured by the number of hours participants spent volunteering during a typical week during their absence from the workplace. On the basis of previous research by Konstam et al. (2014), participants were asked to choose between *Less than 1 hour*, *2-3 hours*, *4-5 hours*, *6-7 hours*, or *8 or more hours*.
- Additional education: Three questions were asked to measure the participants' level of additional education. The first question asked participants to indicate the highest level of education completed before they left the workplace ranging from a high school diploma through a doctoral degree. The second question asked participants if they completed an additional degree or post graduate certificate during their workplace absence. If participants answered the second question in the affirmative, they were then asked to indicate the type of degree or certificate they earned.
- Training: Based on a 2007 study by Tchibozo, training was measured by the number of months participants spent updating skills and certifications or learning new ones. Participants were asked to choose between *1-6 months*, *7-12 months*, *12-18 months*, *19-24 months*, and *over 24 months*.

- Self-efficacy: The NGSE was used to determine participants' levels of self-efficacy in relation to job searching and job search behaviors (i.e., networking, volunteerism, education and training). The NGSE is comprised of eight items scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through a survey generated by ZipSurvey.com and made available through the iRelaunch social media group. Participants were given 4 weeks to complete the survey. The initial contact with the participants included an invitation to participate in the study. Two reminder notifications to complete the survey were sent at 1-week intervals, and participants were then given 1 additional week until the survey was no longer available. Individuals who did not meet the educational and professional requirements for the study or women who left the workplace for reasons other than to care for their children were not considered. Incomplete surveys were also withdrawn from the study.

Data were analyzed using version 21.0 of SPSS. A linear regression was calculated to describe the relationship between networking, volunteerism, and additional education and training and the career reentry attempts of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Due to the absence of quantitative studies related to the career reentry strategies of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers, research on the reemployment success of unemployed persons was used as the methodological basis for the present study. In a 2009 study, Hoye et al. performed a logistic regression to determine relationship between

the structure (i.e., size) and composition of an unemployed person's social network and the outcome of their employment search. Likewise, logistic regressions were also used to study the relationships between education and training and reemployment success (Tchibozo, 2007; Wanberg et al., 2002). Similar to the aforementioned studies, a logistic regression was conducted in the present study as the outcome variable (career reentry success) was dichotomous. This study can be further categorized as a multiple logistic regression due to the number of independent, or predictor variables, under examination (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2012).

Measures Taken for the Protection of Participants

Several measures were taken to ensure compliance with the Walden University Institutional Review Board's ethical guidelines for the protection of participants. Prior to participating in the survey, potential subjects were presented with an informed consent letter detailing the background of the study, procedures for the study, and potential risks and benefits of participation. The informed consent letter also described the voluntary nature of the study and clarified the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point.

To preserve the privacy of the participants, the informed consent explained that participants' anonymity would be ensured by disconnecting names with surveys and concealing participants' names on any of the study's reports. Data were saved in a password protected, electronic file to limit access and promote confidentiality of information. Following the completion of the study, data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years as required by Walden University. Finally, contact information was provided to

each of the participants as part of the informed consent letter in the event that questions or concerns arose regarding participants' involvement in the study.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodology used in the present study and provide justification for the quantitative approach taken to answer the research questions. Chapter 3 also contained a description of the steps taken to perform the study and the tools used to analyze the results. In Chapter 4, the results of the quantitative analysis are presented, and in Chapter 5, the findings of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research and practice are presented.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

I investigated the relationship between the career reentry strategies of networking, volunteerism, additional education and training, and career reentry success (obtaining employment) of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers using a multiple logistic regression analysis. Self-efficacy, as measured by the NGSE, was also factored into the success of career reentry while length of workplace absence was used as a moderating variable in the analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings of the study within the context of the research questions outlined previously. This chapter will provide demographic information, data analysis, and a summary of the hypotheses and findings for each of the questions under research.

Demographic Information

This study was conducted with female participants who met the following criteria: (a) highly educated mothers holding a master's degree or higher (b) had taken 2+ years out of the paid workforce to care for their children, and (c) subsequently returned to work or were currently in the process of reentering the workplace. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1. Participants were provided with a direct link to the online survey that was created through ZipSurvey ([zipsurvey.com](https://www.zipsurvey.com)). The online survey was accessible throughout the data collection process, which lasted from February 2016 through January 2017.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample (N=157)

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
<u>Age</u>		
25-34	8	5.1
35-44	82	52.2
45-54	57	36.3
55-59	5	3.2
60 or above	5	3.2
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Divorced, separated	8	5.1
Married	145	92.4
Single, never married	2	1.3
Widowed	1	0.6
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
African American	1	0.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	11	7.0
Caucasian	140	89.2
Hispanic/Latino	2	1.3
Other	1	0.6
<u>Education</u>		
Doctoral degree	23	14.6
Master's degree	134	85.4
<u>Length of absence</u>		
2 to 5 years	49	32.2
6 to 10 years	57	36.1
11 to 15 years	37	23.5
16+ years	14	8.8
<u>Reentered</u>		
No	50	31.8
Yes	107	68.2

A purposeful sample from iRelaunch's LinkedIn group of 2,500 members yielded survey participants below the original target of 322, thereby altering the data collection plan. To generate additional survey participants, I employed a random sampling method by contacting numerous women's organizations, professional organizations, and personal networks through social media, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn. Sample size recalculations using G*Power was difficult as many of the input parameters required for the calculation were unknown to me. Therefore, I based the sample size recalculation on the work of Peduzzi, Concato, Kemper, Holford, and Feinstein (1996) where $N=10k/p$, k represented the number of covariates in the study and p denoted the smallest of the proportion of negative or positive cases in the study. The new sample size was recalculated at 157 participants using the following formula:

$k=5$ (covariates included networking, volunteerism, additional education, additional training, and self-efficacy)

$p=.318$ (smallest proportion in sample was the negative cases, or the participants who had not reentered, and was calculated by dividing the number of negative cases by the total sample size)

$N=10(5)/.318$

$N=157$

The sample of 157 women consisted of 107 who had successfully reentered the workplace and 50 who were currently in the process of reentry. A majority of the participants were Caucasian (89.2%), married (92.4%), between 35 and 44 years of age (52.2%), and held a master's degree (85.4%). The mean length of absence from the

workplace was 9 years ($SD=4.80$) with a range of 2 to 25 years of absence. The average number of children in the sample was 2.5 ($SD=.99$) with a low of one child and a high of eight children. Survey participants volunteered an average of 8 hours per week ($SD=7.37$) and attended a total of 62.56 hours of training ($SD=146.32$) on average during their absence from the workplace. The pursuit of additional education during the career break was a less popular reentry strategy as only 15.9% of the participants reported further formal schooling. Finally, the average NGSE total score was 32.4 ($SD=4.76$) out of a possible 40 points on the measure.

Data Analysis

In this quantitative study, I attempted to describe the relationship between the career reentry strategies of networking, volunteerism, additional education and training, and general self-efficacy of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers on their reentry success. Reentry success was defined as obtaining employment after an absence of at least 3 years from the workplace. Raw data were exported directly from ZipSurvey into the statistical program SPSS version 21 where several analyses were computed. Frequency charts of participant's network size, volunteer hours, additional education, and additional training are found below.

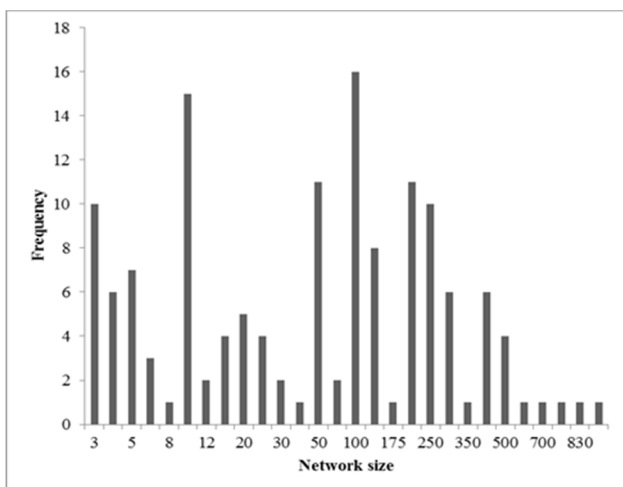


Figure 1. Size of network frequencies for sample population

Note. Eight participants reported a network size of zero. Those responses were removed from the analysis.

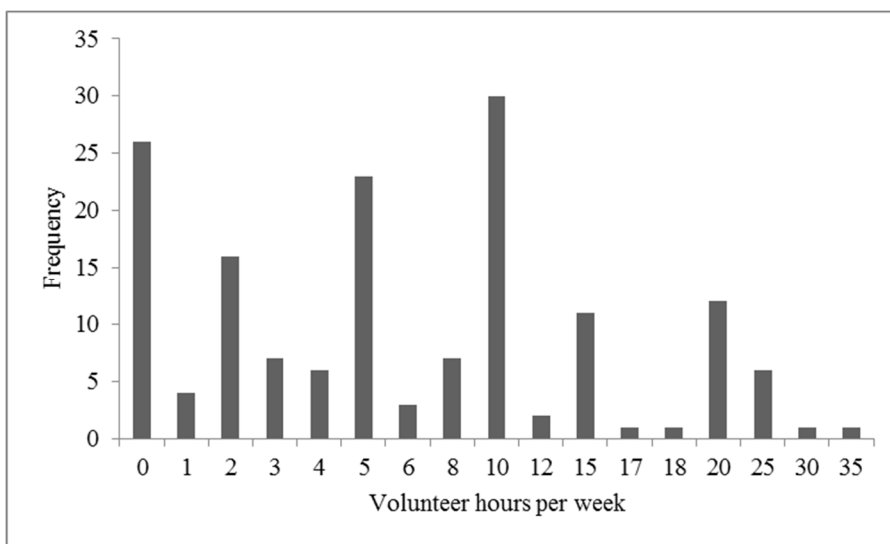


Figure 2. Average number of volunteer hours per week during career break

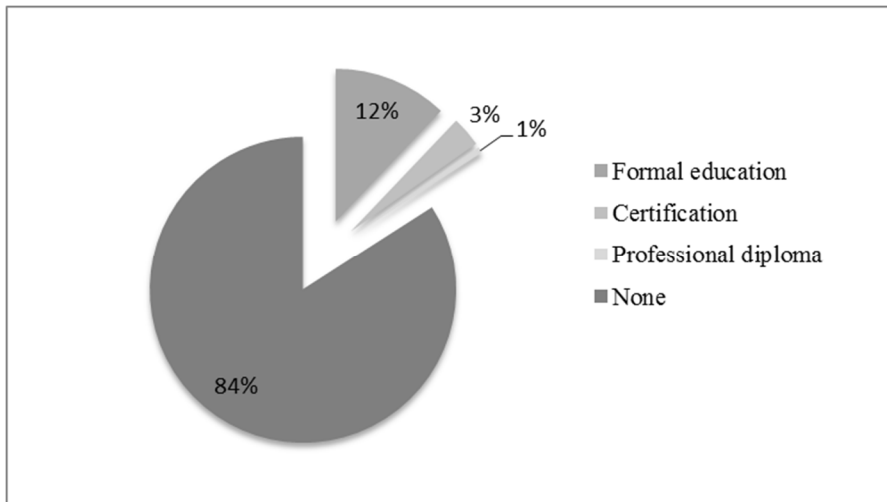


Figure 3. Additional education earned during career break

Note. Formal education includes completion of associates degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctoral degree. Certification includes teaching certification and professional management certification.

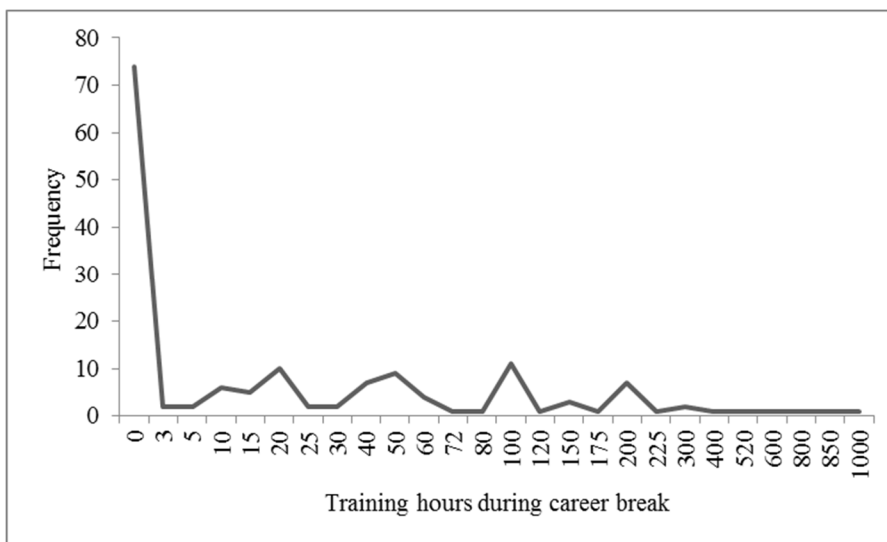


Figure 4. Additional training hours completed during workplace absence

To examine the direct effect of each of the predictor variables on reentry success, a logistical regression analysis was conducted in which network size, volunteer hours, additional education, training hours, and self-efficacy were the predictor variables, and reentry success was the outcome measure. In accordance with the structure of the research questions, network size was recoded using the dummy variable of 0 to indicate a network size less than 100 and 1 for network sizes larger than 100. Although the related survey question asked for the size (quantity) of the participant's personal and professional network at the time of their reentry, several participants indicated they had no one in their network. A network size of zero was unlikely as the criteria for the study was previous work experience and having earned a master's degree or higher. These two conditions would have required the participant to interact with others, forming a professional relationship or network. Furthermore, the survey indicated that contacts through social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook could be included. Therefore, due to a definitional issue for the term network, any responses that indicated a network of 0 or none were removed from the data. In total, eight responses from the variable network size were removed.

The variable additional education was also recoded using 1 if the participant completed further education during her workplace absence such as a doctoral, master's, bachelor's, or associate's degree or a teaching certificate. Participants who indicated that they did not complete any additional education while out of the workplace were assigned a code of 0. Because the population under examination was already highly educated, having earned a master's degree or higher, the basis for the variable recode was to

research if formal study beyond an already high level of education had any relationship to reentry success for these stay-at-home mothers. Length of workplace absence was recoded using 0 to indicate an absence of less than 3 years and 1 for absence greater than 3 years. Finally, the outcome variable of reentry success was recoded using the dummy variable 0 for those who had not yet found employment, while 1 was assigned to those who had reentered successfully.

The results for the full model were statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, N=157)=30.93$ $p<.05$ indicating that the set of predictor variables reliably predicted reentry success. The variance in reentry success accounted for by the model was small as calculated by (Nagelkerke R^2)=.263. The model's overall classification success as reported by the classification table were noteworthy, albeit lop-sided, with 36% of nonreentrants and 88% of successful reentrants correctly predicted, for an overall success rate of 72%.

Table 2 provides the regression coefficients (β), Wald statistics (W), odds ratios (OR), and 95% confidence intervals for odds ratios of each of the predictors. I found that both self-efficacy ($\beta=.189$, $W=13.34$, $p<.05$, $OR=1.21$) and length of absence ($\beta=1.39$, $W=5.94$, $p<.05$, $OR=4.01$) were significantly and positively related to reentry success. Network size ($\beta=-1.132$, $W=7.11$, $p<.05$, $OR=.322$) was also significantly related to reentry success; however, the relationship was negative. In the context of this research and the structure of the research question, this negative relationship between network size and reentry success indicated that at some point, larger network sizes do not offer any advantages in the process of workplace reentry for highly educated, stay-at-home

mothers. The specific point at which network size did not benefit the reentry process was not determined during this study and would be a recommendation for further study.

Table 2

Logistical Regression Results

	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>
Network size	-1.132	.425	7.107	1	.008	.322
Volunteer hours	.052	.030	3.149	1	.076	1.054
Additional education	-.370	.608	.370	1	.543	.691
Training hours	.001	.002	.576	1	.448	1.001
Self-efficacy	.189	.052	13.346	1	.000	1.208
Length of absence	1.389	.570	5.935	1	.015	4.009
Constant	-6.425	1.798	12.763	1	.000	.002

Mean comparisons on the five predictor variables using independent *t* tests² indicated that successful reentry women ($M=9.00$, $SD=7.24$) worked significantly more volunteer hours ($t(155)=-2.672$, $p<.05$, $d=.53$) than those who had not reentered ($M=5.70$, $SD=7.20$).

Successful reentrants ($M=33.28$, $SD=4.07$) also reported significantly higher levels of self-efficacy ($t(155)=-3.508$, $p<.05$, $d=.82$). No significant differences in mean scores were reported for the other predictor variables of network size, additional education and additional training between successful reentry women and those who had not reentered.

A summary of the mean, standard deviation, and *t* tests for each group (not reentered and reentered) can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary Statistics by Group and t test Results

	Not reentered		Reentered		<i>t test</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>d</i>
Network size	.45	.50	.29	.46	1.83	147	.33
Volunteer hours	5.70	7.21	9.00	7.24	-2.67	155	.46
Additional education	.12	.32	.18	.38	-.92	155	.17
Training hours	47.86	145.73	69.44	146.79	-.86	155	.15
Self-efficacy	30.52	5.55	33.28	4.07	-3.50	155	.57
Length of absence	.74	.44	.91	.29	-2.80	155	.46

Note. Descriptive statistics were calculated using network size recoded as 0 (less than 100) and 1 (greater than 100); additional education recoded as 0 (none) and 1 (associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, certification, PMP, professional diploma, teaching certificate); total self-efficacy score using the NGSE; and length of workplace absence using recode of 0 (less than 3 years) and 1 (greater than 3 years).

A Pearson correlation test revealed that volunteer hours and reentry success were significantly related, $r(157)=.210, p<.05$ as was self-efficacy and reentry success $r(157)=.271, p<.05$ and length of workplace absence $r(157)=.219, p<.05$. Thus, 4% of the variance in reentry success was explained by volunteerism, 7% was explained by self-efficacy, and 5% by length of workplace absence. Table 4 provides the correlation table between the predictor variables of networking, volunteerism, additional education and training, and self-efficacy, the moderating variable of length of workplace absence, and the outcome variable of reentry success.

Table 4

Correlations Between Workplace Reentry Strategies and Workplace Reentry

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Reentered	-						
2. Network size	-.150	-					
3. Volunteer hours	.210 ^b	.007	-				
4. Additional education	.073	-.021	-.080	-			
5. Training hours	.069	.135	.090	.199 ^a	-		
6. Self-efficacy	.271 ^b	.153	-.026	.235 ^b	.062	-	
7. Length of absence	.219 ^b	-.019	.282 ^b	-.017	.038	-.143	-

Note. 1= Reentered recoded using 0 (reentered) and 1 (not reentered); 2=Network size recoded using 0 (less than 100) and 1 (greater than 100); 3=Average volunteer hours during career break; 4=Additional education recoded using 0 (none) and 1(associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, certification, PMP, professional diploma, teaching certificate); 5=Training hours completed during career break; 6=Self-efficacy as measured by NGSE; 7=Length of workplace absence recoded using 0 (less than 3 years) and 1(greater than 3 years).

^a. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

^b. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between length of workplace absence and the ability to reenter the workplace for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

H_{01} : No significant differences exist between a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's length of workplace absence and her attainment of a paid position commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_{a1} : Lengths of workplace absence in excess of 3 years for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother negatively impacts her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

According to the study, there was a significant relationship between length of workplace absence and career reentry success ($p=.015$). Thus, I reject the null hypothesis that no significant differences exist between the length of workplace absence and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. To test the predictive ability of the length of workplace absence on reentry success, subsequent logistic regressions were analyzed. The variable recodes of less than or more than 3 years of absence were removed and the analysis was performed using the variable's original continuous nature. Using Nagelkerke's R^2 , the new model had less predictive ability at 21.7% versus 26.3% in the original model. Classifying workplace absence as a continuous variable also affected the logistic regression model, indicating a nonsignificant and negative relationship between length of workplace absence and reentry success ($\beta=-.02$, $W=.201$, $p=.654$, $OR=.981$).

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between network size and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at home mothers?

H_{02} : The size of a highly-educated, stay-at-home mother's professional and social network has no effect on her ability to obtain a paid position equal to her skills, abilities and desires upon her decision to re-enter the workplace.

H_{a2}: A network of 100 or more physical and virtual contacts will have a positive effect on a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to secure a desired position upon her decision to re-enter the workplace.

There was a significant and negative relationship between size of network and career re-entry success ($p=.008$), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. Similar to the workplace absence variable in Research Question 1, the predictive ability of network size warranted additional analysis due to potential effects of recoding the variable. The variable recoding of network size of less than 100 or more than 100 were removed and a logistic regression analysis was performed using the variable's original continuous nature. Using Nagelkerke's R^2 , the new model had slightly less predictive ability at 22.4% versus 26.3% in the original model. Classifying network size as a continuous variable resulted in a nonsignificant, negative relationship between the variable and reentry success ($\beta=-.002$, $W=2.399$, $p=.121$, $OR=.998$).

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure employment upon her decision to re-enter the workplace?

H₀₃: The number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother has no significant difference on her ability to obtain a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to re-enter the workforce.

H_{a3}: Greater number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother positively affects her ability to obtain a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to re-enter the workforce.

According to the results of the logistic regression, the relationship between the number of volunteer hours worked and career re-entry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers was not significant ($p=.076$). Thus, the null hypothesis was supported for this research question.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between the completion of additional education and a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to successfully re-enter the workplace?

H₀₄: The completion of additional postsecondary degrees or the completion of postgraduate certificate programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother has no significant difference on her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to re-enter the workforce.

H_{a4}: There is a significant relationship between the completion of additional postsecondary degrees or postgraduate certificate programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to successfully re-enter the workplace.

The relationship between completion of additional education and career re-entry success was not significant under the conditions of this research ($p=.543$). Therefore, I retained the null hypothesis for this research question.

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between the success of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's career re-entry attempts and the completion of relevant, professional training during her workplace absence?

H₀₅: There is no significant difference between the number of months completed in relevant, professional training programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to re-enter the workforce.

H_{a5}: There is a significant difference between the number of months completed in relevant, professional training by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to re-enter the workforce.

Approximately 90% of the participants had less than 1 month (160 hours) of professional training during their career break. To better understand the relationship between additional training and reentry success, I measured additional training in hours instead of months, providing a greater range of values to analyze. Based on the results from the logistic regression, the relationship between hours of additional training and reentry success was not significant ($p=.576$). Therefore, I retained the null hypothesis for this research question.

Research Question 6: What is the relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

H₀₆: No significant differences exist for highly-educated, stay-at-home mothers to successfully re-enter the workplace based on their level of self-efficacy.

H_{a6} : There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and career re-entry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

A significant relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers was found as a result of this study ($p=.000$). Thus, I rejected the null hypothesis and retained the alternative hypothesis. Based on the results, self-efficacy was shown to be a good predictor of reentry success.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between networking, volunteerism, additional education and training, and self-efficacy and career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Logistic regression analysis indicated that neither volunteerism nor additional education and training were significantly correlated to career reentry success. However, both network size and self-efficacy were shown to be predictors of career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Length of workplace absence, acting as a moderating variable, was also found to be a predictor of career reentry success

Chapter 5 contains a summary of the results of the study as well as an interpretation of the findings. The subject of workplace reentry for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers is discussed in further detail along with implications for social change. Finally, recommendations for further study are presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

I investigated the relationship between the career reentry strategies used by highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their ability to successfully reenter the workplace. The career reentry strategies under investigation included networking, volunteerism, additional education, and additional training. Applying the theoretical framework of the SCCT, the relationship between the participants' self-efficacy and their reentry success was also examined. As length of workplace absence can be a variable for those seeking reemployment, it was treated as a moderating variable in the present study.

The design was nonexperimental, quantitative, and consisted of an online survey completed by 157 working and nonworking mothers. Using a logistical regression analysis, I expected to find that networking, volunteerism, and self-efficacy would positively affect career reentry success. Furthermore, it was expected that length of workplace absence would be a significant predictor of reentry success and that the relationship between the two variables would be negative. I found that networking, self-efficacy, and length of workplace absence were significantly related to reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

In this chapter, I will summarize and interpret the key findings of the present study. Implications for social change will be discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are provided, hoping to generate more research opportunities in an area of interest that is presently understudied.

Summary of the Findings

The present research about the career reentry strategies for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers was conducted to fill the gap in the literature for this population. The research questions, hypotheses, and findings are as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between length of workplace absence and the ability to reenter the workplace for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

H_01 : No significant differences exist between a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's length of workplace absence and her attainment of a paid position commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_{a1} : Lengths of workplace absence in excess of 3 years for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother negatively impacts her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

According to the study, there was a significant relationship between length of workplace absence and career reentry success ($p=.015$). Thus, I rejected the null hypothesis that no significant differences exist between the length of workplace absence and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between network size and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at home mothers?

H₀₂: The size of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's professional and social network has no effect on her ability to obtain a paid position equal to her skills, abilities, and desires upon her decision to reenter the workplace.

H_{a2}: A network of 100 or more physical and virtual contacts will have a positive effect on a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to secure a desired position upon her decision to reenter the workplace.

I found a significant and negative relationship between size of network and career reentry success ($p=.008$) resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure employment upon her decision to reenter the workplace?

H₀₃: The number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother has no significant difference on her ability to obtain a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_{a3}: Greater number of volunteer hours worked by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother positively affects her ability to obtain a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

According to the results of the logistic regression, the relationship between the number of volunteer hours worked and career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers was not significant ($p=.076$) Thus, the null hypothesis was retained for this research question.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between the completion of additional education and a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's ability to successfully re-enter the workplace?

H₀4: The completion of additional postsecondary degrees or the completion of postgraduate certificate programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother has no significant difference on her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_a4: There is a significant relationship between the completion of additional postsecondary degrees or postgraduate certificate programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to successfully reenter the workplace.

The relationship between completion of additional education and career reentry success was not significant under the conditions of this research ($p=.543$). Therefore, I retained the null hypothesis for this research question.

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between the success of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's career re-entry attempts and the completion of relevant, professional training during her workplace absence?

H₀5: There is no significant difference between the number of months completed in relevant, professional training programs by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

H_a5: There is a significant difference between the number of months completed in relevant, professional training by a highly educated, stay-at-home mother and her ability

to secure a paid position in the workplace commensurate with her skills and abilities upon her desire to reenter the workforce.

In the results from the logistic regression, I found that the relationship between hours of additional training and reentry success was not significant ($p=.576$); therefore, I retained the null for this research question.

Research Question 6: What is the relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for a highly educated, stay-at-home mother?

H_{06} : No significant differences exist for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers to successfully reenter the workplace based on their level of self-efficacy.

H_{a6} : There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

A significant relationship between self-efficacy and career reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers was found as a result of this study ($p=.000$). Thus, I retain the alternative hypothesis indicating that self-efficacy is a good predictor of reentry success.

Based on the data analysis presented in Chapter 4, length of workplace absence, network size, and self-efficacy were all significantly related to the reentry success of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. I found a negative relationship between network size and reentry success while self-efficacy and length of workplace were positively related to reentry success. I did not find volunteerism, additional education, or additional training as significant predictors of reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

Interpretation of the Findings

Length of Workplace Absence

In the first research question, I examined the relationship between length of workplace absence and reentry success. In the present study, length of workplace absence was used as a moderating variable, intended to describe how the duration of a career break affects the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable under study. I found that length of workplace absence was a significant predictor of reentry success, and its relationship was deemed positive. However, longer lengths of absence do not necessarily result in greater reentry success, so caution should be used when applying these findings. On the contrary, it is often thought that longer lengths of workplace absence result in longer job searches. Petricci, Blau, and McClendon (2014) found that length of unemployment had a significant relationship on reemployment expectations, suggesting that the desire to find a job quickly is constricted by the length of absence from the workplace. Although the population in the Petricci et al.'s study were unemployed professionals who had been jobless for 2 or more years, it supports the notion of an inverse or negative relationship between length of workplace absence and reemployment. Despite the differences between the population under investigation in this study and the population in the study by Petricci et al., additional studies are warranted to better describe how the length of workplace absence affects reentry success.

Longer lengths of workplace absence diminish an individual's job talents and skill, thereby reducing his or her human capital and potentially affecting his or her successful reentry into the workplace (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014). Although the higher

levels of education completed by the population in this study indicates a commitment to the value of work-related knowledge, additional information from this study may indicate otherwise. The average length of workplace absence for this population was approximately 9 years, which allowed for many years of skill degradation and nonlearning (Theunisse et al., 2011). In addition, a low number of participants pursued additional education or training during their workplace absence. With the conflicting information available, it is difficult to determine how the length of workplace absence affected the human capital of the participants and their reentry success. Therefore, I recommend further study between the length of workplace absence and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Based on the key findings of this study, I also recommend that highly educated, stay-at-home mothers perform the activities that are stronger predictors of reentry success during their career break, regardless of the duration of the absence.

Network Size

In the second research question, I focused on the relationship of the size of a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's network and her ability to successfully reenter the workplace. I found that network size was a significant predictor of reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. However, the relationship was negative; as network size increased, reentry success decreased.

As discussed in Chapter 4, network size was examined by dividing participants into two groups, one group in which participants' network size was less than 100 individuals and another group where participants' network size was more than 100

individuals. In this study, it was necessary to define the size of a network as either small or large to determine how the size of the network affected reentry success. The division point of 100 individuals in the network was an arbitrary number that I chose. The reclassification of network size could potentially have impacted the study's outcome; therefore, an additional logistic regression was performed using the continuous nature of the network size as originally reported by the participants. The analysis of network size using continuous numbers as originally provided by the participant indicated a nonsignificant predictor of reentry success, which was inconsistent with the outcome of the analysis using the recoded network size defined as small or large. However, this second analysis using real network sizes revealed a negative relationship between network size and reentry success ($\beta = -.001$), which was consistent with the logistic regression test using the recoded network size ($\beta = -1.132$). Therefore, larger-sized networks do not necessarily produce greater reentry benefits. In addition to the application of the β coefficient, the *OR* for the network size using real numbers and recoded network size were both less than 1, $\text{Exp}\beta = .999$ and $.322$ respectively. The odds of successful workplace reentry are lower for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers if their network size was greater than 100.

The negative relationship between network size and reentry success was counterintuitive; larger networks generally produce more job leads and hence a greater likelihood of finding employment. However, these findings are consistent with other career development and talent development studies that found network size was not a good predictor of career success (Claussen, Grohsjean, Luger, & Probst, 2014). I found

that network characteristics other than size may also play a role in a job search. Hoye et al. (2009) described a network in terms of its structure (size and strength of ties between network members) and its composition (status of the people in the network). Although the size of the networks in this study ranged from three to 850, the strength of the relationship between the participants and the individuals in their networks was unclear. Had the participants been asked to rate or describe how close they were to members in their networks, I may have been able to assess the strength of the ties in the network. This was a limitation of the present study. Individuals are more likely to interact with strong ties than weak ties in order to gather information, which in this case, would be access to employment opportunities (Dalton, 2011; Hoye et al., 2009; Ramos-Rodriguez et al., 2010).

Equally as important as tie strength would be the status of the individuals in the network (Hoye et al., 2009). In the present study, no information was gathered regarding the educational, occupational, and general life status of the individuals in the participants' networks. A small network of high status friends, well connected peers, or previous coworkers and supervisors may produce more valuable job leads for a stay-at-home mother compared to a large network of low status or nonworking mothers.

As a result of this study, highly educated, stay-at-home mothers should be aware of the benefits of networking upon their decision to reenter the working world. To maximize the benefit of this strategy, reentry women should also consider the strength of the ties and the status of the ties within her network rather than its sheer size.

Volunteerism

In the third research question, I evaluated the impact of the number of volunteer hours worked during workplace absence upon the reentry success of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. I found that volunteer hours were not a significant predictor of reentry success for the population under study, although the correlation between the two variables was found to be positive. In addition, an independent *t* test indicated a significant difference between the volunteer hours worked by successful reentry women than those who have not reentered.

The relationship between volunteer hours and reentry success may be dependent upon an individual's life stage. Konstam et al. (2014) revealed a positive relationship between the number of volunteer hours and reemployment, which is inconsistent with the findings of the current study. However, the participants in the Konstam et al. study were identified as "emerging adults" aged between 21 and 29 and who were not employed 6 months before taking part in the study. Survey participants in this study ranged in age between 25 and 60+, with a majority of the participants belonging to the 35-44 age range. In addition, the average length of workplace absence in the present study was almost 9 years, well above the time frame for the participants in the Konstam et al. study.

Maurath, Wright, Wittorp, and Hardtke (2015) investigated whether volunteer experience compensates for gaps in employment that occurs either early or late in a person's career. Maurath et al. indicated that volunteer experience was not significantly related to higher ratings by employers, which aligns with the present study's findings that volunteer hours were not a significant predictor of reentry success. Although not

statistically significant, Maurath et al. found that the applicants with employment gaps late in their career were rated highest when their volunteer experience was career-related. Over 40% of the participants in the current study were in the age ranges of 45 and above, classifying them in the later stages of their career (Super, 1980). Applying the findings of Maurath et al. to this segment of our population suggests that focusing on career-related volunteer hours would be more beneficial to reentry success.

Additional Education

In the fourth research question, I addressed the relationship between the completion of additional formal education (i.e., earning additional college degrees or pursuing professional certifications) and the reentry success of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. I found that the completion of additional education during workplace absence was not a significant predictor of reentry success for the population under study. In addition, the correlation between these two variables was found to be nonsignificant.

The results of this study should be interpreted with caution as 84% of participants ($n = 132$) reported they had completed no additional education during their workplace absence. Survey participants were required to have a master's degree or higher to participate in the study. This high educational achievement may provide a potential explanation for the low number of participants pursuing additional education as a reentry strategy. However, another explanation could relate to the economics of furthering education. Zimmer (2016) found that individuals with master's degrees could expect an increase of \$1800 per quarter upon reemployment versus a boost of \$1089 and \$1557 per quarter for those with doctoral and bachelor's degrees respectively. Based on Zimmer's

findings, the economic return on the investment of additional education for this specific population would be low, which may also partially explain the small number of participants partaking in this type of reentry strategy.

Training

In the fifth research question, I examined the relationship between the number of training hours completed during the career break of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers and their workplace reentry success. The average number of training hours completed during a workplace absence was 62 hours. A mean comparison using an independent *t* test indicated that women who had successfully reentered the workforce had completed more training hours ($M=69.44$) than those who had not experienced reentry success ($M=47.86$); however, the difference was not statistically significant. The correlation between training hours and reentry success was also not significant.

Although the number of training hours was not a significant predictor of reentry success in the present study, previous research suggests otherwise. Lovejoy and Stone (2012) stated that the need for updated skills was one of the obstacles that women face when trying to restart their career after a break. Furthermore, the odds of finding employment were 2.67 times greater for individuals participating in training programs that teach job search skills, self-presentation, and motivation enhancement (Liu et al., 2014). Therefore, participating in some type of training as a reentry strategy might seem beneficial to this specific population. Additionally, Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that a majority of women reentering the workforce after a break do not return to their former employers, and many even prefer a redirection of career path. This change in career

choice would most likely involve learning new skills, indicating the need for additional training would be vital to successful reentry efforts.

Self-Efficacy

The relationship between self-efficacy and reentry success was the basis for Research Question 6. According to the results of the logistic regression, there was a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and reentry success. Participants with higher levels of self-efficacy had more positive outcomes in the job search and reentry process. Results showed that the odds of obtaining employment at reentry were 1.21 times higher for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers with higher levels of self-efficacy. The finding from this study were consistent with a 2014 study by Liu et al. that indicated the odds of reemployment were 3.25 times higher for individuals who participated in interventions that increased their self-efficacy.

The findings from the present study support the theoretical framework outlined by the SCCT that identifies self-efficacy as an important element in career development, including the process of career reentry. The SCCT describes four possible sources of an individual's self-efficacy: (a) successfully performing the task in the past, (b) vicariously learning from others performing the task, (c) being positively influenced by others, and (d) reducing the feelings of fear. Having gone through the process of finding and securing employment previously, this population of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers under study should be somewhat prepared for the task of workplace reentry. Tasks such as identifying open positions, networking to obtain job leads, and calling potential

employers to obtain job information were most likely completed during the participants' prior job searches, potentially benefitting them during their reentry efforts.

The significant relationship between self-efficacy and reentry success found in the present study is consistent with previous research (Anderson, 2015). Therefore, it is important for this population of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers to boost their self-efficacy before beginning the next stage of their career development. This may be a challenging task as research has found that stay-at-home mothers experience worry and fear over the loss of workplace skills and a diminished marketability during their workplace absence (Rubin & Wooten, 2007). Although it is true that absences from the workplace diminish human capital (Greer, 2013; Mavriplis et al., 2010; Theunisse et al., 2011), women reentering the workforce must be mindful of any strategies that can be used to mitigate the loss of valuable workplace skills.

Training was not found to be a significant predictor of reentry success in the present study; however, training programs used for skill development and motivation enhancement are related to increased self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2014). Commitment to personal growth and self-care were found to be lower priorities for stay-at-home mothers (Bean, Softas-Nall, Eberle, & Paul, 2016; Rubin & Wooten, 2007;), but these strategies may increase confidence and boost self-efficacy upon a highly educated, stay-at-home mother's decision to reenter the workforce.

Implications for Social Change

The potential impact for positive social change from the present study may be noted at several levels: individual, organizational, and societal. The results of this study

indicated that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. However, limited research on this population has suggested that these women feel isolated, have lost their identity, and suffer from low self-esteem (Mavriplis et al., 2010; Rubin & Wooten, 2007), and it is possible that these factors could severely affect the self-efficacy of these women upon their decision to return to work (Bao & Luo, 2016; Maddy, Cannon, & Lichtenberger, 2015). Maddy et al. (2015) found a strong relationship between social support and self-esteem and noted that encouragement and validation from spouses, family members, and friends can produce feelings of pride and self-assurance. This encouragement and validation may ultimately have a positive effect on a stay-at-home mother's self-efficacy when deciding to reenter the workforce. This initial step of recognizing the unpaid work of the stay-at-home mother may initiate social change simply by placing a higher perceived value on the job of caretaking and a greater respect for the role.

From an organizational perspective, the pool of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers provides a viable source of talent that is much needed due to an impending labor shortage. Although gaps in employment histories generally cause concern among employers, 63% of the participants in the current study were able to return to work despite a career break of 3 or more years. This finding suggests that individuals who are absent from the workplace can still return and be a productive part of the labor force. However, before a successful reentry occurs, stay-at-home mothers must be prepared to meet the demands of the current workplace. This may be difficult to do. As more companies are focusing their efforts on retaining top female talent, few are offering

programs to reengage and retrain females who have taken a break from their career (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Reynolds, 2011). Organizational training and development programs aimed specifically towards stay-at-home mothers reentering the workforce may provide these women with a greater chance of success while also providing organizations with alternate sources of talent.

Finally, from a societal viewpoint, this research provided an opportunity to reevaluate the stereotype associated with women who do not work outside the home. The label stay-at-home mother is perceived along a wide spectrum, ranging from a mother who does nothing all day to a mother who intensively cares for her children (Akass, 2012; Crowley, 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2008). Regardless of which definition is used, these perceptions of stay-at-home mothers are generally not constructive. The results of the present study indicated that a large number of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers are successful in making the transition from stay-at-home mother back to working mother, negating the stereotype commonly associated with this group. Although a majority of stay-at-home mothers are the less educated, the mothers in this study represented a portion of the 32% of stay-at home mothers with a master's degree or higher (Office, n.d.). Reprogramming the social mindset to recognize that 1 out of every 3 stay-at-home mothers are highly educated, and a majority of those mothers wish to return to work (Hewlett & Luce, 2005), may initiate a social change that casts a more favorable light on this specific population.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study contributed to the limited body of research related to workplace reentry for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. However, more studies can be conducted to provide an even greater depth of understanding of the experiences of these women as they reenter the workforce. The first recommendation for further study is related to the present study's theoretical framework. The SCCT addresses the interaction between several constructs and career development (i.e., interests, attitudes, values, gender, and race), but only self-efficacy was measured in the present study. At this time, it is unknown to what extent outcome expectations and personal goals impact reentry success for the population under study. However, career-related actions such as attending resume writing workshops and sharpening interviewing skills do help organize and guide career reentry efforts and could potentially impact the outcome expectations and goals of reentry women (Liu et al., 2014). Therefore, additional studies could be performed using reliable and valid measurements of outcome expectations and goal setting using this specific population.

Personal characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and educational background also play key roles in the SCCT as they actively shape a person's career development experiences (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2006). However, participants in the present study were all female, mostly white, and were highly educated, having earned a master's degree or higher. Therefore, additional research is recommended to specifically study the relationships between various reentry strategies and reentry success for a more diverse population, including males (stay-at-home fathers), stay-at-home mothers of

different races and ethnicities, and nonworking mothers with lower levels of education (associates or bachelor's degrees). As noted when discussing the limitations of the study, only those stay-at-home mothers with master's degree or higher participated in the study, providing opportunities to further study the impact of varying levels of education on reentry success for mothers who chose to take a career break.

Suggestions for future research can be made in relation to the present study's predictor variables. The lack of a clear definition of the variable network size provides an opportunity to replicate the study using terms that are more precisely defined. Eight participants in the present study reported a network size of 0, which seemed unlikely in this modern, highly technological, and globally-connected world. In addition to network size, strength and status of network ties could prove influential to reentry success and therefore these characteristics also warrant further study. Some participants in this study may have had over 200 people in their professional and social network; however, many of those individuals could have been contacts the participants had not interacted with in several years or individuals with whom the participants had limited interaction. It is unlikely that those ties would have any significant effects on stay-at-home mothers' career reentry efforts.

Volunteerism has previously been found to be positively associated with reemployment (Konstam et al., 2014). However, I found that volunteerism was not a strong predictor of reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Past research indicated that volunteerism has several benefits for individuals who do not work outside the home (e.g., increased employability skills, opportunities to learn, personal

growth, social interaction, and increased self-worth and personal satisfaction; Kulik, 2010; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Shore & Tashchian, 2013). Due to the conflict between the results of the present study and past research, additional studies are warranted to determine the effect of volunteerism on reentry success for this specific group of nonworking adults. Although the results of the study indicated that highly educated, stay-at-home others should not rely on volunteerism to assist with the reentry process, the benefits of volunteerism on an individual's sense of self, and in turn self-efficacy, may suggest otherwise.

Finally, I recommend that a mixed methodological study incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods be conducted to provide a better understanding of the relationships between job search variables and reentry success for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Several survey participants took the opportunity to provide brief explanations of why they exited the workplace and/or the timing of their reentry, suggesting for a desire on the part of these women to provide more information regarding their individual career journey. A future mixed methods study focusing on the reentry efforts of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers would be a valuable source of information on this understudied topic.

Conclusions

The purpose of this quantitative, correlational study was to investigate the relationships between the career reentry strategies of networking, volunteerism, additional education, and additional training on the reentry success of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. Length of workplace absence was used as a moderating variable to

examine how the length of a career break, in conjunction with the reentry strategies listed previously, affects reentry. Applying the theoretical framework of the SCCT, self-efficacy was also examined as it relates to reemployment success for mothers who have taken a career break. Multiple logistic regressions identified a significant predictive model ($\chi^2 (6, N=157) = 30.93, p < .05$) where network size ($\beta = -1.132, p = .008$), self-efficacy ($\beta = .189, p = .000$), and length of workplace absence ($\beta = 1.389, p = .015$) were significant predictors of reentry success. No significant relationships were found between volunteer hours, additional education, or additional training and successful workplace reentry for highly educated, stay-at-home mothers.

This study made an important contribution to help bridge a gap in the body of knowledge on the workplace reentry efforts of highly educated, stay-at-home mothers. This study obtained an adequate sample size, used reliable and valid measures, and gathered information about the participants' network size, volunteer hours, additional education and training, level of self-efficacy, and length of workplace absence. The results of the study should be interpreted carefully as there are several other factors that can predict reentry success other than those examined in this study. The available literature about highly educated, stay-at-home mothers is minimal, signaling a need to further investigate various career and noncareer relationships for this population.

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