Women in Family Business

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This paper, is condensed from the author's, qualitative research study on women in family business. Women and other family members were interviewed on how gender-related issues affect their work. Also included is an extensive literature review followed by a brief discussion of the research methodology. The research results offer common themes that emerged from the diverse sample of participants. In addition, there is a discussion of implications for practice and research that may be helpful to both family-business members and consultants.

Introduction

A growing number of women are entering family business today (Danco, 1981; Mancuso and Shulman, 1991). A strong belief exists that these women confront difficulty in family business just because they are women (Lyman, 1988; Rosenblatt et al., 1985). Women in family enterprises, according to Lyman, are more readily constrained by traditional female roles than women who do not work with their families. Rosenblatt et al. believe that female offspring do not receive the same encouragement, opportunity, and education as male offspring. This double standard prevents women from moving toward an executive or ownership position in the business. The position of Rosenblatt et al. supports a general belief that women in family business are a microcosm of society (Dumas, 1989a; Salganicoff, 1990). Many other researchers believe that the problems facing females working with family members reflect the same gender issues confronting other women in their business and family lives.

This article presents the results of a qualitative study on women in family business (Cole, 1993) and what those women have to say about the impact gender issues have on their professional lives.

Review of the Literature

As more women have entered the world of work, family businesses have been duly affected by an increase in the number of women working with family members (Bork, 1986; Danco, 1981; Mancuso and Shulman, 1991). Although

more women are becoming involved in family business, some traditional biases still linger (Galagan, 1985; Rosenblatt et al., 1985; Salganicoff, 1990). According to Salganicoff, even though many women work in family companies the media still presents them as cute or rare examples. Articles and programs continue to portray the family-business female with such stereotypes as "the 'little girl' who became a successor in a family business, the devastated widow who rescued her late husband's business, or a little sister who became more successful than her older brother in an automobile dealership" (p. 127).

Career Sketch. In a study of 91 female participants by Salganicoff (1990), with the help of her colleague, Barbara Hollander, only 27% expected to enter the family enterprise. Reasons for eventually joining the family business included wanting to help the family, filling a position that no other family member wanted, and being dissatisfied with another job. Dumas (1989a, 1989b) also concluded that, in general, women do not plan a career in their family business, do not aspire to ownership, and see their work as a job rather than a career.

Despite these limitations, many believe that family business offers women abundant opportunities (Bork, 1986; Jaffee 1990; Nelton, 1986; Salganicoff, 1990). Jaffee finds some differences from the participants in Salganicoff's and Hollander's study. Jaffee's work, based on a survey of graduates of a business program for women, finds that most women perceive their family business as a reservoir of great careers. When a woman works outside the family domain, she may face the "glass ceiling" no matter how talented she may be.

Salganicoff (1990) reports better positions, higher incomes, and more flexibility in work schedules for females who work with family. Family business offers women access to male-dominated industries, such as construction, and provides more latitude for job security. Although most businesses cannot afford to hold a position open for an employee out on medical, personal, health, educational, or recreational leave, most family businesses will have a paid job waiting after a prolonged absence.

The difference between a family business and a non-family business seems reflected in the way money, positions, and time are allocated. Although most businesses make decisions based on bottom-line profitability, family businesses allow more latitude for personal concerns, which is particularly important for women who must constantly juggle home and work.

Roles

Along with the advantages of women working in the family business come the disadvantages. Family-business writers use the word "role" in discussing these problems, such as "role conflict" (Salganicoff, 1990); "role carryover" (Rosenblatt et al., 1985), and "role confusion" (Freudenberger et al., 1989). These terms refer to the two incompatible roles (business and family) contained in family business relationships.

Many believe that women are particularly vulnerable to so-called role conflict, because they struggle with the expected family role versus the expected business role (Drozdow, 1990; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Lyman, 1988; Salganicoff, 1990). Lyman, in research on family-business women, discusses roles as reflecting "a number of social and cultural factors. Women's roles within networks are influenced by traditional expectations of women's family and work responsibilities" (p. 385). Lyman lists examples of how this translates into traditional sex-role characteristics: Women are expected to be always available to listen and respond but have no legitimate authority to question or to challenge; women receive rewards for service not for independent action; women are expected to be nurturing, noncritical, and accepting of others.

Salganicoff (1990) explains roles as conflictual for women who choose to work in the family firm; they experience double messages from their families. Salganicoff gives these examples: "Dedicate yourself fully to the business, but give the family children"; "Be independent and autonomous and behave like a businessman, but be dependent, take care of the family, and behave like a mother"; "Do not take business home, but let's talk shop tonight"; "Don't postpone your career and personal needs, but help the business now" (p. 133).

Hollander and Bukowitz (1990) agree with Salganicoff and label the role conflict as a double bind "in which both conformity and nonconformity carry penalties and rewards" (p. 145). The no-win choice for a female in business is between accepting a more traditional role and attempting a self-promotional attitude to bring vitality and respect to her business role. If she chooses the traditional role to maintain harmonious relations with family members, she sacrifices her career objectives. If she chooses self-promotion, she risks negative sanctions from her family, especially her father's anxiety and perceived disapproval.

One role that Hollander and Bukowitz (1990) warn against is that of "over nurturer." They feel women tend to fall into this "smothering kind of caretaking" (p. 142) in order to correct a situation that feels out of balance and believe that in a family business, the pull toward overnurturing can be increasingly seductive. Dumas's (1989a, 1990) study on daughters in family business supports that theory. She describes a "protectionism" daughters say they feel for their fathers that inhibits an open discussion of succession plans. Daughters fear that bringing up the subject of retirement will upset their fathers' pride and sense of immortality.

Rules. Some authors introduce the concept of "rules" to explain typical family business problems (Flemons and Cole, 1992; 1994; Jaffee, 1990; Kaye, 1991; Rosenblatt et al., 1985). Rosenblatt et al. discuss rules as something all families have. Sometimes the rules are verbalized; sometimes they are not.

As more women become involved in family business, they challenge one of the most sacred family business rules—that of "primogeniture" or the transfer of leadership from father to the first-born son (Barnes, 1988; Dumas, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Kepner, 1983). However, as more managerial women enter fam-

ily businesses, Barnes finds the primogeniture rule less automatic than in the past. Nevertheless, he believes daughters, more than younger sons, face complex challenges by skeptical parents and siblings. Fathers put up the most significant hurdles, as they place more pressure on daughters succeeding to power than on sons. Dumas (1989a) agrees, adding that daughters are usually passed over as potential successors unless they are forced into leadership through a crisis.

Psychological Characteristics. Role and rule conflict develop from the expected behavior of women. A number of writers make sense of the way women behave in family business by referring to the women's psychological make up.

According to Salganicoff (1990), females offer unique contributions, especially in management, to their family businesses. She bases her conclusions on the work of Gilligan (1982) and Belenky et al., (1986), who write about women's socialization in the behaviors of nurturing and peacekeeping. Such women, modeling themselves after their mothers, are said to define themselves in terms of their relationships to others and, as a result, fear separation. In contrast, men, according to Gilligan and Belenky et al., define themselves in terms of their independence and accomplishments in the outside world. Salganicoff believes that because of their unique gender characteristics, women in family business exhibit such behaviors as loyalty to the business, concern for family members, and a sensitivity to the needs of others. These attributes, in Salganicoff's opinion, make women proficient at "peacekeeping" or solving problems and conflicts among family members.

Freudenberger et al. (1989) think women in family business hold back on their business capabilities because of uncertainty of how they, as females, should behave. For instance, Freudenberger et al. say that women's feelings of esteem and self-worth become confused over how they want to act and how they think they should act in a family business. Also, they believe that women repress any attempts to become as successful as their male counterparts, because accomplished businesswomen are viewed as too masculine and aggressive. Additionally, Freudenberger et al. blame the lack of separation and individuation for females' inability to affirm business roles. The result is that women in family business, according to these authors, remain entrapped in rigid, "family" roles unless they separate and individuate from their families.

Dumas (1989a, 1989b, 1990), based on the research of Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), and Belenky et al. (1986), believes that differences do exist between men and women. The key issue, according to Dumas, concerns a woman's need for intimacy or affiliation; this makes a difference in how women and men behave in family business. Men-men relationships, the tradition in family firms, have been based on a need for independent behavior that, in Dumas's opinion, may not work for women. Women, by nature, may expect more "collaboration, cooperation, and interaction" (1989, p. 43).

Invisibility and Visibility. In the discussion of women in family business, the terms "visible" and "invisible" command much attention. Many women

feel invisible in the family business because they are not viewed by others, whether within or outside the business, in the same way as male members (Gillis-Donovan and Moynihan-Bradt, 1990; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Nelton, 1986; Rodriquez-Cameron, 1989). This happens frequently with female partners in husband-and-wife businesses (Hollander and Bukowitz; Nelton). The assumption by the outside world is that women hold important positions because they are married to the boss. Even when their credentials are equal or better than their husbands', these women find other businesspeople bypassing them and looking to their spouses for final decisions.

Salganicoff (1990) blames women's invisibility in family companies on two factors working together simultaneously:

> One is the continuing stereotyping and discrimination that are the result of prejudices in society and are reflected and expressed within the family business system. The second factor is women's own limiting attitudes toward their potential and roles, attitudes derived largely from the way they have been socialized. (p. 136)

Summary. The ideas presented in the literature review suggest a belief that women in family business continue to struggle with the traditional limitations imposed on them by others. The literature helps raise a number of interesting questions:

1. Do the experiences of women in family business reflect the same gender issues that face women in society? Do they struggle with invisibility, child care, elder care, and glass ceilings? If so, how are they handling these problems?

2. Do women in family business play a certain role in that business because of gender expectations? Are they the nurturers and peacekeepers? Do they ever *not* play these roles?

3. More succinctly, given that women are increasingly taking positions within family businesses, how do they and the family members they work with describe these experiences? Additionally, how do their stories compare with what has already been written or assumed about women in family business?

Research Methodology

The qualitative methodology for this study was guided by the naturalistic or constructivist research paradigm in studies by Guba and Lincoln (1981, 1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). They express ideas similar to the relational perspective of this study—that meaning is fundamentally contextual—by proposing that phenomena being studied take their meaning "as much from their context as they do from themselves" (1985, p. 189). For that reason, I decided not to interview the women in isolation but, instead, with the other family members involved in the business. Originally, I thought it a mistake to interview the business family together. I thought the women would tell a different

story when their "context" or other family members were present. That proved to be wrong. I first tested my interviews in a pilot study in which I interviewed several women alone. Later, I went back and interviewed the same women in the context of their families, and the stories did not change.

The most important decision involved how to select these participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of purposeful sampling and refer to Patton's (1980) definition. Purposeful sampling can be used as a research strategy "when one wants to learn something and come to understand something about certain select cases without needing to generalize to all such cases" (Patton, p. 100).

Patton explains the advantage of using "maximum variation" in purposeful sampling. By increasing the diversity of variation in the sample, the researcher can have more confidence in common patterns that emerge while being able to describe the unique variation.

With this in mind, I attempted as much family business diversity as possible, thus increasing the variety of contexts. Tables 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the diversity that was achieved with the research participants and businesses in the following areas:

Table 1. Characteristics of Participating Family Businesses

| Ref# | Industry | Age | Employees | Family Business Members* | |
				# Working	# Interviewed
1	Fine Arts	11	9	2	2
2	Production	66	20	3	3
3	Manufacturing	15	40	2	2
4	Service	25	65	2	2
5	Textile	168	92	4	4
6	Wholesale	3	2	3	3
7	Agriculture	35	8	5	3
8	Retail	54	14	2	2
9	Manufacturing	30	5000	6	2

* Number of family members working in the business and, of those, the number interviewed.

Geographic Location: The interviews took place in different regions of the United States. Three interviews were conducted in the Northeast, three in the Midwest, and three in the Southeast.

Relationships: Instead of confining the study to the more available family-business relationships of wife-husband and daughter-father, I included a variety of male-female configurations. The 23 research participants (12 females and 11 males) consist of the following relationships: two mother-son, four wife-husband, two daughter-father, four sister-brother. By inviting all working family members to participate, the following relationships were also included: two mother-daughter, one sister-sister, two father-son, one sister-in-

Table 2. Characteristics of Participating Women

Ref#	Name	Women*	Age	Marital Status	# Children
1	Hellerman	Wife	32	Married	0
2	Dell	Daughter & Sister	32	Single	0
3	Monte	Wife	50	Married	3 Adult
4	Bella	Daughter	29	Single	0
5	Sherman	Mother	65	Widowed	3 Adult
5	Sherman	Daughter & Sister	37	Single	0
5	Sherman	Daughter & Sister	38	Single	0
6	Hockman	Wife & Mother	45	Married	3 Adult
7	Nelson	Wife	51	Married	2 Adult
7	Nelson	Sister-in-law	49	Widowed	1 Adult, 1 Teen
8	Craft	Wife	55	Married	3 Adult
9	Zeitland	Sister	35	Married	1 Infant

* Family relationship to other family-business members interviewed. Some women had more than one relationship.

Table 3. Characteristics of Participating Men

Ref#	Name	Men*	Age	Marital Status	# Children
1	Hellerman	Husband	46	Remarried	1 Adult
2	Dell	Son & Brother	30	Married	1 One year
2	Dell	Father	60	Married	4 Adult
3	Monte	Husband	48	Married	3 Adult
4	Bella	Father	59	Married	2 Adult
5	Sherman	Son & Brother	40	Divorced	2 Teenage
6	Hockman	Son	21	Married	0
6	Hockman	Husband & Father	45	Married	3 Adult
7	Nelson	Husband	50	Married	2 Adult
8	Craft	Husband	55	Married	3 Adult
9	Zeitland	Brother	31	Married	1 Two years

* Family relationship to other family members interviewed. Some men had more than one relationship.

law and sister-in-law, and one sister-in-law and brother-in-law.

Type: I not only wanted diversity in the family relationships but also in the type of business to include in the study. The family businesses ranged from fine arts and agriculture to service and manufacturing industries.

Size: Diversity in business size, from mom-and-pop stores to large corporations, was an important consideration. Originally, I planned to base size on the businesses' annual profits, but several participants were reluctant to share financial information. Instead, I asked how many people they employed. The numbers ranged from 2 to 5,000 employees.

Age: Both age of the family business and age of the family-business members were included in the sample. The youngest company was 3 years old, and the oldest was 168. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 64.

The first step in the interview process involved making contact with prospective participants. For this, I used two methods of introduction, personal and organizational. Six of the interviews were arranged through a personal contact who knew of a family business; three were arranged through the Family Firm Institute, whose members include family businesses and consultants.

I audiotaped the interviews with the families' consent. Audiotaping seemed the least invasive method of gathering information; the tapes were later transcribed word for word, with the speakers identified only as "husband," "daughter," "mother," etc. The transcripts are available on request, but the tapes have been erased to protect the participants' anonymity. Confidentiality and anonymity remained a strong research ethic throughout the study. Although none of the participants seemed concerned about this issue, I decided to allow informants the right to remain anonymous. At minimum, pseudonyms were used in the final report. I used them in the transcripts as well.

The interviews ended after nine families had participated. Enough diversity had been achieved according to the five areas previously described. Also, the later interviews revealed little new information, and this saturation of material marked a stopping point (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Next, I analyzed the data by using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in which the data generates the conceptual categories of properties that are constructed into a general theory. In this study, it seemed more important for the data to generate categories for analysis and comment than in coming up with an all encompassing theory (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

An important final step in the methodology involved the concepts of "negotiated outcomes" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This term means that the research participants have "the *right* to provide input on the subject of what are proper outcomes, and the inquirer has an *obligation* to attend to those inputs and honor them as far as possible" (p. 211). The research participants had an opportunity to comment on a draft of the data analysis, which provided another check on validity, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Research Findings

The findings of this study were grouped into four categories or constructs related to gender issues. The following section presents these categories as common themes that cut across a diverse sample of participants and shows how their comments compared to the literature review. The information in the categories should not be generalized to all family businesses. Instead, these findings should be used to understand and appreciate the complexity of women in family business. Table 4 condenses the research findings.

Invisibility. All of the men and women in the sample mentioned the invisibility of women in the family business. For this study, invisibility meant a role

Table 4. Research Findings

Category	Literature Review*	New Information**
Invisibility	Agrees	Women treat other women as invisible.
Differences between Men & Women	Disagrees	Women do not accept traditional roles. Men play the same roles as women. Women take longer to make decisions.
Glass Ceiling & Succession	Disagrees	Women advance as fast as men. Women do not always want to advance.
Motherhood & Child Care	Agrees	Women believe they make own decisions in how much child care holds them back.

* How much participants' comments agree or disagree with information in the review of the literature.
** New information in the research results that was not found in the review of the literature.

created for a woman in which family members and others ignore the woman's professional capabilities. In the interviews, men and women discussed the invisibility of women from a relational perspective, meaning they tied their invisibility to certain relationships and contexts.

Most women in the sample tended to feel invisible in their relationship to some customers, salespersons, or other non-family business members. For example, a woman who works with her husband and son in a wholesale meat business described her experience this way:

Well, even when customers come in here, I think they prefer to deal with my husband. Sometimes I feel like I get the brush off. I've noticed that with salesmen, the brush off.

The participants who described feelings of invisibility surprisingly identified female employees, customers, and salespersons as more likely to ignore a woman's position in the family business. Older women customers or clients usually wanted to deal with a man in the business. A young woman who works in a large family business with her brother, father, and uncle reported a difference between the invisible relationship with certain female company managers who ignore her in meetings, don't ask for her input, and "forget" to invite her to critical meetings. She noticed a difference between this and the treatment she received from top male managers who acknowledged her in public, yet undermined her in private.

Although families presented examples of women's invisibility in relationship to the public or employees, many agreed that family-business men supported the women and their business competencies. This supportive relationship helped them handle situations when the family-business women are being ignored. In this sample, the invisibility issue seemed to bother the men more than the women. The women usually wanted to see how important a customer or client was before making an issue of it, and the men wanted to take more of a stand. For example, one man, who worked with his son, wife, Kay, and sister-in-law, Darlene, in an agricultural business said this:

But what I do to these people, because it just irritates me, is I'll talk to them, visit with them, and they'll ask me a question, and I'll say, "Gosh, I just can't answer that. You'll have to talk to Kay," or "you'll have to talk to Darlene," and I put them right back to the person they refused to talk to.

The oldest participant in the study, a 65-year-old woman business owner who worked with her daughters and son, observed that not much had changed between her generation and her daughters' in how women are accepted into the business world. What had changed, she said, is her daughters' ability to speak up when they felt unfairly treated as females.

Differences between Men and Women. Closely related to invisibility is the issue of differences between men and women in family businesses. The literature contains many generalizations about the basic, internal makeup of men and women. For example, women are said to be dependent and concerned for others, whereas men possess a more independent nature. Many draw on this behavior and label women as good peacekeepers or mediators. They also suggest that women tend to fall into nurturing roles in family business situations. Families in this study did not tend to conform to these stereotypes.

"Nurturing" was the role most often discussed in the family business interviews. More than half the participants agreed that the women in the family business were not necessarily the designated nurturers, and that the men in the family played as much or more of a nurturing role at work. For example, a female participant saw herself as less nurturing than her husband; the employees, including her son, looked more to her husband for help and support. A brother and sister who worked together agreed that they both played the role of peacekeeper in their family business. An interesting difference in perception then arose when the same brother talked about his sister's nurturing role. He appreciated her new policy of recognizing employees on their birthdays and planning company picnics as a nice "woman's touch." His sister explained that she did not view it that way; she thought of the policy as an important managerial strategy for building teamwork and company loyalty.

Although many families disagreed that gender stereotyping applied to their situation, one family spent time pointing out some stereotyping that seeped into the workplace. A father told a story of how his daughter Suzanne's good idea of offering credit to customers was put down in a business meeting with this remark by a non-family business member:

Yeah, that's a good idea, and I might have known that Suzanne would have thought of it because all the women like credit cards.

The father's impression was that the man liked the idea but wanted to discredit Suzanne for coming up with it first. He resorted to gender stereotyping as his weapon.

Although the expected differences between men and women discussed in the review of the literature did not match the research participants' experi-

ence, one unexpected difference did emerge in the analysis of the data: how men and women make business decisions. According to many of the research participants, women needed more time to reach a decision. As one female participant explained:

> He [husband] doesn't discuss things . . . I can talk to somebody before making a decision—to get their feelings, get their ideas, and to find out what they think.

A brother and sister, Sarah and Phillip, debated that issue in relationship to their opinion of the basic differences between men and women:

> **Sarah:** I think that one of the differences between males and females is the female tends to be more inquisitive in terms of how a decision will affect the broader perspective.

> **Phillip:** And it's not just in business, but the other women that I know, they're more concerned about what everybody else is doing. And I'm more concerned . . . I'm worried about what I am doing, and what it means to me. And there's just a basic difference there.

More women than men seemed concerned about that difference. Although the women wanted more time for decisions to be made, some of the men said they appreciated the difference and thought that it not only added more complexity to decision making, but also made it "less boring."

Glass Ceiling and Succession. According to the literature review, many women in family business suffer from the same "glass ceiling" problems that other women in business face. Because they are female, they do not advance as quickly as men and remain in lower level positions. As far as succession, the literature suggests that family-business women's chances of running the company remain slim because of the primogeniture rule—the first-born son usually inherits the business.

The women in this study did not fall into the usual generalizations about glass ceilings and succession planning (see Table 5). With the exception of one woman, their positions in the business reflected a high standard of respect. They did not seem to be held back because they were women. Succession planning, a difficult issue for most families to discuss, came up several times in certain families' conversations. When it surfaced, the rule of primogeniture did not appear to be an automatic determinant of who should assume the leadership position. Several daughters were designated the heiress apparent even though they had brothers also working in the business. For example, siblings Janet and her younger brother, Stephen, teased each other during the interview:

> **Janet:** It's not like, well, because I'm a woman I'm getting a better shake or because I'm a man I'm getting a better shake.

> **Stephen:** She did have a company car. She made more money than I did, and still does.

The most marked example was a business in which the son was not only the oldest child but also had worked more than ten years longer than either of

Table 5. Comparison of Family-Business Positions between Women and Men

Ref#	Fam Position	Women Bus Position	Yrs*	Ref#	Fam Position	Men Bus Position	Yrs*
1	Wife	Co-director	7	1	Husband	Co-director	11
2	Daughter	Market. Dir.	2	2	Son	Prod. Man.	6
-	-	-	-	2	Father	Pres. & CEO	36
3	Wife	Asst. to Pres.	15	3	Husband	Pres. & CEO	15
4	Daughter	Exec. Manager	4	4	Father	Treas. & CEO	15
5	Mother	President	17	5	Son	VP Mar. & Sales	18
5	Daughter	Exec. VP Oper.	11	-	-	-	-
5	Daughter	VP Customers	3	-	-	-	-
6	Wife	Owner & Partner	3	6	Husband	Owner & Partner	3
-	-	-	-	6	Son	Employee	1
7	Wife	Fin. Dir. & Part.	25	7	Husband	Pres. & Part.	35
7	Sis-in-law	Off. Man. & Part.	15	-	-	-	-
8	Wife	Vice President	15	8	Husband	President	35
9	Sister	Project Manager	18	9	Brother	Relocation Man.	12

* Number of years working in family business.

his sisters. Nevertheless, one of the sisters was being groomed to take over the company.

Some interesting points were raised by the analysis. Several women welcomed their husbands' position of boss in the business and felt it was either good for the public image or allowed more flexibility in the work schedule.

Another interesting point involved the relationship of job title to job status. The women's status at work did not always reflect their official positions. For example, one participant was listed as both "owner" and "partner" but willingly took a back seat to her husband, who assumed a more visible leadership position at work.

Motherhood and Child Care. Worrying about adequate child care and balancing work with motherhood created problem after problem for women. Many women participants in this study appeared to have conflicts over mothering and child care. Some of the problems resulted from mixed messages about work and family priorities that came from other family members, particularly their fathers. As one daughter explained, her father was always asking her when she planned to give him a grandchild. When her son was born, her father then kept asking her to hurry back to work. Interestingly, she saw this double bind as a compliment, because in a family business as large as hers (more than 5,000 employees), she felt needed rather than just accommodated as the boss's daughter.

Several younger women offered ways of coping with the child-care issue. They planned to put more balance in their lives than their fathers did; the

work would not consume their family life. One woman planned to rearrange her job duties so that more of her work could be done by computer at home.

The older women with grown children had a different perspective on the child-raising issue. Several reported the conflict more as one imposed on them. One had chosen children over work, two chose work over children, and one seemed content with balancing the two. The two women who chose work over children strove for professionalism in their work and did not want to take advantage of their family-member position. One of these women described her neglecting the children even though her husband, Jim, encouraged her to spend more time away from the business:

In retrospect, I feel I did neglect them somewhat . . . See, it was not Jim who required me to be here; it was me. Jim would say, "Go to the ball game."

Whatever the reasons for their conflict over children and work, it appeared to be a relationship issue rather than a general statement of feeling unsupported at work and at home. However, balancing children and work still seemed very much a woman's concern. For example, a middle-aged man responded to my child-care question by indicating that it was something he never thought about; his wife/co-owner just took care of it. When a woman from a younger generation discussed her recent motherhood status, a similar echo resounded. She said that her husband will not participate in interviewing a nanny for her return to work; he sees that as her job.

Implications for Practice and Research

Although this study provides support for some of the existing literature, it also offers some new perspectives. In this section, I discuss the research findings in terms of their applicability in family business practice.

The practice area may include the family members themselves, non-family business members, and professionals consulting to family businesses. Whoever is attempting to make sense of family companies may be helped by thinking about certain biases or assumptions in gender issues.

Roles. A particular bias exists that women play certain roles in family business because of their feminine makeup and conditioning. It may be more helpful to think of these roles as "expected" rather than "accepted." In other words, just because women are expected to play certain roles in family business does not always mean that they do. Nurturing and peacekeeping roles present examples of what is considered normal behavior for family-business women. These roles, which may include behaviors such as listening and mediating, are assets to any business, especially in management. But according to this study, more than half the participants either did not see the women in their family business as fitting into these particular role assignments or did not see nurturing and peacekeeping as pertaining only to the female member of the family business. Brothers, husbands, and fathers fulfilled these roles along with or instead of the women. Furthermore, if a female business member played these roles, she

may have viewed herself as practicing good management skills rather than adding a "woman's touch."

Expected roles and behavior can be used as weapons against women in family business. One family gave an example of a male manager undermining the daughter's ideas with his gender stereotyping remarks. Another family reported that the daughter was slotted into the invisible role by some female managers who ignored her and did not invite her to important meetings.

One interesting point about both of these examples is that they involve people in high management positions within the family business who are not blood relatives. Perhaps some non-family members in larger companies resort to gender discrimination as a way of competing for limited managerial positions.

Another interesting point about the examples is that both men and women can be guilty of undermining family-business women's competence. Other participants complained about female clients and professionals ignoring the family-business women, but in the smaller companies, the invisible treatment comes from those outside the business. In larger companies, the invisibility issue is inside as well.

More attention needs to be directed to assumptions concerning women, roles, and work. Although peacekeeping, nurturing, and other expected female behaviors may fit some women and the contributions they can add to the work context, this may not always be the case. Rather, it may be more beneficial to attend to the individual's behavior and how it may benefit the family business. For example, a woman may be more suited and productive managing the sales division than mediating employee issues in personnel.

Professional Development. A general belief exists that women in family business can be ignored or held back just because they are women. The study participants gave personal stories that present another side of that picture. Most of the women in this study felt very acknowledged and supported by their male family members, especially when other professionals or clients ignored them. Along with this support, only one participant complained about lack of professional advancement. Most of the women expressed satisfaction with their positions in the family business. When sibling participants told their stories, the rule of the son succeeding as head of the business was not automatic. Sisters appeared to be moving ahead as fast or faster than their brothers.

Women are making more advancements in their family companies. This situation is not the wave of the future, it is occurring right now. On the reverse side, attention may be misdirected toward women who seem to be in subordinate positions unless one understands that not all females in family business want to advance their titles and responsibilities.

A differentiation must be made between a glass ceiling that is transparent or mirrored. A transparent glass ceiling may create a barrier when women can see advancements that lie beyond their reach simply because they are women.

A mirrored ceiling may give women the opportunity to reflect on why they do not want to reach upper management positions. Ideally, this ceiling should be "mylar" (both flexible and mirrored), so that women can reach the top and experience the responsibility but, if needed, return to a lesser position and reflect on their decision. This may seem a bit farfetched unless one understands the juggling act women experience between work and home, particularly if children are involved.

Parenting. Elder-care issues did not surface at all during the interviews, but child-care concerns certainly did. More than half the women participants were recalling, anticipating, or in the process of juggling work and raising children. In these cases, except for one, they expressed some anxiety over managing the two demands.

A current assumption is that women feel unsupported at work and at home when it comes to child-care concerns. The mothers in this study did not complain about lack of support. With the exception of one mother, they did describe a mixed message that required them to take care of children and take care of the family business. Two families identified the mixed message coming from the male members, especially fathers of daughters in the business.

Yet no perspective on the men's willingness to share child-care responsibilities could be drawn because these women were not actually experiencing working and mothering at the same time. The other mothers said it was their own professional standards that led to the anxiety; they could have taken more time off for children, but chose not to.

Whatever the reasons for their conflict over children and work, balancing children and work still appears very much a woman's concern. Those who work in or with business families must remain sensitive to the problems that develop when a person feels torn between work and home. Family-business women and men can start looking for ways to handle the mixed message (devote yourself to the business, but take care of your family) by finding their own balance between the two. All of the women in the study found different ways of handling this problem. Some chose to spend time away from work; others did not.

In summary, this section points out the importance of women defining for themselves a position within family business that fits their needs. In other words, family-business women need to be as curious about what they want out of the business as what the business wants out of them. And those who work with family businesses need to be curious about the individual skills of each female family member rather than relying on assumptions about what women, in general, can or cannot contribute to the success of the family business.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to explore the experiences of women in family business. I believe that goal has been achieved. Nevertheless, the study con-

tains several limitations in sampling. First, the decision to interview women in a family-business context that included at least one male family relative should not suggest that this would be the only way to look at gender issues or that a family business without male relatives would not contribute rich material for research projects.

Second, the maximum diversity sample might have been improved by including more women with small children and more women from large companies. I added two more months to the interview time line to schedule meetings with participants who fit these characteristics. However, large corporations were difficult to access without a close, personal contact, and women with small children were too busy to schedule an appointment.

As the findings suggest, juggling children and family business remains a continuing dilemma for women. Hearing from more women currently in this position would have added more ideas of how women are handling this juggling act. In the one large company included in the study, problems with non-family business members overshadowed problems with family business relationships. It might have been helpful to hear from other women dealing with non-family managers.

Also, ethnicity was not addressed in this study. The method of making contact with family businesses limited the sample of the research participants. During the interviews, two families brought up their Italian heritage but did not connect ethnicity to their relationships in family business.

Implications for Research

The practice section helped identify some family-business issues that need further investigation. The following section identifies a number of research concerns:

Child Care in Family Business. More than half the women in the study raised the dilemma of combining work with children. No easy answers to this problem seem forthcoming. In the practice section, I suggested that family business mothers decide how to prioritize their lives rather than having it prioritized for them. This is just the beginning. What if family business members do not support the woman's decisions? What if a woman wants to pour her energies into her work rather than children but suffers tremendous guilt by doing so?

These are just a few examples of issues needing further attention. In this study, child care remained very much a mother's concern rather than a father's. It is vital to hear from other business families to investigate the depth and breadth of that theme. A study that targeted only family business members with young children would make a valuable contribution. Then, most of the questions could be directed toward parenthood and child-care concerns.

Women in Larger Family Businesses. In this study, a woman in a large company experienced problems with non-family management, who seemed to

be competing with her for high managerial positions, including the future leadership slot. A study is needed that addresses only larger company families with women in positions of influence. Is this a problem in other large family businesses? If so, how are the women handling the situation? What are her family business members doing to help or not help? What do the non-family managers have to say?

Women Working Only with Female Relatives in Family Business. This research study looked at gender issues from stories told by women and men who worked together. It would be valuable to look at the same issues with women who only worked with other female relatives and compare the two studies.

A Larger Sample. Qualitative research encourages small samples for depth instead of breadth in the research results. In a study with as many relationships as this one, it may be interesting to conduct a quantitative research study to encompass a larger sample. Then the two studies could be compared for similarities and differences.

Ethnicity in Family Business. Literature in this area remains scarce; therefore, any well-researched findings would make an important contribution. Perhaps the same perspective as this study could be applied so that assumptions concerning different women in ethnic populations may be approached from a position of curiosity rather than acceptance.

Conclusion

The results of this study echo many of the same concerns of the postmodern feminist perspective of women. Advocates of postmodern feminism (Hare-Mustin, 1987; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990) believe that a feminist point of view only polarizes the differences between men and women by attributing behavior to social conditioning. This feminist perspective still encourages others to categorize behavior in the "either/or" manner of "Women are this way, and men are that way." Postmodern theorists encourage a "both/and" perspective that attends to both the similarities and differences between men and women.

The findings of this study point to a "both/and" or postmodern lens of looking at family business members in two ways. First, family-business women and men share many similarities that remain unacknowledged. Hare-Mustin (1987) reminds us that our beliefs or constructions of gender emphasize differences and polarity between men and women rather than similarities and commonalities of experience. In this study, the unexpected commonalities among the men and women participants seem worth noting, especially in the gender roles that each sex is expected to play. As many men as women in family business seem comfortable playing the nurturing and peacekeeping role, which is usually thought to be reserved only for female members of the family.

Second, differences between women in family business are as important as their similarities. For example, even within a similar theme of child care, the

research participants held different perspectives about the problem. Also, in discussing the glass ceiling, the research participants disagreed about how far they wanted to advance in the company.

With this postmodern view of attending to both similarities and differences, Fraser and Nicholson (1990) express ideas about women that closely fit this study's research findings:

> The underlying premise of this practice [describing women from a postmodern feminist perspective] is that, while some women share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal: rather, they are interlaced with differences, even with conflicts. This, then, is a practice made up of a patchwork of overlapping alliances, not one circumscribable by an essential definition. (p. 35)

Fraser and Nicholson use a rich metaphor for their ideas. They compare a composite of women to a tapestry composed of different hues rather than one woven in a single color. Applying this metaphor to the research findings encourages us to stand back and admire the tapestry of women in family business, while still noticing the different colors. We can then come close to the tapestry and examine the individual strands of each woman and how her unique threads are interwoven with others to create a strong and enduring whole.

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