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# There's No Place Like Home? The Effects of Childhood Themes on Women's Aspirations Toward Leadership Roles

Janet Wojtalik

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There's No Place Like Home?  
The Effects of Childhood Themes  
On Women's Aspirations Toward Leadership Roles

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders

School of Education

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by

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2006

## Abstract

The shortage of women in leadership positions remains a far-reaching concern in all management arenas. Although the literature hints at the influence of the internal barriers of lack of self-confidence, poor self-esteem and the overwhelming attitude of instinctive male dominance, the literature fails to address the impact of early childhood messages and their consequent gender-biased themes on the development of these misconceptions. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of childhood themes on women's aspirations toward leadership as suggested by the Eccles Model of Achievement Related Choices. Early childhood gender related experiences of eight women in leadership and non-leadership roles were solicited using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Interviews, focus groups, check lists, self-esteem measures and journaling were used to gather in-depth information from the participants. Themes prevalent in the childhood homes of the participants were identified, coded, sorted and compared relative to the Eccles model. The findings indicated that childhood messages regarding career options impact career choice. They also indicated that females are more likely to choose higher education when parental expectations include this aspiration and women are less likely to aspire to leadership roles when sent messages of female helplessness and submissiveness. The findings indicated that parental role models depicting gender-role stereotypes have little to do with the adult woman's educational and career choice. Parental levels of education were also not related to the educational and career choices made by the participants. The findings indicated that the messages sent to the participants about their

own capabilities, and the expectations their parents held for them were of greatest impact.

These messages formed the women's values regarding education, career choice and motherhood.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose and Significance of the Study.....	14
Research Questions.....	16
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study.....	16
Definition of Terms .....	17
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	20
Introduction.....	20
Theoretical Framework.....	23
Gender-Role Stereotypes .....	27
Socializers' Beliefs and Behaviors .....	29
Differential Aptitudes .....	32
Previous Achievement-Related Experiences .....	36
Summary.....	38
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	40
Introduction.....	40
Methodological Approach.....	40
Data Recording Procedures .....	42
Participants .....	45
Data Analysis .....	47

Internal Validity.....	49
Conclusion.....	50
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS .....	52
Narrative of Events .....	52
Characteristics of the Participants .....	53
Gender-Role Stereotypes .....	59
Socializers' Beliefs and Behaviors .....	67
Differential Aptitudes .....	77
Previous Achievement-Related Experiences .....	87
Aspirations Toward Leadership.....	93
Heroes, Mentors and Significant Others.....	98
Summary.....	100
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS .....	102
Interpretation of Results .....	102
Generalizations .....	113
Limitations .....	114
Implications for Research.....	114
Implications for Practice .....	119
Summary.....	127
References.....	129
Appendix A: Introductory Letter .....	151
Appendix B: Informed Consent .....	154

Appendix C: Open-Ended Interview Guide .....	157
Appendix D: Gender-Message Assessment Checklist .....	159
Appendix E: Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) .....	163
Appendix F: Open-Ended Focus Group Prompts .....	166

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1 Expectancy X Value Theoretical Model of Achievement-Related Choices.....	6
2 Self-Esteem Scores of Leaders and Non-Leaders.....	79
3 Self-Esteem Scores of All Participants.....	79
4 Model of Socializers Effecting Women's Educational and Career Aspirations.....	113

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	54
2 Comparison of Effects of Parental Role Models and Parental Expectations on Educational and Occupational Achievement.....	71
3 Gender Messages Selected by Participants and Implied Themes.....	76
4 Self-Esteem Scores of Participants on the Index of Self-Esteem.....	78
5 Heroes, Mentors, and Significant Others of the Leader Group.....	99

DEDICATION

To my best friend

Robert

For his endless messages of patience, inspiration and support

As I honored the struggle

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Over time, we have seen the feminine instinctive nature looted, driven back, and overbuilt. For long periods it has been mismanaged like the wildlife and the wildlands. For several thousand years, as soon and as often as we turn our backs, it is relegated to the poorest land in the psyche. The spiritual lands of Wild Woman have, throughout history, been plundered or burnt, dens bulldozed, and natural cycles forced into unnatural rhythms to please others.*

-Women Who Run With Wolves (Estés, 1995, p.1)

Dorothy's words in the 1939 MGM silverscreen adaptation of L. Frank Baum's tale *The Wizard of Oz* (as she is about to click her heels and leave the Emerald City) should be a cause of concern for women everywhere. After her triumphant victory over the wicked witch, her battle with the haunted forest and her confrontation with the winged monkeys, she tells Glinda, the good witch, and the Tin Man how the experience has changed her. When the Tin Man asks her what she has learned, she states, "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own back yard" (Warner Home Video, 1999).

This portrayal of female acquiescence is one of many that permeate our fairy tales, childhood films and television shows today. These gender-biased messages are peppered with themes of dependence and helplessness. Although they may be subliminal, they are in our homes, our libraries and our schools. We also send messages through the words we use and the roles we play. These messages communicate gender-related themes to our youngsters which influence their perceptions of gender from an early age. These may not be the messages, however, that we want to send our children (Rimm, 1999).

They are antiquated and confining, yet they still persist. Without our knowledge and intervention these childhood themes of female helplessness and male dominance will continue to influence our children, shaping their opinions of male and female roles and impacting their feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence and aspirations for leadership. The effects of these messages may play a part in the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.

#### Statement of the Problem

Although women have made gains, the shortage of women in leadership positions remains a far-reaching concern in all management arenas (Addi-Racah & Ayalon, 2002; Lublin & Brewer, 2003; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Morrison, White, and Van Velsor (1992) state in their book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* that “Since the early 1970’s, women have made tremendous gains in the business world...It is still rare, however, to find women at the top of America’s largest corporations” (pp. 5-6). Current literature indicates that there continues to be an underrepresentation of women in the fields of business, science, medicine, educational administration, physical education administration, research and public office (Addi-Racah & Ayalon, 2002; Bloot & Browne, 1996; Brunner, Grogan, & Prince, 2003; Coleman, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Lublin & Brewer, 2003; McCabe, 2001; Morrison et al., 1992; Skinner, Robinson, Brown, & Cates, 1999; Skrla et al., 2000; Tesch, Wood, Helwig, & Nattinger, 1995). Many of these authors indicate that both external and internal barriers may influence this underrepresentation.

External barriers are those obstacles to advancement that exist outside of the control and influence of the individual seeking advancement and include sex-role stereotyping and discrimination (Hudak, 2001). Gender-bias, which is defined as prejudice towards a specific gender without just cause, crosses many arenas. One bias reflects the belief that men make better leaders than women. This misconception can be a fundamental obstacle when selecting leaders (Lublin, 2003). Perceived preference for male vs. female leadership style serves as an external barrier for women on the climb (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999). Gender-oriented names can also serve as a barrier for women on the climb. Ellington and Critelli (1980) showed that women with masculine first names were more likely to be found in leadership positions. Other external barriers include the selection process for hiring. Walby (1990) argued that the criteria used to recruit and hire administrators favor men over women. In reference to the superintendency, Brunner states “board and search criteria are based on white male norms” (Brunner et al., 2003, p. 31). Hearn (1990) and Shepard (1999) also asserted that the external barriers of recruitment, selection, evaluation and reward systems in most school districts ensure that women are less likely than men to serve in a leadership capacity. Brunner et al. (2003), in their study of women superintendents, state that since men have dominated the field of the superintendency for so long, they have become the standard for the position.

Although external barriers persist, internal barriers are also present. Internal barriers refer to the personal conflicts experienced by females and the internalization of values which women or society create, choose, exercise, or maintain (Hudak, 2001).

Internal barriers such as poor self-image, poor self-esteem, socialized role expectations, and modest career goals that inhibit women from aspiring toward leadership roles are also prevalent (Adkinson, 1981; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2003; Golub & Canty, 1982; Hansot & Tyak, 1981; Hudak, 2001; Shakseshaft, 1987; Tindall et al., 1978). Dowling (1981) indicates that women are socialized early in life not to take care of themselves, not to cope, not to have high self-esteem and to be helpless. A socialized mindset that suggests that these behaviors are the norm creates these internal, unspoken barriers, which manifest themselves in feelings of inadequacy, inferiority or, as this author argues, a sense of instinctive or socialized male dominance.

Although there is research to support the notion that women are successfully advancing in leadership positions, it also shows that they still do not aspire to leadership roles as often as men (Skrla et al., 2000). In fact, current research in the area of education indicates that the superintendency remains male dominated with the selection of females increasing from 11% in 1930 to only 14% in 2000 (Brunner et al., 2003). This is not a significant increase. The reasons why remain a topic of inquiry. Many are convinced that equality among the sexes, or gender equity, is not a critical issue any longer. After all, more women now hold highly influential, high paying jobs (Hudak, 2001). Although this may be true, women in leadership positions still do not approach a level proportionate to men (Hudak, 2001). The literature also informs that women continue to remain underpaid as well as underrepresented (Brunner et al., 2003). Supportive evidence suggests that there are still problems with how men and women are socialized, creating internal, gender-biased values, which inhibit females from seeking leadership status.

Theoretical frameworks support the influence of society and culture on the aspirations of women towards leadership positions (Atkinson, 1964; Bandura, 1977, 1986; Eccles, 1987; Lewin, 1938; Weiner, 1974). The Expectancy X Value Theory (Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983) (see Figure 1) is a theoretical model of achievement-related choices which addresses gender differences in educational and career selection. This theory posits that gender role socialization leads females and males to develop different expectations for success and contributes to fluctuations in confidence in one's ability to succeed. It conceptualizes gender differences in achievement patterns in terms of choice. Instead of looking at why women are not more like men, the model theorizes as to why women make the choices that they do, lending support to the effects of socialized internal barriers (Eccles et al., 1983).

Although this theory originated in 1983, Eccles' work continues to be included in current investigations and has received recognition as cutting-edge research in the area of gender studies. She continues to investigate gender role socialization and its contribution to the gendered patterns of educational and occupational choices (Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Eccles, Wigfield, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Jozefowicz, Barber, & Eccles, 1993; Swann, Langlois, & Gilbert, 1999; Udegraff, Eccles, Barber, & O'Brien, 1996).

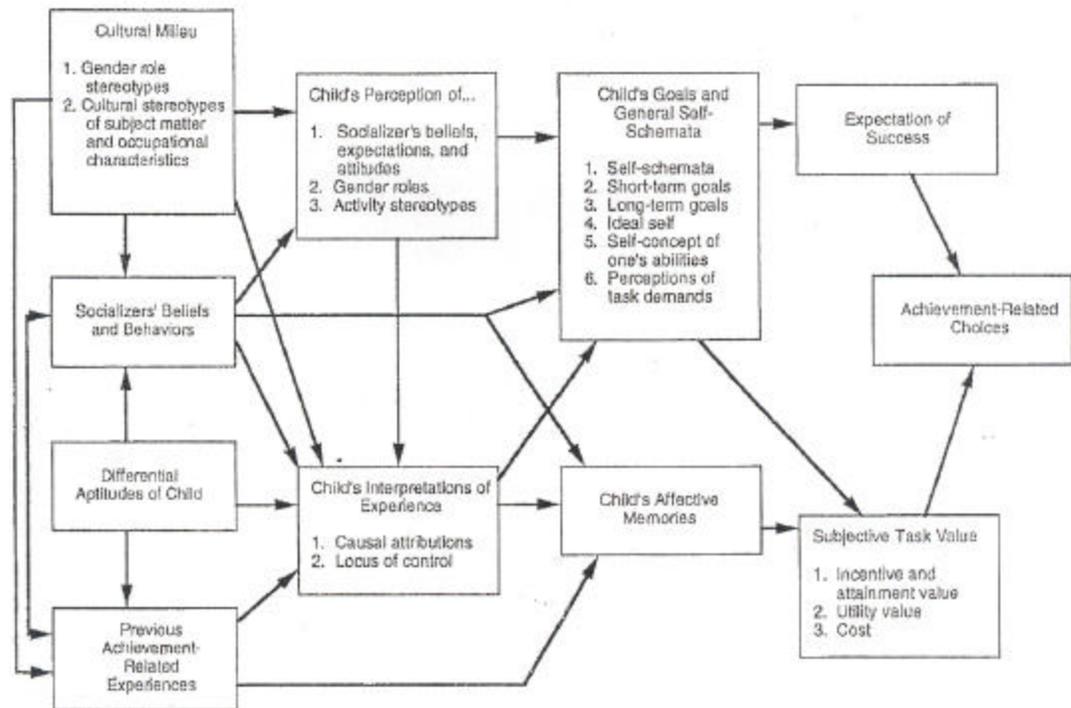


Figure 1. Expectancy X Value Theoretical Model of Achievement-Related Choices

Note. From “Linking Gender to Educational, Occupational, and Recreational Choices: Applying the Eccles et al. Model of Achievement-Related Choices” by J. S. Eccles, B. Barber, & D. H. Jozefowicz. In *Sexism and Stereotypes in Modern Society: The Gender Science of Janet Taylor Spence* (p.154), by W. B. Swann, J. H. Langlois, & L. A. Gilbert (Eds.), 1999, Washington, DC: APA Press.

Other authors address this area of choice. Kellerman and Rhode (2004) review conflicting opinions regarding what women want. They refer to choices as they review salient views. They discuss the contrasting conclusions of Belkin and Friedan, stating that Friedan described a society that limited women’s choices while Belkin sees a society in which women are exercising choices to reject the workplace. They look at the interplay between socialized career choices and the absence of career choice options.

Rhodes (2004) in his book *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, however, argues that differences between men and women are “hardwired” into our biology, rather than a mindful choice. He reports a wealth of scientific evidence demonstrating that sex distinctions remain a deeply rooted part of human nature and defines differences as a result of varying levels of testosterone. The more testosterone a woman has, the more competitive and self assured she is. Rhodes (2004) states that women enjoy caring for children and doing housework more than men. He believes that cultural pressures force women to work outside the home when that is not what they really want to do. He discards the idea of socialization and states that men are innately more competitive and aggressive and looks at these characteristics in females as uncommon. In fact, he states that “A woman who seeks power outside the family through a dominant and aggressive personality will have to be as agile as Spiderman if she is to be happily married as well” (p. 263).

Kimura (1992) suggests that boys are inherently aggressive and that girls are inherently passive. His research indicates that men out-perform women in mathematical reasoning and that women have greater verbal fluency. He holds, as does Rhodes (2004) that these differences exist because the environment is acting on brains that are wired differently. Both authors support the nature rather than nurture stance for explaining the differences between males and females and do not address the effects of socializers.

Tinklin (2003), on the other hand, also looks at gender differences and attainment, more specifically the underachievement of boys. Tinklin (2003) states that although the academic performance of boys and girls is improving, that of girls continues to surpass

that of boys. Her research links achievement to social factors such as peer pressure, social background and task value. Girls, she states, “tend to be better prepared, more conscientious, cooperative, organized...and respectful...”(Tinklin, 2003, p. 321). Her research indicates that academic success is valued more by girls than by boys, thus supporting Eccles’ position relative to task value and career choice making (Eccles et al., 1983).

Recent research shows a range of different factors that are related to gender differences in performance. Parental attitudes, post-school opportunities, gender roles portrayed in the media and existing inequalities by gender in the family and workplace have been shown to influence young people’s attitudes and aspirations, thereby influencing their behavior and performance at school (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin,& Frame, 2001).

The nature versus nurture stance is not new to the literature. This research study acknowledges that there may be differences in the way we are hardwired but believes that the influence of social factors plays a major role. It is not the purpose of this study to support or negate the fact that differences may exist between males and females. Rather, this researcher wants to delve more deeply into the influence of societal factors on the choices that women make.

The implications of the Eccles’ model provide the understanding of the link between gender roles and gendered educational and occupational decisions. The social and psychological factors addressed by this theory contribute to these gendered patterns

of career-related choices, offering an explanation for the failure of women to choose leadership roles.

Women remain underrepresented across all professional arenas, even with the passage of anti-discrimination and sexual harassment laws (Addi-Racah & Ayalon, 2002; Lublin & Brewer, 2003; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). The reasons identified for this underrepresentation range from discrimination, biological make-up, and poor self-confidence to women simply choosing not to lead. Although researchers continue to look at the external barriers, a more compelling view is emerging, one that supports the view that society, parents, teachers and the media are fostering the belief that women are not as capable of leading as men (Coleman, 2003; Eccles, 1993; Hudak, 2001). Our boys and girls are socialized to accept these attitudes and they carry them into adulthood. Perhaps these socialized beliefs are the cause of women's failure to aspire to leadership roles.

Generation after generation our children are inundated by social messages sent by parents, schools and media that portray discriminatory male and female roles. In the 1960s and 1970s the media portrayed women as helpless and subservient. *I Love Lucy*, *All in the Family*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *Andy of Mayberry*, *Gilligan's Island*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Bewitched*, and *Three's Company* all sent messages that women were silly and unintelligent, content with cooking, cleaning and meeting the needs of the male. Today's popular TV shows continue to send messages to our children that may not portray women as capable individuals. *Friends* shows women as highly sexual, having one partner after

another, and continually in turmoil over the latest fling. Although employed, their career choices include gender stereotyped professions: caterer, singer, and fashion designer.

Degrading women and embellishing sexuality in movies and on television are routine. The way women and girls have been traditionally portrayed, either as perfect homemakers or artificial sex symbols, has had a harmful influence on our children (Rutter, 1996). Rimm (1999) further discusses the image of women portrayed on television. Gender stereotyping occurs frequently, she states, showing our young girls and boys that “women are romantic, brainless fools or sexual objects. Television in many ways sabotages the feminist movement by typically portraying mothers as aggressive ogres married to playful and fun fathers who sabotage the mother’s power in an alliance with the children” (p.156).

Even our classic fairy tales teach our children that women are helpless, waiting to be rescued by the strong male hero. Seven little men rescued Snow White and she happily cooked and cleaned for them until she was later rescued by the handsome prince. Rapunzel was held captive in a tower until saved by her equally attractive man. Gilligan (1993) states:

In the world of fairy tale...the adolescent heroines awake from their sleep, not to conquer the world, but to marry the prince....The sex differences depicted in the world of fairy tales...indicate repeatedly that active adventure is a male activity... (pp.13)

When women are present in power positions in our childhood tales, they take on negative roles such as “the evil queen”, the “wicked stepmother” or the “wicked witch of the west”.

The female role models depicted in television and in the books we read to our children may play a powerful role in their perceptions of women. Studies of children’s literature between 1967 and 1971 examined picture books which were chosen as award winning children’s literature by the American Library Association. These Caldecott award winning books, chosen as the best of the year, revealed that for every one girl drawn, eleven boys were pictured (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). When female characters were included, they were inconspicuous: a girl playing quietly in a corner, a silent woman carrying wood, a princess whose hand is given in marriage, and a mother who packs lunch and waves goodbye. Jobs for adult women were limited to mother, mermaid, and fairy. In contrast, men were main characters and were shown as house builders, storekeepers, kings, farmers, judges, preachers, fathers, adventurers, soldiers, policemen, fishermen, monks, fighters, gods, and storytellers (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Newer studies have shown improvement in children’s books, but not significantly. Review of the research shows that the proportion of instances of females in pictures in Caldecott winners rose steadily from a low in the 1960s of 19%, to 31% in the 1970s, to a high of 36% in the 1980s, and then back to 35% in the 1990s (Davis & McDaniel, 1999). While more females are included, representation is far from equal, and starkly drawn stereotypes remain: competitive, creative, and active boys; dependent, submissive, and passive girls (Bigler & Liben, 1990; Davis & McDaniel, 1999;

McDonald, 1989; Nilges & Spencer, 2002; Williams, Vernon, Williams, & Malecha, 1987).

Although stories alone do not determine children's perceptions of gender, they are a part of the complex of societal influences, including television, movies, advertisements, magazines, and popular music, that together send strong messages of gender norms and ideals. Within this complex, stories have a powerful and often subtle effect (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999; Trousdale & McMillan, 2003). As Gilbert (1992) writes:

By entering into story worlds, and by being inserted into the storylines of their culture, students come to know what counts as being a woman, or being a man, in the culture to which the stories belong. They come to know the range of cultural possibilities available for femininity and masculinity- and the limits to that range...Through constant repetition and layering, story patterns and logic become almost "naturalized" as truths and common sense.

(pp.127-128)

Although the themes of helplessness and submissiveness may be communicated through the media, of primary significance are the messages sent by parents, children's primary socializers. Parents and teachers send gender-biased messages to our children through their words and actions. Phrases like: "throw like a girl", "act like a lady", "fight like a man", "cry like a girl", "boys are bossy", "man up to it", "be a man", "marry a rich man", "don't be a sissy", "mamma's boy", and beliefs like: "girls are afraid of bugs", and "it's a man's world" all communicate a message of male dominance. The themes inherent in these messages suggest that being female means weak, fearful and squeamish. They

tell our children that showing emotions of fear, caring and sadness are negative and highly attributed to girls. Therefore, if you are a man, do not act like a girl by showing emotions of sensitivity. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's continual reference to "girlie man" in his 2004 political speeches is insulting and derogatory to women and just one example of socialized gender-bias that continues to be communicated to our young. References, such as Schwarzenegger's, shape our children's perceptions of gender related roles and may strongly influence behaviors and perceptions about female leadership.

The belief held by men and women that males are dominant and females are helpless begins in childhood and prevails into adulthood. Gender researchers, David and the late Myra Sadker (1994), conducted a unique study involving 1,100 elementary school children. The children were asked what life would be like if they woke up one morning and were the opposite gender. The responses were disturbing. Forty two percent of the girls said something positive about being male. They stated that they would be more secure, wouldn't worry so much about what people thought about them, would be treated with more respect and would make more money. Ninety five percent of the boys could not think of one advantage to being female. In fact, 16% of the boys indicated that they would rather commit suicide. One boy responded "I would kill myself right away by setting myself on fire so no one knew" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.84).

What are we doing to our children to reinforce this message of male dominance or superiority so early on? This researcher believes there is more to investigate than the external barriers facing women. Efforts should target the sources of these misconceptions and how to change them. As parents and as educators we need to be mindful of the

attitudes being communicated to our children. Through words, literature, movies, television and music our children are surrounded by themes of male dominance and female helplessness. Of strong impact are the messages containing gender-biased themes that are sent to children by their parents during their formative years. These childhood themes defined as both covert and overt, take hold rapidly and strongly influence the attitudes children carry with them into adulthood and ultimately affect the career choices they make.

#### Purpose and Significance of the Study

Previous research has supported the view that both internal and external barriers block women from reaching leadership positions. Although the literature hints at the significance of the internal barriers of lack of self-confidence and the overwhelming attitude of instinctive male dominance, the literature fails to thoroughly address the impact of early childhood themes on the development of these misconceptions. Expectations for success, confidence in one's abilities to succeed, and personal efficacy have long been recognized by decision and achievement theorists as important mediators of behavioral choice (Atkinson, 1964; Bandura, 1977; Lewin, 1938; Weiner, 1974). The primacy of parents as socializers of these mediators has also been recognized (Eccles, 1987).

Atkinson (1964), Bandura (1977), Lewin (1938), and Weiner (1974) give us a framework that explains the impact of early socialization on self confidence and career choice. Eccles (1994) argues that early formative experiences influence why women

make the career choices they do. She discusses the influence of socialized gender misconceptions on the adult woman's educational and career aspirations.

The Eccles (1987, 1994) theory conceptualizes gender differences in achievement patterns in terms of choice and takes us beyond the question "Why aren't women more like men?" to the question "Why do women and men make the choices they do?" This theory examines socializers and their impact on women's self-perceptions and capabilities. This model legitimizes the choices of both men and women and allows us to look at the gender differences from a choice perspective rather than a deficit perspective (Eccles, 1994). It enables us to set aside, rather than negate, theories that profess that men differ from women because of nature rather than nurture. It validates instead the impact that socializers can have on these differences.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the Theoretical Model of Achievement-Related Choices (Eccles, 1994) by exploring the relationship between gender-related childhood themes and women's aspirations toward leadership. This theory purports that the socialization that occurs in a child's formative years strongly impacts adult behavior. In order to explicate this theory, early childhood gender-based messages of women in leadership and non-leadership roles will be compared. If significant differences exist, we may gain a greater understanding of why women choose to enter or not to enter into leadership. The findings of this study may direct future research to further investigate the unintentional, but limiting, gender-bias messages that characterize our homes and our classrooms.

The goal of this study is two-fold: (a) to identify the themes prevalent in the childhood homes of women in leadership and non-leadership positions, and (b) to determine if there is a relationship between these themes and the participants' aspirations for leadership.

### Research Questions

The research questions being addressed in this study include:

(RQ1) What themes were prevalent in the childhood homes of the women participants?

(RQ2) To what extent did these themes influence the attitudes of the participants toward leadership roles?

(RQ3) Is there a significant difference between the childhood themes conveyed to leaders and non-leaders?

### Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations and limitations establish the boundaries, exceptions, reservations, and qualifications inherent in every study (Casterter & Heisler, 1977). This study will be delimited by geographical area. The sample population will be confined by including women residing within the Erie county region. The study will also be delimited by the participants' ability to recollect and share childhood experiences and by the women's ability to see and understand the reality of their childhood environments. The purposive or intensity sampling procedure will limit the study by decreasing the generalizability of findings.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions will be used for this investigation:

Achievement-related experiences: Real life incidents which effect the individual's educational and occupational goals.

Affective memories: Those emotional recollections that have impacted the individual.

Aspirations toward leadership: The desire to achieve a leadership/management position through one's own efforts and to meet the standards of excellence required.

Childhood messages: Actions or statements, covert or overt, that contain gender-related themes.

Childhood themes: Generalized inferences about gender-roles and capabilities contained in covert and overt early childhood messages.

Differential aptitudes: The individual's perceptions about their own capabilities and talents.

Dominant parent: The parent viewed as the person in charge of discipline, decision making, household rules and routines.

Early childhood home: The child's formative years ranging from birth through grade five.

External barriers: Obstacles to advancement that exist outside the control and influence of the individual aspiring towards leadership positions. Sex-role stereotyping and discrimination are two examples of external barriers.

Formative years: A child's critical years of development ranging from birth to grade five.

Gender-bias: Prejudice towards a specific gender without just cause.

Gender-role stereotypes: Jobs, activities or chores specifically attributed to one sex.

Internal barriers: Hurdles or obstacles to advancement stemming from learned attitudes or beliefs that exert a powerful negative influence on women's ability to aspire to leadership positions. Two examples of internal barriers are negative self-image and sex-role socialization.

Instinctive male dominance: The innate feeling or attitude that males are superior to females.

Leaders: Individuals holding positions that involve the hiring, supervision and evaluation of subordinates.

Negative Female Reference: Any comment or phrase that addresses femaleness as a negative trait. For example, an unskilled ballplayer is said to throw like a girl.

Non-leaders: Individuals who do not supervise others.

Perceived expectations: Goals and aspirations that children believe are held for them by their parents.

Perceived field of options: The educational and career opportunities believed to be available.

Perception of competency: The opinion one has regarding individual capabilities.

Self-efficacy: Expectations or beliefs concerning one's ability to perform successfully a given behavior.

Self-esteem: An individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, or likes him or herself.

Self-schema: A person's self-image including who he or she is and who he or she would like to be.

Social agents: Those persons or events which influence a person's view of themselves and their capabilities.

Socialized gender-bias: Prejudice towards a specific gender learned through the socialization process.

Socializers: Those persons or events which affect a person's view of themselves and their capabilities.

Social scripts: Themes or messages prevalent in the home or society which dictate the expected roles of a specific gender.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The movement of women into leadership positions continues to be a popular theme for researchers across many disciplines. The fields of science, education, medicine and business have all addressed the presence or absence of women in top leadership fields. The underrepresentation of women continues to be an area of study with an increased focus on the internal and external barriers that inhibit women from reaching for and acquiring leadership roles.

The obstacles that prohibit females from reaching their potential leadership capabilities have been categorized as either external or internal. External barriers are those obstacles to advancement that exist outside the control and influence of the individual aspiring towards leadership positions. One of the most common external barriers addressed has been termed the glass ceiling effect. This perspective suggests that the obstacles women face in promotion, compared with men, systematically increase as they move up the hierarchy (Wright & Baxter, 2000).

Although references to external barriers such as the glass ceiling remain, a focus on the internal barriers is emerging (Hudak, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000). Internal barriers are hurdles or obstacles to advancement stemming from learned attitudes or beliefs that exert a powerful negative influence on women's ability to aspire to leadership positions. A lack of confidence and a difference in development of self-reliance and autonomy indicate that internal barriers may play a key role in the ability of women to advance into

leadership positions (Hudak, 2001, Skrla et al., 2000). Lack of confidence, sex-role socialization, low career aspirations and a tendency toward a feeling of instinctive male dominance may significantly impede female advancement.

Hudak (2001) and Skrla et al. (2000) indicate that women may indeed be greatly influenced by internal factors. Parental and societal influence during childhood colors the adult woman's frame of reference and thus unconsciously inhibits her ability to advance into challenging or leadership roles. A lack of self-confidence, an internal conflict between career and motherhood, and the antiquated notion of instinctive male dominance, instilled since childhood, may prevail into adulthood. These childhood themes remain in our families and in our schools and impede the young woman's innate feelings of leadership potential (Atwood, 2001).

Over the past 20 years, Eccles (1987, 1994) and her colleagues have studied the motivational and social factors influencing such achievement goals and behaviors as educational and career choices, recreational activity selection, persistence on difficult tasks, and the allocation of effort across various achievement-related activities. Due to the striking gender differences in educational, vocational, and avocational choices, Eccles and her colleagues have been particularly interested in the motivational factors underlying male and female achievement-related decisions (Eccles et al., 1999).

Drawing upon the theoretical and empirical work associated with decision-making, achievement theory, and attribution theory (Crandall, 1969; Weiner, 1974), Eccles (1994) has elaborated on a comprehensive theoretical model of achievement-related choices that has been used to guide the research efforts for this study. This model

links educational, vocational and other achievement-related choices most directly to two sets of beliefs: the individual's expectations for success and the importance or value the individual attaches to the various options perceived by the individual as available. These beliefs, according to the model, are related to cultural norms, experiences, aptitudes, and to those personal beliefs and attitudes that are commonly assumed to be associated with achievement-related activities by researchers in this field (Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983; Eccles, 1987; Meece, Eccles, Kaczala, Goff, & Futterman, 1982). Using the Eccles' model as a guide, this review will examine the interpretative systems that influence achievement-related choices.

This chapter will begin with a theoretical overview. The factions of the Eccles Model of Achievement- Related Choices (1987, 1994) will be used as a guide to orchestrate the literature review. Gender-role stereotypes will be examined, lending support to the belief that the stereotypes young men and women develop regarding occupations, career choice and leadership aptitude may influence women's ability to enter into leadership roles. This chapter will also acknowledge the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions by reviewing the research edifying the disproportionate numbers of males and females in a variety of leadership fields.

Socializers affecting decision making will also be examined, investigating the influence of both internal and external barriers on women's view of themselves and their abilities. Self-perceptions of aptitudes and self-esteem will be further examined. The literature review will address the implications of poor self-esteem on leadership ability and goal development and achievement. Achievement-related experiences will also be

addressed, looking again at self-worth, task perception, and gender-related goals and expectations. Women's lack of self confidence and poor self esteem may be key obstacles and are supported by clinical and achievement theory, which acknowledge that we may be socialized to make the career choices we do.

### Theoretical Framework

Feminist psychologist, Jacquelynne Eccles, (1987, 1994) has studied the motivational and social factors underlying female and male educational and vocational decisions and has developed a comprehensive theoretical model of achievement-related choices drawing upon the theoretical and empirical work associated with decision making, achievement theory, and attribution theory (Crandall, 1969; Weiner, 1974).

The general attributional approach to motivation developed by Weiner (1979, 1985, 1986) asserts that the causal beliefs people hold about their successes and failures have important consequences for their feelings, expectancies, and behavior. The Eccles model links achievement-related beliefs, outcomes, and goals to interpretative systems like causal attributions, to the input of socializers (primarily parents and teachers), to gender role beliefs, to self-perceptions and self-concept, and to one's perceptions of the task itself.

Eccles (1987, 1994) uses an Expectancy X Value Model of achievement motivation and has framed this theory specifically to address gender differences in educational or occupational choices. The model specifies that the choice to take on an achievement-related task is the result of two sets of beliefs: the individual's expectations for success (self confidence) and the extent to which the individual values the task. Task

self-confidence and subjective task value are powerfully influenced by gender socialization processes, including messages from parents, teachers, textbooks, and the mass media (Eccles, 1994).

The foundation of the model is based on the interplay of four factors: a) gender and cultural stereotypes, b) beliefs and behaviors of the child's primary socializers, c) the child's self-perceived aptitudes or locus of self-esteem, and d) the child's experiences related to achievement. These conditions or events are peppered by the child's perceptions and interpretations of these beliefs, expectations, attitudes, gender roles and stereotypes.

Based on this interplay, the child develops an expectation for task success and learns to place a certain value on the task based on these experiences. Thus, achievement-related choices are made based on the interweaving of the above themes. Each of these factors or themes are assumed to influence both the expectations one holds for future success at the various achievement-related options and the subjective value one attaches to these various options. These expectations and the value attached to the various options, in turn, are assumed to influence choice among the options (Eccles, 1994). Therefore, this model predicts that women will most likely apply for positions that they think they can master and that have high task value for them. Women's expectations for success depend on their confidence in their intellectual abilities and on their estimation of the difficulty of the position.

This theoretical perspective is supported by the literature regarding internal barriers, particularly a lack of self-confidence which may be key to women's

underrepresentation in leadership positions. It also addresses the achievement choices that women make, based once again, on socialized attitudes regarding what women can and cannot do. This model differs from other social scientists who have adopted a male standard of ideal achievement when judging the value of female achievements (Parson & Goff, 1980). Other theorists acknowledge the effects of social and cultural influence on adult behavior (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Huston, 1983).

Huston (1983) states that, by age five, children have clearly defined gender role stereotypes regarding appropriate behaviors and traits. In addition, children appear to monitor their behaviors and aspirations in terms of these stereotypes (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Huston, 1983). Gender theory, socialization theory and achievement theory attempt to explain the influence of early childhood experiences on adult career choices, however these theories are disconnected and fail to take into account the societal influence on the definitions of achievement. The Eccles Theory (1987, 1994), on the other hand, acknowledges the influence of socialization on achievement relating specifically to task value and task cost.

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory has been applied to career behavior and used to explain the process by which traditional gender role socialization influenced women's self referent evaluations in relationship to career choices and behaviors. Self-efficacy is defined as "people's judgment about their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). According to Bandura, efficacy expectations develop and are potentially modified via four sources of experiential information: a) performance accomplishments,

b) vicarious learning, c) verbal persuasion and encouragement, and d) degree of anxiety associations (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Bandura's theory (1977) postulates that the individual will develop self-efficacy expectations in the domain of interest relative to these four experiences. The Eccles (1987, 1994) model supports Bandura's theory as it recognizes confidence in one's ability to succeed and personal efficacy as important mediators of behavioral choice (Eccles, (1994).

Rosenberg (1979), in his analysis of self-esteem, claimed that self-esteem is based on self-assessments of qualities that are perceived as important by individuals. Harter and Mayberry (1984) provided evidence that supports the effects of perceived task value on self concept. These investigators asked fifth to seventh graders to rate both the importance of five different areas (i.e., school, sports, social relations, physical appearance, and behavior) and their own competency within these areas. Self-esteem was the highest among students who rated their best areas as also the most important. These researchers lend further support to expectancy-value theorists (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991) who also distinguish between perceived competence and task-value perceptions.

Osipow (1983) and Super (1963, 1990) support the belief that individuals lacking in self-esteem are less likely to make good matches between self and occupational roles, once again lending support to the Eccles (1994) theoretical model. Research on women's career development has shown self-esteem and other self-concept features to be pivotal in the career development of women. Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) and Walsh and Osipow

(1994) show that higher levels of global self-esteem and more positive self-concepts are found in career-oriented versus home-oriented women. Higher levels of self-esteem have been strongly related to women's pursuit of traditionally male-dominated occupations and to their achievement motivation and career commitment (Betz, 1994; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

### Gender-Role Stereotypes

Gender-role stereotypes are defined, for the purpose of this research, as jobs, activities, tasks or expectations specifically attributed to one sex. Gender-role stereotypes can result, then, in ill-conceived perceptions of the talents or capabilities of the individual. According to Eccles (1994), because men and women are socialized differently, they acquire different self-concepts, different patterns of expectations for success and different values and goals. They also acquire different expectations for one another based on these socialized gender-role stereotypes. In reviewing the literature we see the effects of gender-role stereotypes on career aspirations. The scope of the underrepresentation of women in leadership and scholarship positions as a result of these stereotypes becomes apparent.

Skinner, Robinson, Brown, and Cates (1999) investigated the frequency of female publishing patterns in school psychology journals. This study found that females are indeed underrepresented in the world of research. Lublin and Brewer (2003) investigated the extent to which gender influences the election of women to public office and concluded that traditional gender roles have a significant impact. They found that women are most likely to win public offices in areas where men do not want the jobs.

Blout and Browne (1996) interviewed physical education teachers in Western Australia to determine the reasons for the low number of female department heads in the field. All interviewed supported the assumption that a significant barrier to promotion was the fact that they were female.

Historically, men have dominated administrative positions in our educational system. Females in educational leadership have risen over the last decade; however, since the education profession is over 70 % female, they remain proportionally underrepresented. Women constitute about 14 % of the superintendents in the 14,000 U.S school districts (Brunner et al., 2003; Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). The role of public school superintendency continues to top the list of the most gender-stratified executive position in the country (Björk, 1999; Kawakami, White, & Langer, 2000). Men are 20 times more likely to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in schools than are women (Skrla, 1999). These facts remain even though there are a larger number of female students in educational administrative doctoral programs than males (Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1990).

In 1995, only 8.7 % of the Fortune 500 companies' corporate officers were women. Although by 2002 the percentage had nearly doubled to 15.7 %, this is still a small number (Wellington, Kropf, & Gerkovich, 2003). Although females are now more educated and more hold leadership credentials it still remains that they are less likely to be found in power positions than men (Burke & MacDermid, 1996; Kearney, 2000; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001).

### Socializers' Beliefs and Behaviors

Socializers are individuals who communicate powerful messages about competencies and expectations. The beliefs and behaviors of these significant intimates can highly impact the beliefs and attitudes regarding the competencies of others through the messages they send (Eccles, 1994). If young children only see male principals they will be socialized to assume that only men can be principals. If they only see male government officials, the same holds true. Gender research supports this claim and shows that even when new or non-traditional gender deviations occur, acceptance remains difficult. The strength of the impact of socialized bias is strong and deeply ingrained, once again supporting the theoretical factions of the Eccles Model of Achievement Related Choices (1987, 1994).

Gender stereotypes about leadership in past research have indicated that men are perceived to be more capable of leading than women (Broverman, Vogel, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1972). Although current writers (Arburdene & Naisbett, 1992; Carless, 1998; Cranwell-Ward, 2001; Gardner, 1990; Growe & Montgomery, 2001; Hegelsen, 1995; Rosener, 1995), suggest women have “special” qualities suited to leadership they remain underrepresented in all arenas (Addi-Racah & Ayalon, 2002; Bloot & Browne, 1996; Brunner, Grogan & Prince, 2003, Coleman, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Lublin & Brewer, 2003; McCabe, 2001; Morrison, et al., 1992; Skinner, Robinson, Brown & Cates, 1999; Skrla, et al., 2000; Tesch, Wood, Helwig, & Nattinger, 1995).

Interestingly, literature now indicates that a favored leadership approach is leadership that is transformational in nature, involving ownership, oneness and doing the

right thing rather than doing things right (Depree, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1992). These characteristics have been previously assigned to a typically female style of leadership. Research indicates that this is a preferred approach (Cuban, 1988; Grogan, 1996; Henkin, Wanat & Davis, 1996; Leithwood, 1995; Nogay, 1996). We no longer value the command and control type of leadership, but rather the “interactive leadership” as discussed in Judy B. Rosener’s (1995) work *Ways Women Lead*. Interactive leadership involves getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group. It encourages participation, shared power, and enhanced self worth.

In Sally Helgesen’s book *The Female Advantage* (1995) she recognizes women’s values as a source of strength rather than as a sign of weakness. She views women as possessing an attention to process instead of a focus on the bottom line; as showing a willingness to look at how an action will affect other people; and with a concern for the needs of the community. Although Helgesen (1995) acknowledges that some men may share these values, they are defined as female because they have been nurtured in the private, domestic sphere to which women were restricted for so long.

While these authors support the growth and appreciation of women in scholarship and leadership, trends indicate that the movement of women into leadership positions of true authority still does not exist at a rate comparable to that of males (Hudak, 2001; Lawler, 1990; Morrison et al., 1992; Skinner, 1999; Skrla et al., 2000). Lawler (1990) states:

We live in a society that values what is male more than what is female. Our government, major corporations, institutions of higher education ...are operated by men at the highest levels of administration, while women assume 'support' tasks that are lowest paid and least rewarded. (p.652)

Gilligan (1982) and Helgesen (1995) both focus on the differences between male and female leaders. Although the current women's movement holds that, for all intents and purposes, men and women are equal and bring to the workplace unique and successful leadership styles, research shows that females who attempt to enter and advance in leadership positions encounter obstacles that prohibit them from climbing to the top with their male counterparts (Hudak, 2001). Gail Evans (2003) states "My research showed that women get promoted on their performance, while men...get promoted on their potential...we must prove we know how to do it" (p. 36).

Although the typical female style of leadership is gaining in popularity, women are often not viewed as capable of leading (Broverman, et al., 1972; White & Van Velsor, 1992). This socialized attitude surfaces as an internal barrier according to the literature that examines male and female perceptions of what makes a good leader. Available research (Epstein, 1988; Golub & Canty, 1982; Hebl, 1995; Morrison & Shakeshaft, 1989; Tindall et al., 1978; White & Van Velsor, 1992) suggests that men are sought out for leadership positions and that women are not given or do not take the opportunity to lead.

Socializers' negative beliefs and attitudes regarding women's leadership abilities are not only held by men. Tindall et al. (1978) found that men were ranked higher by

men and by women in terms of leadership in small task groups. Golub and Canty (1982) hypothesized that if sex role expectations influence the assumption of leadership, and if women as well as men believe that women do not make good leaders, or should not be leaders, they will defer to men whenever men are present. Neither study attempts to pursue the dynamics behind these behaviors but only guesses at the forces at play. It is interesting to note that in both studies females deferred leadership to male participants (Golub & Canty, 1982; Tindall et al., 1978).

This socialized belief or attitude that women cannot lead begins early. As noted by Sadker and Sadker (1994):

If children see business offices where men, for the most part, are managers and women are secretaries; if they see hospitals where males are mainly doctors and females are nurses; if in their schools they watch male principals giving directions to mostly female teachers, they reach the inescapable conclusion: Men are bosses and women work for them. (p. 258)

#### Differential Aptitudes

Perceptions about one's own capabilities and talents can be termed differential aptitudes. The literature review indicates that a person's self-concept or perceived aptitude for a specific task greatly influences task selection (Eccles, 1994). Perceived self-concept relative to aspirations for leadership has been investigated (Adkinson, 1981; Golub & Canty, 1982; Hansot & Tyak, 1981; Hudak, 2001; Shakseshaft, 1987; Skrla et al., 2000; Tindall et al., 1978).

Despite gains in women's status and the appreciation for the female style of leadership the literature shows that women are not entering the realm of leadership at a rate comparable to men. The reasons continue to be investigated. The external barriers of gender-bias (Gurman & Long, 1994; Kawakami et al., 2000) may play a significant role in women's ability to achieve leadership status, however, the socialized internal barrier of the lack of confidence in female leadership ability seems to resurface again and again in the literature (Adkinson, 1981; Golub & Canty, 1982; Hansot & Tyak, 1981; Hudak, 2001; Shakseshaft, 1987; Skrla et al., 2000; Tindall et al., 1978).

Research done by Skinner et al. (1999) indicates that women are underrepresented as school psychology instructors and that women publish fewer journal articles than men. Although they found an increase in the trend of females to publish, males were more likely than females to be authors of articles in the journals reviewed. The authors indicate that a lack of self-confidence in writing skills may be a significant factor. Here we see women lagging behind men in an area of scholarship where confidence and initiative are paramount.

Women's underrepresentation in public office (Lublin & Brewer, 2003) was also attributed to a question of confidence. Recruitment issues were discussed as these authors suggest that women often do not pursue these top positions. These investigations show that a lack of confidence may be at the crux of women's underrepresentation in these areas, lending support to Skinner's et al. (1999) assumptions regarding the lack of female written works. Neither, however, addresses the source of this inferiority, nor do they propose additional research in the area. The findings do not lend themselves to useful

solutions to these identified areas of weakness, nor do they give us specific reasons for these conclusions.

The study of physical education teachers in Western Australia (Blot & Browne, 1996) investigated the reasons for the low numbers of department heads in this field. Twenty-seven female physical education teachers were interviewed. Evidence obtained indicates that only seven females interpreted their teaching and life experiences in the light of their personal characteristics in such a way as to desire promotion, apply for it, and successfully assume the head of department position. The analysis revealed that constraints on the promotion of females were based primarily on stereotypic attitudes and expectations regarding gender-roles. Blot and Browne (1996) state:

Many women do not appear to consider themselves as potential leaders.

Internalized views of the incompatibility of leadership roles with femininity held by women themselves have been cited as a reason why women are viewed as less competent, less objective and less logical than men. Some highly capable women make a conscious choice not to apply for promotion. (p. 84)

The study concludes that the underrepresentation of females at head of department level in physical education is a gender-based phenomenon. Each contributory factor was perceived as a barrier to promotion because the teacher was female. One prominent factor is the women's own perceptions or self-confidence. Underlying these factors is gender-role stereotyping. This social process which attributes particular behaviors, attitudes, values and beliefs to one sex rather than the other, is

largely responsible for the sex imbalance at the head of department level in physical education (Bloot & Browne, 1996).

The lack of confidence is a recurring explanation offered for women's underrepresentation in leadership roles. This perceived lack of aptitude greatly affects a woman's motivation to seek leadership positions. Merrick (2002) states "Many women have bought into a self-defeating paradigm: a fear of success, a reluctance to legitimize the exercising of authority, a tendency toward self-minimalization" (p. 95). This reflects the belief that women are faced with barriers that keep them from entering into leadership roles; even with the proven success of the skills they bring to an organization. On one hand we see support and movement toward female leaders, on the other we still see a resistance to or lack of women in high profile leadership positions. Applying the Eccles et al. (1987, 1994) model of achievement-related choices is a way to understand this phenomenon. If women are socialized not to choose typically male achievement-related positions because they are socialized not to feel confident in these tasks, this underrepresentation will continue to occur.

Research supporting women's failure to attain leadership roles is abundant. The glass-ceiling perspective remains, blaming external factors as one culprit for this underrepresentation. Issues such as leadership style and gender-bias persist, however a shift is occurring. Researchers are taking a closer look at internal obstacles. Self-imposed barriers are a new focus, supporting the Eccles et al. (1987, 1994) model of achievement-related choices. Emerging research suggests that women today experience fewer entry barriers as a result of affirmative action and antidiscrimination policies (Smith, 2000).

Still, women continue to shy away from leadership roles. Internal self-imposed constraints exist that may make women less likely to pursue opportunities for advancement because they feel they lack the capability or the aptitude to do so (Austin, 2000; Skrla, et al., 2000). Limitations on women's academic achievement and aspirations for leadership come not only from the external environment, but also from internalized ideas and beliefs. When compared to men, women have less confidence in their own abilities, especially in domains that are stereotyped as male (Beyer & Bowden, 1997; Eccles et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

#### Previous Achievement-Related Experiences

Gender roles mandate different primary activities for women and men and these gender roles can influence the definition one has of successful performance of those activities considered to be central to one's identity (Eccles, 1994). If a woman is socialized to value a domestic role and to believe that is all she is capable of doing, she will most likely pursue that career path. The research reviewed indicates that previous achievement-related experiences, then, send messages of expected success or failure in those areas.

Denmark (1993) states that typical female socialization does less to promote leadership ability in the workforce, but instead prepares women for domestic roles as wives and mothers or in lower level traditional jobs in the workforce. Shakeshaft (1989) asserts that women are limited by societal expectations, parental guidance, self-aspirations, and society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles. Men, she

states, are socialized to seek professional success while women are socialized to assume the traditional role of homemaker and mother.

Clinical theory and research also support the concept of gender-bias within our families. In looking at studies involving relationships and gender in our homes, family therapists found that “sexist thinking is pervasive in families” (Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988, p.27). They observed that even in families that presumably valued evenhanded fairness regarding gender, equality between the sexes is more illusionary than real (Goldner, 1989; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996). Atwood (2001) identifies legacies from childhood experience of gender-bias that may be associated with depression among women. In her study, family based gender bias is explored, particularly parental bias, which puts daughters at a disadvantage. Atwood’s (2001) research affirms the existence of parental attitudes and behavior that discriminate against girls:

To various degrees all girls and women are affected by sexism, whether it be within their families, at school, in the workplace, or through the media...The family atmosphere that generated those feelings permeates their everyday thinking about themselves and their relationships...For many women, their confidence in themselves and their capacity to form satisfying intimate relationships have been undermined...they compare themselves with men and feel inadequate; they overvalue the importance to their well-being of attachment to a male or indiscriminately perceive men as threatening; or they equate their

value as women with unstinting service on behalf of others at the expense of themselves. (p. 31)

Hyde and Kling (2001) reviewed psychological research on motivation and on educational achievement focusing on gender. They once again support the impact of internal barriers:

Until women feel that they are of equal worth, it is likely that their education will be impaired. Girls, of course, are not born with these ideas. They acquire them through the processes of gender socialization. Special attention to the messages that girls receive from parents and teachers about their worth relative to boys is needed to remove this internalized barrier to women's achievement. (p.374)

#### Summary

The theoretical framework of the Eccles' et al. (1987, 1994) model of achievement behaviors is based on the belief that socialization shapes both individual's self-perceptions and their goals and values. This theory and the literature reviewed indicate that women and men should acquire different self-concepts, different patterns of expectations for success across various activities, and different values and goals through the processes associated with gender- role socialization. These socialization experiences can affect educational and vocational choices in several ways.

The Eccles Theory (1987, 1994) indicates that gender-role socialization can lead women and men to have different hierarchies of core personal values and to have varying levels of confidence or ability self-concepts across various domains. The literature reviewed supports this claim. Both theory (Eccles, 1993; Ginzberg, 1972; Holland, 1985;

Roe, 1957; Super, 1990) and empirical research (Eccles et al., 1999; Grotevant & Cooper, 1988; Jodl et al., 2001; Mortimer et al., 1986; Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Schulenberg et al., 1984) highlight the pathways linking parental values, beliefs, and behaviors to adult occupational choices and aspirations.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Women do not aspire to leadership positions at a rate comparable to men (Skrla et al. 2000). They are often faced with obstacles, either external or internal, which keep them from advancing into leadership positions. The literature identifies these barriers and offers notions for why women are not represented in leadership positions proportionately to men. Empirical studies have presented the scope of the underrepresentation. The literature also recognizes the attitudes biased in favor of men and theoretical lenses locating the problems within the women themselves (Skrla et al. 2000).

The issues that shape women's career aspirations are of interest to this researcher. There is a need to pierce the silence at the individual level to promote open discourse with and among female leaders and non-leaders regarding their early childhood gender-experiences. This research was designed to advance the conversation in a space that has been largely untapped (Chase, 1995). This design created a context in which women moved toward integrating talk of their career aspirations relative to themes ingrained in them during childhood. The methodology used included the women's own analyses of their early childhood experiences and explored their own proposed solutions to the obstacles facing our children (Lincoln, 1993).

#### Methodological Approach

This study utilized a qualitative methodology based on phenomenology, a search for meaning over a search for rules (Shank, 2002). Phenomenology is based on the notion

that we, as human beings, do not experience anything directly. Instead, we come to know things by the impact those things have on our consciousness. In other words, what we really know are the effects of things on our awareness, and not the things themselves. It is a form of interpretation that says human consciousness is the key to understanding the world. Through phenomenology we see how people interpret their worlds, and how we can, in turn, interpret their interpretations (Shank, 2002).

Qualitative methods, according to Shank (2002), are useful for exploring phenomenon and understanding it. Qualitative methods humanize situations and focus more on process rather than product. Dilthey (1961) first proposed that we seek *Verstehen* (understanding) of human beings by empathizing with them. “One must immerse oneself in everyday reality--feel it, touch it, hear it, and see it--in order to understand it” (Kotarba & Fontana, 1984, p. 6). Phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1994) examine human experiences through detailed descriptions of the people being studied. This understanding of “lived experiences” is based on the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Schuler, Sartre, and Merlau-Ponty (Nieswiadomy, 1993). As a method of research it involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Dukes, 1994; Oiler, 1986).

#### Data Collection Tools

Interviews, surveys, case studies and thematic analysis are popular methodological choices for qualitative study (Blout & Browne, 1996; Brunner, 1997; Logan & Scollay, 1999; McCabe, 2001; Oplatka, 2001). Most of the research reviewed

by this author was found to be guided by traditional paradigms using traditional methods for both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

In support of the Eccles' et al. (1983, 1994) Theoretical Model of Achievement-Related Choices, this researcher investigated the influence of early childhood themes on women's aspirations for leadership and non-leadership positions utilizing a qualitative, descriptive approach. Interviews, focus groups, self-esteem measures, gender-message checklists, and journaling were utilized to gain a deep existential understanding of the world as the participants see and feel it. The various methods encouraged self-observations which yielded insights about individual core meanings and experiences and thus provided *Vertshen* (understanding) of the effects of childhood themes on career choice.

According to Shakeshaft (1986), the female world must be examined if we are to understand gender-based differences in leadership organizations. The investigation into the female world needs to be comprehensive and to tap into all areas of influence. This research examines and compares the themes communicated to female leaders and non-leaders in their early childhood homes.

#### Data Recording Procedures

A qualitative, descriptive approach was employed utilizing a collective case study involving with-in case and across-case analysis. With-in case analysis involves looking at each case as an entity in itself. This was completed by looking at each case individually and checking for themes prevalent in the early childhood environments of the women participants. An across-case comparison involves comparing case to case for

commonalities and differences. This was completed within each group and between the two groups to see whether patterns match or differ from one another across the groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Triangulation is the process of converging on a particular finding by using different sorts of data and data-gathering strategies (Shank, 2002). By using a variety of data collection methods, validation was increased and greater support for the findings was evidenced. In the interest of triangulation, open-ended interviews, checklists, focus groups, journaling and a self-esteem measure were used.

The interview technique used was designed to create a context in which the participants felt safe and free to talk. The interviews were closer to conversations among colleagues in which all were involved in exploring the research questions rather than the traditional format of “expert” researcher questioning research “subjects”. Mischler (1986) described this approach to interviewing as “accepting interviewees as collaborators, that is, as full participants in the development of the study and in the analysis and interpretation of the data” (p. 126). This collaborative technique has been discussed and supported by many others as a successful research interviewing technique (Chirban, 1996; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln, 1993; McCracken, 1988; Scheurich, 1995). Chirban (1996) describes this method as the interactive-relational approach. This approach was designed to balance the professional responsibility of the researcher with the goal of understanding the interviewee.

At the close of each interview, the participants were provided a journal. They were asked to narrate and reflect on any gender-related experiences they encountered

over the following two weeks. Journaling is a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experiences (Denzin, 1998). This activity enabled the participants to take notice of the world around them through a new lens, a heightened human consciousness, which is key to understanding the world (Shank, 2002).

Participants' self-esteem (often referred to as self-confidence) was measured using the short form of the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE). Self-esteem has been defined by many theorists as the evaluative dimension of self-concept, the feelings of satisfaction a person has about him/herself (Sibler & Trippett, 1965). Self-esteem, as measured in this research, reflects the extent to which a person feels positive about him/herself and his/her social interactions. The ISE, developed by Hudson and Proctor (1977), measures the degree or magnitude of a problem an individual has with the evaluative component of self-concept. This tool provides a reliable, valid and standardized approach to measuring self-esteem. The ISE is a self-report scale. In a comparative study of five methods of assessing self-esteem, Hamilton (1971) concluded that no methods clearly outperformed measures obtained by self-ratings. The Index of Self-Esteem consists of 25 items, each rated on a 5-point scale ranging from rarely or none of the time (1) to most or all of the time (5). The scoring is completed by reversing the scores of the positively worded items and tallying the corresponding ratings (1-5) of the 25 statements appraised by each participant. The sum of the items is obtained and then a constant of 25 is subtracted. This method of scoring produces a minimum possible score of 0 and a maximum possible score of 100 where a high score indicates the presence of problems with self esteem and a

low score indicates the absence of such problems. Differences in self-esteem scores between the groups of leaders and non-leaders were compared.

A gender-message checklist was distributed and completed by each participant to investigate the themes related to gender that were present in the early childhood homes of each individual.

Two focus groups followed the individual interviews, one involving those in leadership roles and one comprised of those in non-leadership positions. These configurations allowed leaders and non-leaders the opportunity to share and compare childhood events illuminating more fully individual experiences and how these have affected their aspirations and career choices. Blumer (1969) notes the importance of interviewing a select group; he mentions “seeking participants...who are acute observers and who are well informed...A small number of such individuals brought together as a discussion and resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample” (p. 41). The focus groups were informally structured, with response prompts focusing on individual gender-biased experiences.

### Participants

An intensity sampling was used as the method of selecting the participants for this study. This method, as described by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1990), involves selecting participants who represent “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely,...excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not unusual cases” (Patton, 1990, p.171). Eight Caucasian participants were selected for this study. Two females hold senior administrative positions in business, including a

CEO and a bank president. Two hold senior administrative positions in education, including a principal and a dean. The four non-leaders hold non-leadership positions, two in education and two in business. None of the participants anticipate movement in their careers at this life stage.

Selection of the eight participants was aided by referencing numerous local resources. The Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit #5 and the Pennsylvania Association for School Administrators Women's Caucus membership list was utilized to access females in educational leadership and non-leadership positions. The Leadership Erie Directory, a listing of professionals in the Erie area who have participated in and graduated from the Leadership Erie Program, the Metropolitan Erie Women's Business Directory, and the membership list of women involved in the local chapter of the Ophelia Project were used as resources to tap into the business arena.

Once the sample of participants was selected, each participant was sent a letter describing the study and its importance (Appendix A). A follow-up telephone contact was made. Once participation had been agreed to, each participant was provided with the appropriate informed consent form (Appendix B) and was scheduled for a 90 minute semi-structured interview. An open-ended interview questionnaire was utilized (Appendix C) exploring childhood messages present in their early childhood homes regarding gender roles.

The Gender-Message Assessment Checklist (Appendix D) and the ISE assessment protocol (Appendix E) were distributed at the time of the individual interviews. The checklist was utilized allowing the participants to identify additional

gender related themes prevalent in their formative years. The ISE assessed participant's levels of self-esteem. Completion of these protocols was done individually and returned by mail to the researcher. Open-ended Focus Group Prompts (Appendix F) were utilized to encourage conversation among the participants in a follow-up focus group regarding personal gender-biased experiences.

The interview sessions were tape recorded and later transcribed. The individual interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in length. Each interview generated six double spaced pages of transcription. The two focus groups resulted in ten double spaced pages each and ranged from 90 to 100 minutes in length. Interviews were scheduled individually at each participant's work site. Focus groups were held at locations central to all participants, one at a local elementary school and one at the researcher's home.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation, and narrative report writing. Information was collected from the interviews, journals, focus groups and assessment protocols, then sorted into categories, formatted into a story or picture followed by the writing of a qualitative text (Creswell, 1994). This categorical analysis was utilized to identify themes, issues, and recurring motifs occurring in the methods of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). A coding procedure was used to isolate, count, and interpret the themes or categories. These categories and codes formed the basis for the emerging story. The process involved "segmenting" the information (Tesch, 1990), developing "coding categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), and "generating categories, themes, or patterns" (Marshall & Rossman,

1989). The researcher utilized a systematic process of analyzing the textual data as suggested by Tesch (1990):

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read through all of the transcriptions carefully. Jot down ideas as they come to mind.
2. Pick one document (one interview). Go through it and ask, what is this about? Look for the underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margins.
3. Complete for all documents. Make a list of all topics or themes. Cluster similar topics. Form the topics into columns arranged as major, minor and leftovers.
4. Now go back to the data, abbreviate the topics by codes and write codes next to appropriate segments in the text. Look for new codes or categories.
5. Describe the topics and turn them into categories. Group topics that relate to each other. Show interrelationships.
6. Alphabetize the codes.
7. Assemble data in each category and perform preliminary analysis.
8. Re-code, if necessary.

The following coding procedure was used for the participants: EL- Education Leader, BL- Business Leader, EN-Education Non-Leader and BN-Business Non-Leader. Pseudonyms were also assigned to each participant and will be utilized with the above codes to provide ease in recollection of the participant group. Education coding included: D-Doctoral Degree, B-Bachelor Degree, M-Master Degree, HS-High School Diploma, #- highest grade completed. Other codes used include M and F for male and female, Y and N for yes and no, M and D for married or divorced.

Once all data was collected, coded and categorized, the analysis was guided by the Eccles' et al. (1987, 1994) theory by searching for "patterns" (Yin, 1989) and by comparing the results with patterns predicted from the theory of achievement related choices.

### Internal Validity

One of the keys to understanding internal validity is the recognition that when it is associated with quantitative research it refers both to how well the study was run (research design, operational definitions used, how variables were measured, what was/wasn't measured, etc.), and how confidently one can conclude that the change in the dependent variable was produced solely by the independent variable and not extraneous ones. In group experimental research and single subject research, internal validity addresses the true effect of the treatment on the subjects. In descriptive case studies the internal validity refers only to the accuracy or quality of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

Internal validity in qualitative research is ensured by using multiple methods of data collection, often termed triangulation (Creswell, 1994). This study utilized five forms of data collection: individual interviews, focus groups, journaling, a self-esteem measure and gender-message assessment checklist. A convergence among the different methods of data collection served to increase internal validity. Member checks were also utilized. The participants were asked to review their own transcripts for accuracy and to give feedback on the themes and categories identified. An ongoing dialogue regarding the interpretations of the informants' realities and meanings ensured the truth value of the

data. Although objectivity and truthfulness are critical to both qualitative and quantitative research, the criterion for judging qualitative studies differs from quantitative research. First and foremost, the researcher seeks believability, based on coherence, insight and instrumental utility (Eisner, 1991) and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through a process of verification rather than through traditional validity and reliability measures. The epistemological assumption of this qualitative paradigm is based on minimizing the distance between the researcher and the informant (Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

### Conclusion

The research reviewed shows that women who attempt to enter into leadership roles are met with barriers. These can include external barriers including gender-bias from their male counterparts; negative opinions of the typically female or transformational type of leadership; sex-role stereotyping; or direct prejudice and discrimination. Internal barriers may also exist. Feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence or perceived instinctive male dominance may inhibit women from pursuing leadership positions. Theoretical implications (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Huston, 1983) indicate that the influence of society and culture can play an important role in the career choices that women make. Socialized gender differences result, according to the Eccles' et al. (1987, 1994) Theory of Achievement-Related Choices, impacting women's confidence in their ability to succeed in leadership roles. The literature abounds with studies identifying barriers across all arenas. The research, however, does little to address the origin of these internal barriers, which may play a critical role in both male and female perceptions of women's ability to lead.

By examining the early environments of professional women leaders and non-leaders and the messages prevailing in their homes, we may be able to identify the effect of childhood themes on adult perceptions and behavior. The findings of this study will not only inform theoretical understanding of the effects of childhood themes, but may inform our guidance to parents, relatives, teachers, caregivers, media and others who affect our children's formative years.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Narrative of Events

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of childhood themes conveyed by a purposive sample of women during their formative years. Relative to the Eccles' Model of Achievement-Related Choices (1987, 1994), this study attempted to discern through a variety of qualitative methods what childhood themes and socializers were evident and the comparative effect of these agents on the adult women's career choices and perceived options. Interviews, focus groups, journaling, self esteem assessments and early childhood gender message checklists were used to collect the data. The participants included women from both business and education in both leadership and non-leadership positions.

Through the five methods of data collection, the women relayed unique stories, illuminating the socializers prevalent in their early childhood homes. They provided insight into parental role models, expectations and intimate gender-related experiences. Through this search for meaning the participants conveyed personal early life themes and experiences that provided an understanding of the influences of early childhood messages on career decision making choices.

Once the wealth of information was collected, the *unpacking* process began (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The unpacking involved looking deeply into each word and phrase to interpret what had really been said. The information shared by each individual was examined case by case and comparisons were made among individuals and between

the leaders and non-leaders. The use of the Eccles' (1987, 1994) choice theory provided the framework for coordinating and orchestrating the rich, descriptive data.

Meanings and interpretations are reviewed in this chapter relative to the key components of the Eccles' Model of Achievement Related Choices (1987, 1994). Information has been categorized and discussed using the primary factions of the Eccles' construct. Gender-role stereotypes are examined and include the prevalent social scripts regarding: the roles of men and women; themes of dominance, submissiveness, and helplessness; and occupational choice. Socializers' beliefs and behaviors common within and among the groups are investigated relative to their perceived expectations and available options. Differential aptitudes are investigated by looking at perceived competency and individual self-schema. Previous achievement related experiences are explored in light of parental relationships and affective memories. Aspirations towards or away from leadership positions are analyzed relative to these factors.

#### Characteristics of the Participants

Eight women completed the five components of the study. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Member checks were used to assess the correctness of the transcriptions. Once all information was secured, the coding process identified the themes or patterns. These were then sorted into themes and sub-themes.

Table 1 shows the distribution of demographic information collected from the participants including: education, career choice, age, and marital status of each participant. It also displays the educational levels of their parents.

Table 1

*Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

	EL 1	EL 2	BL 1	BL 2	EN 1	EN2	BN1	BN 2
	Mia	Linda	Kate	Millie	Tracy	Karen	Beth	Rose
<b>Demographics</b>								
Education	D	D	B	B	B	M	HS	HS
Career Choice	Director Spec. Ed.	HS Dean	CEO Credit Union	Bank Pres.	Teacher	School Psycho.	Retail	Domestic Engineer
Age	52	45	48	59	45	46	58	47
Marital Status	D	D	D	M	M	M	M	D
# of Children	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	2
Birth Order/#of Siblings	4/6	4/5	3/3	2/2	6/6	2/3	1/2	6/9
Sibling Sex	3 F 3M	2F 3M	1F 2M	1F 1M	4F 2M	2F 1M	2F	6F 3M
Mother's Education	B	HS	HS	HS	HS	HS	HS	9th
Father's Education	HS	B	HS	HS	6th	HS	HS	9th

This table shows that the participants range in age from forty-five to fifty nine.

Six of the female participants completed college and four are divorced. All but one has had children. Only two of the sixteen parents of the participants hold or held a college degree. The descriptions that follow give an overview of each participant and summarize key aspects of their lives and perceptions.

Mia-EL1 (Education Leader 1)

Mia (EL 1) is 52 years old. She is divorced and the mother of one daughter. She has recently earned her doctoral degree and she currently holds the position of director of special education for a three county intermediate unit. She oversees seven supervisors and has three secretaries. She is one of six children. Her early childhood years were characterized by a supportive father, who impressed her with his support of her mother's effort to return to college later in life to become a teacher. She grew up in a home where college was expected and career options were open. She describes her father as labeling the children in the family. "My dad defined me as the student in the family and I have tried to live up to that." She also describes herself as identifying more with males than females while growing up. She describes males as more interesting and always looked for the challenge of successfully completing "guy things".

Linda-EL2 (Education Leader 2)

Linda (EL2) is 45 years old. She is divorced and currently holds the position of high school dean. She will soon earn her doctoral degree. She is one of five children. She describes her childhood home as strong and nurturing. Her father was in charge and typical gender roles were evident in the household. College was expected with open career options although teaching was encouraged. She shared that a first grade teacher was influential in her career choice. Her movement into leadership was reported as a result of mentorship by males in the field.

Kate-BL1 (Business Leader 1)

Kate (BL1) is 47 years old, divorced and the mother of two children. She holds a bachelor's degree and is currently the CEO of a credit union. She describes herself as a tomboy growing up in a household with two older brothers. She labels her family as strong and very close. Her father was the dominant parent, often showing some jealousy over her mother's success in establishing her own real estate business. She describes her mother as her hero by "doing it all" by working and running a typical household. Kate grew up believing in Cinderella, waiting to meet the right person and to live "happily ever after". Typical gender roles were evident in her early childhood home. College was encouraged and career options were open. Her father was most influential in her pursuit of work with the credit union.

Millie-BL2 (Business Leader 2)

Millie (BL2) is 57 years old, a college graduate, married with one daughter and currently the president of a bank. She describes her early childhood home as solid with her mother being the strong parent, communicating respect for college and work ethic. College was expected but education was encouraged as the career of preference. After one year in education, Millie changed her major to business and completed her degree in this area. She describes her leadership success as a result of male mentors in the banking arena.

Tracy-EN1 (Education Non-Leader 1)

Tracy (EN 1) is 47 years old, married and the mother of two children. She currently holds a bachelor's degree and works as a special education teacher. She is one

of six children. She describes her childhood home as poor where her father was abusive and dominant. Negative female references were common. The girls were held in low regard and were expected to wait on the male members of the household. Her mother was seen as dominated, yet, strong emotionally. She grew up believing in Rapunzel, waiting to be rescued by the handsome prince. College was not a prevailing theme within her immediate family. She did receive encouragement to go to college, however, from maternal extended family members. Her interest in special education was sparked by a high school special education teacher whom she admired. Her mother's message to her was "to be strong but to hide it from the men in her life". She finds herself imitating this within her own household.

#### Karen-EN2 (Education Non-Leader 2)

Karen (EN2) is 45 years old. She is married and the mother of two sons. She holds a master's degree, a special education supervisory certificate and her principal's letter of eligibility. She currently works in the capacity of a school psychologist. She has no desire to move into an administrative position, although she has pursued the necessary education to do so. Karen describes her childhood home as "the all-American family". She is one of three children who were expected to go to college and to pursue gender-typical careers. She was most influenced to go into special education by a special education teacher. She describes herself as never "super-feminine", identifying more with male heroes in childhood tales. Her mother was seen as in charge and the decision-maker in the home, although typical gender roles were evident.

Beth-BN1 (Business Non-Leader 1)

Beth (BN1) is 58 years old, married and the mother of one son. After two years of college she left to get married. She is currently in sales and works as a decorator in a home furnishings store. She describes her childhood home as negative with a strong demeaning mother and quiet, “milk-toast” father. Her description of herself includes a comparison to Cinderella, doing all the laundry and cleaning at a very young age. Beth believes she received no parental career or educational support. Her self-aspirations were described as fantasies, including “singers and dancers” based on television personalities. She states that she had no heroes during her childhood years. Themes of male insensitivity and negative female references were prevalent in her childhood environment. Beth sees herself in her marriage as the submissive wife. She sees her husband as the financial manager of the home, and she is uninvolved in all financial matters. She states “I have never even seen a bill”.

Rose-BN2 (Business Non-Leader 2)

Rose (BN2) is 47 years old, divorced and the mother of two sons. She has a high school diploma and is currently part of a personal home cleaning service. She is one of nine children and described herself as “running the household” when her mother returned to work. She cooked, cleaned and took care of her younger siblings in lieu of after-school activities. She states that her father was a very domineering figure, mirroring his role as a “sergeant in the army”. Her mother was described as quiet and submissive. Strong gender bias was prevalent in the family, with the girls given little freedom. As adults the sons were taken into the family construction business while the girls were

expected to “marry a rich man” for financial support. Strong male dominance prevailed in this home with extreme messages of female helplessness and negative reference.

This summary of information provides a condensed picture of each of the participants. The stories and descriptions shared revealed a complicated network of overlapping themes. These themes and sub-themes have been sorted and grouped based on the segments of the Eccles Theory (1994), providing a logical framework for discussion.

### Gender-Role Stereotypes

Gender-role stereotypes are defined, for the purpose of this research, as tasks, occupations or activities specifically attributed to a particular gender. Gender-biased themes or social scripts are defined as messages prevalent in the home or society which dictate the expected roles of males and females. The information gained from the participants in this research was examined for themes and scripts which influenced their expected roles in their early childhood homes.

#### *Male and Female Roles*

The literature shows that by age five, children have clearly defined gender-role stereotypes regarding appropriate behaviors and traits (Huston, 1983). In addition, children appear to monitor their behaviors and aspirations in terms of these stereotypes (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Huston, 1983).

Dad mows the lawn and mom does the dishes. The girls cook and clean and the boys take out the trash. These gender-role stereotypes were abundant in all but one of the eight participant’s childhood homes. Beth (BN1), a member of the non-leader group,

shares her experiences as a child and the expectations her parents had for her in her childhood home. “My mother was a very, very poor housekeeper. That was my job. I felt like Cinderella. I was standing on a chair with a dish towel around my waist washing the dishes when I was young. I was ironing when I was young.”

Rose (BN2) shared similar experiences regarding expected gender-roles in her home. Her social script included taking care of her siblings and her father and therefore eliminated the option for extracurricular activities. Rose (BN2) states:

I had to stay home after school making sure my younger siblings did their homework. I had to cook dinner for my father and for the kids. I had to, starting in seventh grade. I knew my mom needed me. My dad expected dinner. I didn't even opt for a sport or any after- school activity. I couldn't because my role was to come home and take care of them.

Rose's (BN2) most important socializers, her parents, sent her messages of very specific male and female expected roles in the household, ones that were strongly gender-biased. She explains:

The boys had chores to do and the girls had chores to do. The boys had to mow the lawn and take out the garbage. But they could run off any time and do everything they wanted. The girls never went anywhere on Saturday until all the household chores were done. We were also a complete baby-sitting service for our community. When somebody called, whether we had plans or not, we had to cancel them. My dad said one of us would be there and he would book us all out

for babysitting jobs. That's just how it was. The girls had to go to Catechism and the boys didn't have to go if they didn't want to.

The females in Rose's (BN 2) home were sent a clear message that their *place* was maintaining the household. The boys' script included independence and choice and the girls' did not. This gender-role stereotype became deeply ingrained and sent Rose strong messages regarding her role as a woman. Both Beth (BN1) and Rose (BN2) experienced glaring messages regarding what was expected of females in their families.

The gender-related messages sent to the women of the leader group were characterized by somewhat different themes. Mia (EL1) spoke highly of her father, citing many examples of his equal treatment of all six children. He was a central figure in her life and greatly influenced her perceptions of gender-role expectations. She states:

I think gender roles were subtle. My dad was not a handyman. My mom could take apart a lamp and a toaster and put them back together. He could not do that.

He was just not into hammers and nails so I never got to see that as a guy thing.

Everybody was different in my family and no one fit into gender stereotypes.

Social agents can either encourage or discourage individuals from developing gender-role stereotypic beliefs. Mia was raised in a home where novel or gender role deviant options were legitimized. This environment, somewhat free from gender-biased messages, permeated into her adult life. She states "As an adult, I have always fought those gender stereotypes. I have always done guy things just to show I could do it".

Parents, children's primary socializers, can influence gender-role expectations either directly or indirectly. The messages they send can either encourage or discourage

the adult individual from considering or dispelling gender-role stereotypes. Linda (EL2), a high school dean and currently working toward her doctorate in educational leadership, examined her early childhood experiences in search for gender-biased messages. She shared her experiences during the focus group session:

I don't think that gender roles were anything we ever noticed, but they were there.

My brothers never did the dishes. The boys took out the garbage and they mowed the lawn. The girls did the dishes and had to put away the clothes in the laundry.

My brothers were allowed to go more places. They were allowed to take their bikes a lot farther than I was. My dad taught the boys how to use tools.

Themes prevalent in the early childhood homes of the women interviewed revealed different messages regarding expected male and female roles. Like Beth (BN1) and Rose (BN2), Linda's (EL2) story reflects typical themes or scripts allowing boys more freedom and assigning typical male-female chores. She grew up in a home with typical male and female roles and yet she aspired to a career and leadership. Beth (BN1) and Rose (BN2) experienced gender-specific roles yet they did not aspire to higher education or leadership positions.

The social scripts in Millie's (BL2) home sent a neutral message. All children were treated equally. "In our family gender roles were not really evident. We lived in a communal atmosphere that put at a table both siblings and cousins. They looked at us not as boys and girls but as kids." Household chores were shared between the children with no deference to gender. "My mother thought that it was important to teach us things like

ironing and cleaning. My brother loved it. He loved to cook and still does today. We weren't held back. We were all together.”

Although the messages sent regarding male and female roles differed from participant to participant, the expected role in the family appeared to have little to do with the individuals' aspirations later in life. Engaging in typical male-female tasks and responsibilities in the home did not inhibit a woman from aspiring to educational and career achievement. Other messages appeared to have a greater effect.

#### *Dominance, Submissiveness and Helplessness*

The themes of male dominance, female submissiveness and female helplessness were important themes evident in this investigation. Beth (BN1), a member of the non-leader group, grew up with the theme of mother as the “ogre” and dad as the submissive parent, both always trying to please the mother. Beth's negative description of her childhood home indicates that she was belittled and criticized by her mother and her father, receiving approval only when she cleaned, cooked or did laundry. She explains:

My father was just a delightful man but my mother was overpowering, overbearing and kind of wicked and controlling. So, I think she took his self-worth away. They were both very, very critical and very demanding. When I compared myself to my cousins I felt like Cinderella. My parents were always negative. It was “You could be such a pretty girl but...”.

Beth's scripts included a very dominant mother who did little to foster independence or self-worth in her children. The male-female roles she experienced carried atypical themes

of female-dominance and male-helplessness and clearly defined Beth's expected role in the family.

Tracy (EN1), also among the non-leaders, grew up in a home where dad was dominant and females were expected to serve the males in the family. There was little choice or freedom regarding the day to day chores and expectations. Tracy (EN1) adds:

My father was a hot-headed man. My mother was a very weak person. A woman's job was to take care of men. That was pretty direct. Male dominance and female submissiveness were very prominent in my home. There wasn't female helplessness because we were to do everything.

Tracy's (EN1) home exemplifies themes of male dominance and female submissiveness to a strong degree.

Although the theme of parental dominance was evident in most homes, it did not necessarily indicate gender-bias or social scripts dictating helplessness or submissiveness in regards to the female children. Kate (BL1), the CEO of a credit union, experienced gender-stereotypes in the roles of her mother and father, but believes that expectations for all siblings were the same and did not differ because of gender. She describes her family life in the following:

My dad was definitely the dominant one. My mom would always have the meals cooked. There was this routine. He would come home and have a Manhattan and watch TV and my mom would prepare meals. She did everything. She was definitely submissive to my father. He was a strong Italian. You do what I say. I

am the man. Even with this, I wasn't treated any differently than my brothers.

They treated us all the same.

Kate (BL1) explains that her father was in charge, however, equal expectations existed for all the children, regardless of gender.

Millie (BL2), the president of a bank, shares a different story. Her memories revealed a family environment reflecting strong work ethic and maternal strength. She sees her mother as the parent in command:

My mother and father worked very hard. There were years where my mother cleaned to provide extra money for the kids. I didn't know it. My dad didn't even know it. She didn't want to embarrass my father by cleaning but that was my mother. She was the dominant parent. My father was very giving. He never said no to me. My mother was a little tougher. The combination worked. She was a very strong influence in our lives.

Dominant mothers were just as prevalent as dominant fathers and were mixed equally among the two groups. The person *in charge* did not appear to affect the career goals of the participants studied. The messages, however, sent by these individuals involving the capabilities and expectations of the females had a major impact.

### *Occupational Choice*

The Eccles' Expectancy-Value Model emphasizes parents as role models. It labels parents as sources of reinforcement, providers of information, and primary resources for opportunities for their children (Eccles, 1994). Occupational choice, then, can be greatly influenced by parents' gender-stereotypic role expectations.

Karen (EN2) shares that her parents expected her to go to college. She was also expected to enter into the field of education or nursing. Her brother was expected to enter into law. All three children followed the expected path of their parents.

Beth (BN1), the product of a highly critical home environment without encouragement for higher education or a career, works in retail in a home furnishings store. It's interesting to note that her occupational choice mirrors her expected role in her childhood home. In her current household she maintains the same role as she did when she was a child. She receives personal gratification for keeping a clean home, cooking elaborate meals and decorating exquisitely. Beth's occupational choice reflects this gender-stereotypic role that was reinforced during her childhood. Her husband is the primary income source. He pays all the bills and makes all major decisions. Beth's experiences show the force of family processes (e.g., parents' role modeling, attitudes, and behaviors) that have contributed to her adult occupational identities and choices. This scenario supports the primacy of parents in shaping their children's career aspirations (Eccles, 1993; Grotevant & Cooper, 1988).

Tracy (EN1) describes her childhood home as poor and spattered with abuse and extreme dominance by her father. She saw her mother as submissive but strong because she "survived". She attributes any career guidance she received to her involvement in parochial school and influence from family members in her extended family. She relates that her mother's side of the family valued education. Her father's side, however, felt it was "ludicrous that a female would get an education".

Tracy shared that the prevailing philosophy among her female siblings was that ‘It’s a great life if you don’t weaken and you learn to take care of yourself’. This push to be strong as well as the influence of her mother’s family enabled Tracy to pursue a teaching degree. Tracy is a special education teacher with no aspirations for administrative leadership. She has shied away from leadership paths and admits to being fearful of such endeavors. She discloses that she is submissive to her husband and her son although she feels this is wrong. The tendency to be submissive is strongly ingrained.

Tracy’s (EN1) early childhood home and the themes sent to her regarding gender have significantly impacted her career choice as teacher and her role as mother and wife. She admired her mother’s survival skills in a volatile home environment, yet she experienced extreme gender-bias and lack of parental support for educational and career aspirations. Fortunately, Tracy was influenced by the positive influences of her mother’s extended family which encouraged her to pursue college, albeit selecting a typically female stereotypic career as teacher. Tracy shared that she wanted to pursue the field of medicine but did not have the family support needed to do so. The input of her parents, their gender-role beliefs, and their perceptions of her self-worth have all played an important role in Tracy’s life choices.

#### Socializers’ Beliefs and Behaviors

Social agents are defined as those persons or events which influence a person’s view of themselves and their capabilities. Social agents can either encourage or discourage individuals from considering gender-role stereotypic choices. Unfortunately, they typically operate in such a way that individuals are most likely to consider those

options that are consistent with gender-role stereotypes (Eccles, 1994). Parental expectations appear to highly impact one's career path. Also of importance is the individual's field of possible choices. Many options are never considered because individuals are unaware of their existence or they have inaccurate information regarding the options. Still, other options may not be considered because they do not fit well with the individual's gender role schema.

### *Perceived Expectations*

Perceived expectations are defined as goals and aspirations that children believe are held for them by their parents. Although the majority of the parents of the participants did not graduate from college themselves, their educational aspirations for their children played a critical role in the participants' educational and career choices. Beth (BN1) stated that she always wanted to be a movie star, based on the fantasies she saw on T.V. and the movies. She does not recall any direct influence from her parents. "My parents had no career aspirations for me. They never suggested college. My career aspirations were all fantasies." Beth's domestic experiences in her early childhood home have been imitated in her adult life. She met these expectations by selecting a career in home decorating.

Achievement-related decisions are made within the context of a complex social reality that presents each individual with a wide variety of choices, each of which has both long-range and immediate consequences (Eccles, 1994). Tracy's (EN1) social reality was one of self-preservation and survival. The messages sent to her by her mother

were selfish, at best, but delivered the nuance of being strong and self-sufficient. She shared her experiences during her focus group discussion:

I don't know if my father had any career aspirations for me. He died when I was 16. He never had any interest in my schooling and always looked at me kind of weird when I was working on a project for school. My mother pushed me to go to college so she could collect the social security check. You get there; you do what you have to do to be there and you figure out how to pay for it, but I get the social security check.

Tracy's (EN1) encouragement by her mother to go to college was a result of her mother's need for financial help rather than for career aspirations for her. The childhood theme of self-preservation may also have contributed to Tracy's choice to reach a level of education that would enable her to improve her life condition. She selected education because it fit the stereotypic gender-role schema. She has no leadership aspirations, admitting that she does not feel capable of that type of goal and sees men as more able to do so. As she reiterated "We were brought up to believe that women are here to wait on the men".

Linda (EL2) revealed messages of parental aspirations for college but alludes to gender-specific career expectations. Although typical male-female task oriented roles existed in Linda's early childhood environment, she shares evidence of open options and encouragement to pursue education. "I don't know if I wanted to or if I was brainwashed to go to college. It was just expected. I think they wanted me to be a teacher, but I think I

could have done anything.” Linda followed the path set out for her by her parents. Her choice to enter into the field of education was ingrained in her since childhood.

Mia (EL1) also came from a home where education was a valued profession. She shares her experiences with the other participants during the focus group session:

Education was a really, really big thing to my parents but I never had the impression that I was limited in what I could do. My parents didn’t say you are all going to be teachers. It was ‘What do you want to do?’ They expected me to go to college, not to get a husband, but to get a profession and that you would do the profession.

Millie (BL2) states that the women in her family were expected to go to college and to enter into the field of teaching. She states that her parents believed that this gender-stereotypic occupational choice would afford a woman a profession that would complement the roles of mother and wife. “The females that went to college in my family had to be teachers. I mean that was the rule. You went to college to become a teacher.” Millie was surrounded by educators in her family and saw this as expected. Although she did drift from this path, she did follow her parents’ expectations and began her college career in the field of education.

The findings regarding the relationship between early childhood parental expectations and the adult women’s educational and career decisions can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Comparison of Effects of Parental Role Models and Parental Expectations on Educational and Occupational Achievement*

	Parental Role Model	Parental Expectation	Educational Outcome	Occupation Outcome
Mia EL1	“Mother was a homemaker until we were all in school. Then she went to college to get her teaching degree. It took her ten years. My dad never went to college but he was very supportive of her.”	“Education was a really big thing to my parents. There was never any question about whether or not we would go to college. We all did.” “I never had the impression that I was limited in what I could do.”	Doctorate	Director of Special Education
Linda EL2	“My father had a college degree. My mother did not. She made taking care of her children the priority.”	“College was what they had planned for all of their children.”	Doctorate	High School Dean
Kate BL1	“Neither of my parents went to college.” “I grew up in a home where there was definitely the mommy role and the daddy role. My father was very strong and outspoken.”	“It was expected for all of us to go to college but they let us be what we wanted to be.”	Bachelors	CEO/Credit Union
Millie BL2	“Neither of my parents went to college. My mother was the dominant parent. She was very strong.”	“Going to college was a part of your life. You went to grade school, high school and then college. That was it.”	Bachelors	Bank President
Tracy EN1	“My mother graduated from high school. My father made it through sixth grade. My mother was a very weak person. My father was hot-headed and abusive.”	“I don’t think my parents had any career aspirations for me. If I was to choose college I had to do it on my own.”	Bachelors	Special Education Teacher
Karen EN2	“My mother was a stay-at-home mom. My dad was a manual laborer.” “My mom was the decision maker.”	“It was expected that all of us would go to college.” “Girls were either nurses or teachers. Boys were doctors or lawyers.”	Masters +	School Psychologist
Beth BN1	“Neither of my parents went to college. My mother was overpowering.”	“My parents had no career aspirations for me.”	High School	Decorator/ Retail
Rose BN2	“Both of my parents only completed the ninth grade. My mother was very docile. Whatever my dad said went.”	“My parents didn’t offer college. I didn’t know how to go about doing that.”	High School	Domestic Engineer

Parents as socializers have been shown to greatly influence the women's self perceptions of their capabilities. The weight of gender-stereotypic roles within the household does not appear significant in the adult women's career choice-making ability. Parental expectations, however, have a profound impact. Although the women may have seen one parent as dominant or experienced gender specific family roles, of greatest impact were those messages, positive or negative, delivered regarding something deeper. The messages shaping the young woman's perceptions of her own capabilities, and her expected role as a woman impacted the achievement-related choices of the women participants to a marked degree.

#### *Perceived Field of Options*

A person's perceived field of options is defined as the educational and career opportunities believed to be available. The interplay of one's perceived options, expectancies for success at those options, short and long range goals and gender-role self schema are all influenced by the behaviors and goals of one's socializers. The options presented as available, attainable and appropriate were ingrained in the messages sent to the women participants and strongly influenced their career choices.

Karen (EN2) lends support to this supposition regarding her perceived field of available options. Karen's conversations about her family reveal that although mom was in charge and decisive, she sent very stereotypic messages regarding expected career choice. Karen was encouraged to pursue college, but she was encouraged to pursue typical female, non-leadership options. "It was expected that we would go to college. The options for jobs were gender specific. Girls were either nurses or teachers. Boys

were lawyers or doctors. Most of the females in the extended family were nurses. I knew I was not interested in that so I chose the teaching path. My brother is a lawyer.”

Kate (BL1) acknowledges strong parental support for college and believes that any career option was open to her. “It was expected for all of us to go to school, including me. They never asked if I wanted to go to school. I was ready to graduate and we began to talk about college. They let us all fend for ourselves, decide for ourselves, grow up in our own directions.”

Rose (BN2) indicates that the options made available to her were limited. She attributes this to a lack of knowledge. “My parents didn’t offer. I probably could have gone on to college. I just didn’t know how to go about doing that.” Millie (BL2), on the other hand, was provided encouragement and support to “go where no woman has ever gone before”. She shared her family’s attitudes about college and career choice:

There was never an option of whether or not we would go to college. I started off as an elementary education major for a year. That was the path that every woman in our family took who was encouraged to go into advanced education. I didn’t like it and my parents were broad-minded enough to allow me to go back to school in business.

Millie’s resistance to her parents’ expectation for an educational career was fueled by her parents’ open-mindedness and willingness to allow her to pursue the business arena.

Mia’s (EL1) story is another demonstration of open options and encouragement. Although she selected education as her career path, she expressed an interest in politics and leadership at an early age. “There was never any question about whether I would go

to college. I started out in liberal arts and changed to speech therapy. I was in liberal arts thinking I wanted to go into politics.”

Linda (EL2) shares that she believes that open career options were available to her. “I think if I would have wanted to do something other than teach, my parents would have encouraged it.” It’s worthy to note that Linda’s sister became a nurse and her brothers are business owners, all entering into gender-stereotypic professions. The effects of parental behaviors and beliefs regarding gender-specific roles are at times subtle.

Parents can influence the options considered through less direct, more psychological means. Providing or withholding support for various alternatives can have a lasting impact (Eccles, 1987). Linda states, “I was going to be a teacher since I was old enough to talk. My parents bought me the chalkboard and I had everything in the basement for grading papers and playing school.” These, not so subtle messages, had a strong effect.

It’s interesting to note that five of the eight participants had parents with college aspirations for them and the same five completed college. Once again, this supports the Eccles Theory, linking educational, vocational and other achievement-related choices directly to two sets of beliefs: the individual’s expectations for success and the importance or value the individual attaches to the various options perceived by the individual as available. The input of socializers, primarily parents and teachers, are assumed in the theory to influence both the expectations one holds for future success at the various achievement-related options and the subjective value one attaches to the

options. These expectations and the value attached to the various options, in turn, are assumed to influence choice among these options (Eccles, 1994).

### *Perceived Social Scripts*

Social scripts are defined as themes or messages prevalent in the home or society which dictate the expected roles of a specific gender. Messages regarding competence and expectations for success were gleaned from the information shared during the individual interviews and focus groups. The gender-message checklist gave the participants the opportunity to examine their formative years and to acknowledge the gender-messages or social scripts that they perceived were prevalent in their childhood homes. The following messages were selected by at least 3 of the 4 individuals in each group. These messages with the implied themes are presented in the table that follows (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Gender Messages Selected by Participants and Implied Themes*

<b>Common Gender Messages of the Non-Leader Group</b>	<b>Implied Themes</b>
Big boys don't cry. (3/4)	Male insensitivity
Just wait until your father gets home. (4/4)	Male dominance Female Submissiveness
Dad works. Mom manages the money. (4/4)	Stereotypic roles
Girls grow up to be mothers, teachers and nurses. (4/4)	Stereotypic roles
Women cook and clean. Men work and earn money. (4/4)	Stereotypic roles
It's wrong to throw, run, or cry like a girl. (3/4)	Female helplessness
Men are bosses, women are secretaries. (3/4)	Male dominance Female Submissiveness
<b>Common Gender Messages of the Leader Group</b>	<b>Implied Themes</b>
You can be anything you want to be. (4/4)	Open career options
You should go to college. (4/4)	Educational expectations

These messages were identified by each participant as being apparent in their early childhood home environments. In examining their perceptions of the themes sent to them by their parents, a difference can be noted in the gender-related messages and implied themes sent by their socializers. It is evident that the themes prevalent in the childhood homes of the leaders centered on messages of expected college attendance and career choice options. The messages identified by the women leaders were free from the female helplessness and male dominance messages experienced by the non-leader group.

## Differential Aptitudes

Differential aptitudes are defined as the insight one has regarding personal strengths and weaknesses across different arenas. Based on the past research of Korman (1967), Osipow (1983), and Super (1963, 1990) there is reason to believe that individuals lacking in self-esteem are less likely to make good matches between self and occupational roles. Research on women's career development has shown self-esteem and other self-concept features to be pivotal in the career development of women (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Walsh & Osipow, 1994).

Eccles (1987) theorizes that, while self-concept may play a role, these findings may overlook other possible influences on women's educational and career decisions. The Eccles Model of Achievement- Related Choices makes salient the hypothesis that differences in male and female achievement patterns may result from the fact that males and females have been socialized to have different but equally important goals for their lives (Eccles, 1987). The individual's self-schemata, made up of personal long and short term goals, is also a result of socializers.

### *Perceptions of Competency*

Perception of competency is defined as the opinion one has regarding individual capabilities. If females think it will take a lot more effort to succeed as an engineer or a doctor than it will take to succeed as an elementary teacher, or a nurse, they may opt for the more female-stereotypical occupations, especially if they place high importance on having a career that is compatible with their anticipated family roles (Eccles, 1987). Self-esteem or self confidence, then, may be better termed expectation for success. Eccles

(1987) theorizes that this expectation for success is related to the socialization process. A woman's self esteem typically does not suffer because she chose one occupation over another because she was socialized to accept certain roles.

In order to assess perceived competency or self-esteem all participants completed the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE). The scores of the participants are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Self-Esteem Scores of Participants on the Index of Self-Esteem*

	EL1	EL2	BL2	BL2	EN1	EN2	BN1	BN2
	Mia	Linda	Kate	Millie	Tracy	Karen	Beth	Rose
Scores	11	12	19	13	38	10	7	19

The scores possible in the ISE ranged from zero to 100, lower numbers indicated the highest self-esteem. As indicated in Figure 2, seven of the eight participants scored relatively low (< 20) indicating a positive self-concept or self satisfaction within the groups. A score of 38 was obtained by one of the non-leaders. This number was relatively high when compared to the total group and may reflect self-esteem issues.

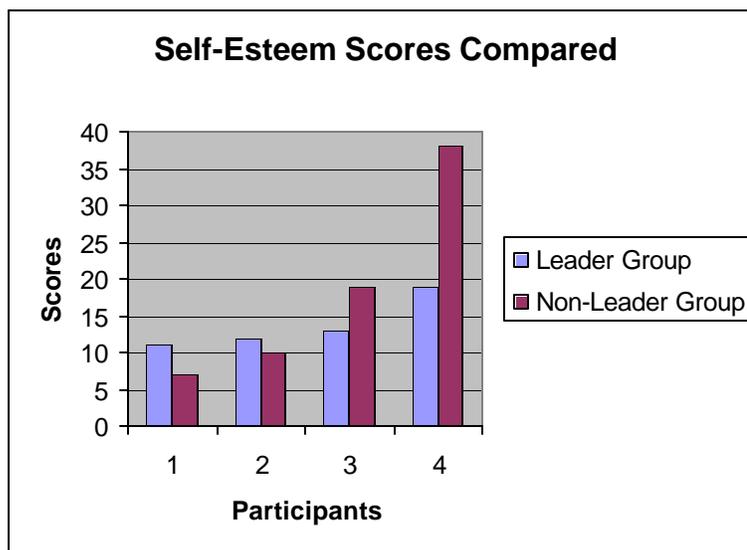


Figure 2. Self-Esteem Scores of Leaders and Non-Leaders

When an across-group analysis was done, however, the scores begin to differentiate (Figure 3). Although the scores appear to be equally distributed within the two groups, when the scores of the total group are examined, a difference is evident in three of the participants' scores (= or > than 19).

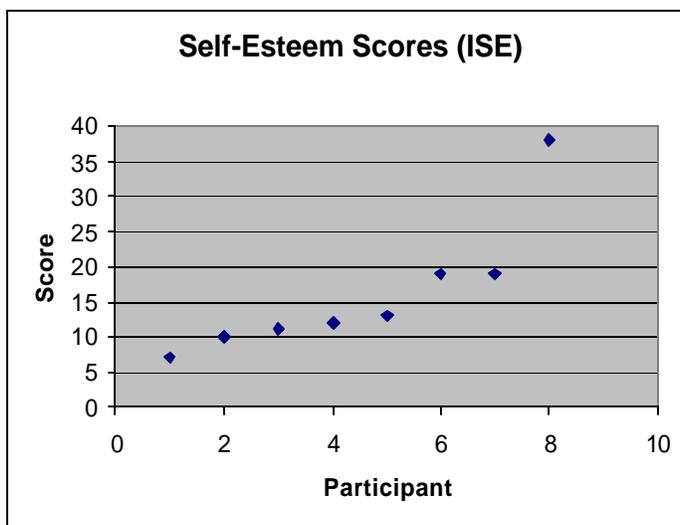


Figure 3. Self-Esteem Scores of All Participants

Although the three scores ranging from 19 to 38 may not indicate significantly low self-esteem, when compared to one another, the scores indicate a need for further analysis. Additional investigation revealed a pattern in the descriptions of these participants' mothers. The participants with the lowest self-esteem ratings described their mothers in negative terms including such descriptors as: weak, submissive, critical, or docile. These women also described their fathers as the dominant parent or the parent in charge of the household.

Eccles (1987) theorizes that gender-role socialization can lead females to have less confidence in their abilities than males. Because females are typically stereotyped as less competent than males, incorporation of gender-role stereotypes, in the case of their mothers, into one's self concept could lead girls to have less confidence in their general intellectual abilities than boys. This, in turn, could lead girls to have lower expectations for success at difficult academic and vocational activities (Eccles, 1987). Seeing their mothers as weak or critical, then, could result in a poor socialized gender-role identity, leading girls to expect that they will have to work harder than boys in order to achieve success which may deter them from selecting demanding or male dominated educational or vocational options.

In looking at the women participants' movement into leadership, Kate (BL1) presents a unique blend of career aspirations peppered by socialized fear of male-dominated fields. Kate (BL1) followed the guidance of her father, but learned about gender-bias from her mother's personal experiences. As a child she witnessed her mother's futile attempts to succeed in a male-dominated real-estate business. She reports watching her

mother struggle with harassment and discrimination. Kate (BL1) was highly impacted at an early age by her mother's fight for equality in the male-dominated real estate business. She witnessed her mother escaping the harassment and starting her own business.

In Kate's (BL1) case, seeing her mother work to overcome the bias and discrimination she faced did not deter Kate from a leadership role, instead she pursued it, although in a female-dominated field. She addresses this choice when she states "I graduated from Slippery Rock with a degree in Parks and Recreation Resource Management. When I found out it was such a male dominated field, I thought, this isn't going to work". As Merrick (2002) states "Many women have bought into a self-defeating paradigm: a fear of success, a reluctance to legitimize the exercising of authority, a tendency toward self-minimalization" (p.95).

Women in this study who viewed their mothers as strong, independent, hard-working and successful were the women who chose to complete college and pursue leadership positions, however, not all chose to enter male-dominated fields. Mia (EL1) and Linda (EL2) selected the field of education, primarily female-dominated, and aspired to and obtained positions in a still male-dominated administrative arena. Millie (BL2) climbed her way to the top position in the banking business, overcoming the *chilly* institutional climate as discussed by Betz (1994). Kate (BL1) shied away from a male-dominated field and chose instead a more comfortable career path, free from the obstacles she perceived as present in her first career choice.

Parents' interpretation of reality, as expressed through their beliefs and perceptions about their child, may be communicated in subtle and overt ways. This

research indicates an association between parents' perceptions of their children's skills and the adults' own perceptions of their skills and self concepts.

It is interesting to note that although the participants' scores on the Index of Self Esteem indicated no significant self-esteem problems, the statements they made about themselves indicate otherwise, supporting the strong impact of childhood themes on the women's beliefs regarding what they can and cannot do.

Tracy (EN1), whose home was characterized by a very dominant, abusive father and submissive mother, summarizes this belief when she states "I would have liked to have gone into either medicine or nursing but I didn't have enough confidence. You need a lot of family support to do things like that and it just wasn't there". Tracy pursued the teaching profession and continues to shy away from leadership roles in this area. Tracy's score on the self-esteem measure reflects the lowest self-esteem of all members included in this research. She described herself as "withdrawn" and is currently on medication for depression.

Tracy's (EN1) perception of her self-worth and her abilities stem from her experiences in her early childhood home. The strong messages of female submissiveness and male dominance have had long lasting effects on Tracy's life. Her perception of the woman's role is a prime example. "I truly believe that women are the backbone of the family and of society. I know that I am the strength in my family whether the men want to admit it or not." Tracy was sent the message that you had to be strong but you had to "hide it from the men". She was socialized to believe that the "smart woman" could manage a man by "stroking his ego" and "playing the game" to survive. What is most

troubling is that these messages of submissiveness and “playing the game” continue to strongly influence Tracy’s adult life. She chose to marry a man much like her abusive father. “They say girls marry their fathers without realizing it and I did just that.” She also continues to pass on the same messages that influenced her. “I hate to admit it but my sisters and I put our sons up on pedestals. We are making our girls stronger but letting the boys think they are.”

Beth (BN1) grew up in a home riddled with negative referents and criticism. Although she scored well on the self-esteem measure she states, “I am not easily educated. I am computer illiterate. I am not very smart”. These comments most assuredly reflect her mother’s assessment of her and her abilities. Beth sees herself as successful and describes herself as “outgoing and creative” yet does not include positive references to her intelligence in her personal description. This self-perception began in childhood as a result of the messages sent to her by her parents and has continued into her adult life.

Beth (BN1) identified with her submissive father, yet continued to try to please her mother with her homemaking skills. Beth’s choice of career and her selected choice of her role in her marriage both confirm the adherence to parental beliefs regarding self-image. Beth continues to place value on those tasks that are consistent with her self-image, which, in turn, are consistent with her parents’ image of her and her capabilities.

In looking at occupational choices, the literature indicates that individuals select those activities for which they have the highest expectations for success (Eccles, 1994). An expectation for success or confidence in one’s ability to succeed, then, plays an

important role in women's aspirations for leadership. This research shows that this self-confidence or self-esteem has its roots in the early childhood messages sent by one's primary socializers, their parents and illuminates the impact of parental messages regarding achievement-related ability and adult movement into leadership positions.

### *General Self-Schema*

Self-schema is defined as a person's self-image. According to Eccles (1994), we conceptualize attainment value in terms of the needs and personal values that an activity fulfills. As an individual grows up, they develop an image of who they are and what they would like to be. This image is made up of many component parts including the schema regarding the proper roles of men and women and their short and long term goals. This self-schema can change over time as goals and family roles change.

Karen's (EN2) story demonstrates this concept. She was sent a clear message that women are to be teachers or nurses and that leadership positions are more appropriate for men. She stated during her interview that she would "rather work for a man than a woman", sharing that women are "much too critical". Karen's assimilation of socialized gender role schema has had a powerful effect on her view of the world causing her to reject activities classified as typically male.

Although parental beliefs and expectations have been shown to play a significant role in the adult women's career aspirations, task value also plays an important role in a person's life plan. Eccles (1987, 1994) acknowledges that career options may not be seriously considered because they do not fit in well with the individual's gender role schema. Assimilation of the culturally defined gender role schema can have such a

powerful effect on one's view of the world that activities classified as part of the other gender's role are rejected, often unconsciously, without any serious evaluation or consideration.

Karen (EN2) describes her childhood home as peppered by some gender-role stereotypes, "Mom didn't work when we were little, she was there to cook. She did all the cleaning and all the laundry. My dad didn't do any of that". She sees her childhood home free from messages of female submissiveness. She describes her mother as strong and as running the household. "My mother brought me up to believe that women are strong and can be the decision makers."

Karen (EN2) is a school psychologist who also holds a supervisory certificate and a principal's letter. She has no desire to move forward into administration. When questioned in regards to her lack of leadership aspirations, she shared that she does not want the responsibility associated with leadership positions. Task value and task cost come into play here. Karen has pursued the necessary qualifications to enter into leadership but her perceptions of the task include more work, longer hours, and more responsibility. She states that she is choosing not to pursue these responsibilities so that she can continue to run her household and be available for her children's after-school activities.

Tracy (EN1) realized as a young girl that her responsibilities would include childcare and running a household. This socialized expectation influenced her decision to enter into the field of education. "I would have to say that teaching was a top choice for me to look at because in my upbringing women took care of the children and had all

of those responsibilities. So, to choose a career where I could do both of those was a big priority for me.”

Rose (BN2) shared her beliefs about her role as a mother and her career choice. She, too, has been prepared or socialized for the domestic role of mother and has selected a lower level traditional job in the workforce rather than a more challenging career. She explains:

That’s why I am doing what I am doing (cleaning houses). I can schedule. I can leave when I want. I am home before the kids come home. I’m there for all their homework and for any medical appointments. I can reroute my whole schedule. I am domesticated, I guess. I have been that way since I have been seven. I have always taken care of my family. When I had my own children I felt that was my first job and my first priority was to make sure I was there. In the morning I was there and I am there after school. That’s why I love what I am doing.

It is noteworthy to review that Rose (BN2) shared that no other options were offered to her. She was not encouraged to go to college or to pursue a trade. In her interview she stated that she wishes she would have had the support and encouragement to pursue a career in accounting.

Denmark (1993) states that typical female socialization does less to promote leadership ability in the workforce, but instead prepares women for domestic roles as wives and mothers or in lower level traditional jobs in the workforce. Both Karen (EN2) and Tracy (EN1) selected occupations where they could balance the roles of motherhood and a career. Their self-schemata included aspirations for higher education and a career;

however, these aspirations were peppered by the socialized gender-responsibilities of homemaker and mother.

#### Previous Achievement-Related Experiences

The Eccles Theory (1987, 1994) indicates that parental values, beliefs, and behaviors may discriminate against girls and may lead women and men to have different hierarchies of core personal values and to have varying levels of confidence or ability self-concepts across various domains. Early childhood achievement-related experiences shape the individual's self-perceptions, goals and values. A potential moderator of the messages that parents provide to their children about achievement-related values and beliefs is the quality of the parent-child relationship. Children should be more likely to internalize parental values and beliefs if they experience a warm, supportive parent-child relationship and view their parents as positive role models (Mortimer, Lorence, & Kumka, 1986).

#### *Parental Relationships*

The input of socializers, primarily parental beliefs regarding gender-roles and gender-specific career expectations, has been found to influence the educational and vocational choices made by each of the participants. Identification with the parent viewed as most supportive has also become perceptible.

Linda (EL2) viewed her mother as dedicating her life to her children. "My mother did not have a college degree. I don't think it was any gender issue, it was a financial thing. She raised five children. My mother picked up extra money, like working in a grocery store, once we got older, but raising five kids...they made raising their kids a

priority.” Linda’s relationship with her parents was positive and she viewed her mother as a dedicated, nurturing individual.

Millie (BL2) witnessed strong work ethic from her mother and a message of equality among the sexes. She states:

My mother has been a very strong figure in my life because she’s been a very outgoing person, worked to provide the private education for me and my brother to go to private high schools and private colleges. She was a central figure, always encouraging betterment. Do more. Push. We were taught never to quit. Finish and you don’t have to do it again, but finish what you start. I guess that was the philosophy that we always had to live by.

Millie (BL2) describes her mother as strong and placing high value on both education and career. This gender message played an important role in Millie’s (BL2) educational and career aspirations.

These perceptions of the mothers of leader group participants all portray a positive image. The perceptions of others, however, are quite different. Tracy (EN1), although describing her mother as a survivor, saw her as powerless. “My mother was a very weak person. When there was a crisis in the family my older sister came to the rescue.”

Beth (BN1) revealed very damaging perceptions of her mother and believes her to have negatively influenced her early childhood household. “My mother was wicked and critical. She was very controlling and diminished my father’s self-worth. She raised me

always with ultimatums. She was a bit of a princess. She barely worked. I never respected her or admired her.”

Rose (BN2) describes her mother as being vulnerable and extremely submissive to her father. “My mom was very docile. If she didn’t do what my dad wanted he would make her life miserable. My dad dominated her and still dominates her.”

In looking at the eight participants’ views of their mothers a strong pattern is evident. The women, who saw their mothers in a positive light, as supportive and nurturing, all show the greatest achievement-related gains. All four of the leader-group participants described their mothers in positive terms. They all pursued and completed college and are working in professional, management fields. The three women who saw their mothers in a negative way have not achieved management positions and do not see themselves as capable of doing so.

### *Affective Memories*

Affective memories are defined as those emotional recollections that have impacted the individual. Mortimer et al. (1986) found that higher levels of emotional support and attachment to parents have been linked to greater career maturity. These findings suggest that certain affective dimensions of the parent-child relationship might modify the messages that parents transmit to their children, children’s receptivity to these messages, or both.

Mia (EL1) saw her father as strong and supportive of her mother as she entered the teaching field later in life. “My mother went to Duquesne to get a teaching degree. It took her 10 years. She was teaching the whole time. It was real interesting watching her.

It was interesting watching my dad support her efforts.” Mia’s experiences with her parents were positive and socialized her to view her world and its options without gender- bias.

Mia (EL1) also shares an admiration for her mother and her mother’s determination to enter college and the teaching profession later in life. She attributes her individuality and independent thinking to her mother’s message of “Don’t be like other people. Be yourself.” She also believes her father to have been a great influence. She shares that he was her hero for his support of her mother and his efforts to “Pick up the slack” when her mother was in school. She shared that he continually encouraged the children to “Back up your mom”. This gender-role deviance contributed strongly to Mia’s gender-free perceptions of career options and opportunities. “I remember saying to my dad on his deathbed that he was the best dad a modern girl could have had. If he hadn’t been that way, I wonder if I would be where I am today.”

Millie’s (BL2) drive to succeed is a direct reflection of her mother’s influence. “My mother was a central figure in my life. She was always encouraging betterment. Do more, do better, push, push, push...We were taught never to quit.” Millie was socialized to make a choice and to follow through with her goals. The messages of female heartiness and capability gave her the strength to aspire to and to succeed in a leadership role, despite the obstacles she had to face.

Kate (BL1) saw her mother as a pioneer entering into the world of gender bias. Her mother’s experiences sent her clear messages regarding male dominance. She explains:

My mom was always there but wanted to go into business for herself. When she went into real estate she would tell me about how horribly mean the men were to her. It was all dominated by men. They would make sure she didn't get appointments, wouldn't return her calls. She and two female friends had a pretty tough time. They were pretty strong women, so they started their own business.

Kate's (BL1) story is unique in that she watched her mother grow over the years and fight against the bias that characterized both her home and her workplace. "I think I gained confidence in my capabilities by watching my mom. I learned from her how she overcame the male dominated real-estate world. Watching her become successful and stand up to my dad really influenced me." Kate identified with her mother and was socialized to be strong and independent and to view the world as offering open opportunities as a result of her parents' expectations for her.

The messages sent to Tracy (EN1) are quite different than those sent to all other participants. Her childhood home was filled with fear and the need for survival. The messages regarding females included the need to be submissive in order to remain safe. Women were to take care of the men. Tracy shares that she "came from a large family that was poor". She describes her mother as "quietly strong". The messages from her mother reinforced the role of woman as submissive but not as helpless. "Her goal in life was to make her girls strong but submissive because you had to play the game to survive." The males in the family, on the other hand, experienced the opposite messages. "The boys were to be enthroned". These childhood messages became so ingrained in this household that they continue today. "All of the girls are very strong and

independent women. And now, I hate to admit it, every one of us tends to put our sons up on pedestals. We expect our girls to do for themselves to make them stronger, but we need to let the boys think they are.” The themes of male dominance and female submissiveness continue.

Beth (BN1) realizes the impact of the messages sent to her by her mother and expressed the fear of communicating the same in her own home. “I absolutely did not want any daughters. My mother was so condescending and critical that I was afraid of repeating this mother-daughter relationship.” Her affective memories have highly impacted her mindset as an adult.

Beth’s (BN1) fear of history repeating itself is a legitimate one, supporting Holland (1985) who theorizes that types produce types. Her treatment of her son, however, is also a reflection of the messages sent to her about women and men. “I have one son. He is 30 and I absolutely idolize him. I do put him on a pedestal.” As a young girl, Beth (BN1) cooked, cleaned and took care of all the chores around the house. Her son was free from that responsibility and was not expected to work while living in her home as a student. Her interactions with both her husband and her son re-send the messages that she received as a child. Women are most capable at cooking, cleaning and laundering while men remain the most apt at decision-making and financial management.

In reviewing the wealth of information shared by these eight women participants, it is evident that the interplay of factors influencing women’s career aspirations is very complex. In support of the Eccles Theory (1987, 1994), we can clearly see the influence of: gender-role stereotyping, expectations for success on the various options perceived as

available, the relation of these options to short and long term goals, the potential cost of investing time in the various career options and the person's general self-schema.

#### Aspirations Toward Leadership

The Eccles' (1994) model attempts to legitimize the choices that women make and looks at these choices as valuable in their own terms, not as a distortion of male choices or male values. Females are not looked at as deficient males but as different from males in their goals and values. Much of the literature, however, continues to make judgments about women based on the values of men. Research shows that women achieve less than men in terms of traditional educational and career advancement, once again comparing women's choices to men's choices (Skrla et al., 2000).

#### *Motherhood, Manhood and Other Barriers*

The Eccles Theory (1987, 1994) legitimizes females' choices as valuable on their own terms rather than as a reflection or distortion of male choices and male values, however, this research indicates that, for many, these choices are based on a somewhat distorted perception of the female's true competencies. If a female is socialized to believe that women are supposed to support their husband's careers and raise their children while the men are supposed to compete successfully in the occupational world in order to confirm their worth as human beings and to support their families (Eccles, 1994), then the choices they make will be mandated by this role.

The conflict arises, however, when things change and the women finds herself needing to support herself and her children or the children mature and mom is left without the confidence, skills or training to sustain herself. Unfortunately, the stereotypes

young women develop regarding various occupations are typically ill-informed and often, as seen in this research, are based on outmoded, gender-role stereotyped scripts of family roles.

In this search for meaning, this research attempted to obtain the women's perceptions of their accomplishments and their voice regarding the choices they have made. As reported, seven of the eight women interviewed did not show significant self-esteem issues. Five of the eight did, however, express that they would most likely have selected a different occupational path had they been born male, indicating that the choices they made were gender influenced. The stereotyped roles they selected were, for most, an attempt to balance motherhood with a career. They expressed that the choices they made were based on what was available to them at the time. By looking at their perceptions of how different their lives would be if they were born male, we get a glimpse of the barriers to women entering leadership from this perspective.

Mia (EL1) believes her life "would have been easier", reflecting on the gender-issues she faced as she entered into educational administration. "I was the first female administrator in the area. I was left out quite a bit. I didn't get invited to 'guy' things such as golf outings." Although she did enter into the leadership arena of education, Mia expressed a desire early on to go into politics but did not pursue that avenue. She did not move into this area because of "the assassinations at that time" and she admits to being fearful of that challenge. "I could be outgoing on one level and then so shy and really fearful about some things." She wonders if she would have pursued a career in politics had she been born male. Once again we see expectation for success and confidence in

one's abilities to succeed as playing an important role in Mia's career choice. She avoided entering into the world of politics because she was afraid she would not succeed in this arena even though she had the desire to pursue that career choice. Her fear of failure, or lack of expectancy for success, led her into a more comfortable career choice, one more typical for females and therefore promising a greater chance for success.

Linda (EL2) reflects that her career selection was based on a female-typical choice. "I probably would have done something different because men weren't elementary teachers then." Linda's movement into educational leadership, a predominately male-dominated arena, reflects her early parental childhood messages of college and career expectations. She also attributes her movement into leadership as a result of male administrators who saw her potential and mentored her into her leadership roles.

Kate (BL1) shared that she would have selected a more male-oriented role. "I might be in a different line of work. I might have done something more with my hands. I have always enjoyed that kind of thing. I may have been a plumber or an electrician." Kate sees that these options were not available to her as a female. Even now she states that she would like to pursue classes in these areas so that she can be self-sufficient.

Millie (BL2), on the other hand, sees her womanhood as contributing to her success. "I would hope that if I were a man I could have accomplished as much as I have as a woman". Although Millie denies being "handed anything", she attributes much of her success in the banking business to significant male mentors who saw her potential and encouraged her and trained her along the way.

She does describe, however, difficulties she faced entering into a predominately male-dominated field. "I was the first college-educated female hired". She experienced isolation and jealousy until she was able to prove her capabilities. "I ate lunch by myself. The women resented me more than the men. They all wondered 'How did she get this job?' It was hard breaking through that." She attributes her success today to great mentors including family and male administrators along the way.

The women in the non-leader group paint a different picture of their lives and see a much different scenario had they been born the opposite sex. Tracy (EN1) voiced a strong opinion on the differences she would experience in this situation. She believes she would have taken charge of the household finances. "It would be great. I have all the responsibility of child rearing and 50 % of the financial responsibility in my home. My husband and I earn a comparable salary, although I have never had control over the finances. I would be better at it than he is. He has destroyed us financially. I would be more secure financially." She also envisions relief from the childcare responsibilities:

If I had been born a man, consideration of whether or not I would be around for my children, would not have been forefront in my mind. I would have a wife to take care of that, just like my husband expects it. He travels all the time and comes and goes as he pleases. He has never had to give a second thought to whether his children are going to be well cared for.

Tracy's vision of what her life would be like if she were the man of the household projects anger and resentment with her current role. It is interesting to note that Tracy maintains this role in her own family and appears to be nurturing it as she continues to

send the messages of female submissiveness and male dominance to her own children. The strength of the themes permeating the early childhood years are powerful and difficult to erase, even when they are obvious to the offender. "I find myself doing the same thing. I expect my daughter to do for herself and I wait on my husband and son."

Karen (EN2), who has shied away from leadership positions in education, shares a different perspective if she were a man. "If I were born male, I would probably be a lawyer. I would probably have been steered into more of a management position." It is interesting to note that Karen would see herself capable of leadership if she were not female. She states now that she "does not want that responsibility" and she is fearful of "staff supervision" and "speaking in front of groups". Karen, however, does not see those characteristics existing if she were male.

Beth's (BN1) self depreciating comments come forth again in her vision of being born male. "I think my life would have been different if I would have finished my education. Since I am not easily educated I don't think I would be successful in administration. As a male I probably would have been educated and very successful just because I am driven." Here Beth equates maleness with the ability to be educated. Once again her socialized gender-role bias is seeping through.

Rose (BN2) has a strong voice regarding the gender-bias she has experienced in her childhood home and how her life would have been had she been born male. She explains:

If I was born male I would be living in a \$500,000.00 paid off home right now because I would have been put into all of that. I would own a condo in Myrtle

Beach and I'd be going to all these vacations and I'd have the life. This is the role the males took on in my family, taking care of the wife because none of them work. They don't have to work.

Rose (BN2) saw her brothers taken into the father's business and provided for so that they could more than adequately take care of their wives and children. The girls were expected to do the same, to marry a man who would provide for them. They were not encouraged to be educated or to learn the skills necessary to fend for themselves. They were expected to be taken care of. This message was strong and had a lasting impact on Rose and her children. She struggles to make ends meet and to balance motherhood with a job in a housecleaning business. She never did find that man to take care of her and now suffers from the debilitating messages that were sent to her by her parents regarding females and their capabilities.

These projections of the women participants on how their lives would differ if they were not bound by the gender-role bias associated with being female further supports this research in its search to ferret out the impact of childhood themes on women's aspirations for careers and leadership.

#### Heroes, Mentors and Significant Others

Of emerging importance in this analysis is a look at other influences on the participants' career decisions. The influence of parents' expectations is clear. The messages ingrained since childhood remain and have been shown to influence the aspirations of the women interviewed. In looking at the leaders and the non-leaders involved in this study, we see, however, another notable influence. Table 5 shows the

reported significant others that persuaded these leaders to enter the field of administration.

Table 5

*Heroes, Mentors, and Significant Others of the Leader Group*

	Identified Heroes, Mentors and Significant Others
Mia EL1	“My dad was my hero. He was so proud of my mom going to school and supported her for doing it.” “My aunt, the first women principal in the area, was also a strong influence. Many people saw her as role model for women considering administration.”
Linda EL2	“A first grade teacher was my hero. She was the only teacher that I felt made any real difference. She kept contact with me until she passed away.” “My entrance into leadership was encouraged by a (male) assistant superintendent.”
Kate BL1	“My mom was my hero. I think she is amazing.” “My dad was most influential in my career. He said ‘You need a job’ and he set up an interview for me in the credit union. He really carved the way for me.”
Millie BL2	“My mother was my hero but also my aunt. Both were strong, central figures in my life.” “I was mentored in banking by the bank president. He gave me the opportunity to do an awful lot of things. He really stretched me. He always encouraged me when I thought ‘I don’t know if I can do this’”.

Millie (BL2) and Linda (EL1) both shared that male mentors were instrumental in their pursuit of leadership roles. Mia states, “The man who hired me was just wonderful and gave me every opportunity. Another gentleman, the head of marketing and advertising, taught me how to act in business. He taught me how not to be afraid when you walk into a room”.

Kate (BL2) shared the influence of her father, who encouraged her to pursue his field of interest and opened doors for her in her involvement with the credit union. Mia (EL1) voiced admiration for her aunt who was the first female principal in the area. The two women in the non-leader group who entered the field of education shared that high

school teachers were an inspiration to them. Both Tracy (EN1) and Karen (EN2) shared that special education teachers sparked an interest in them to enter into this field.

Although these women voiced the influence of others outside of their home experiences, their paths had already been set. The socialized parental expectancies of college and a career had already taken hold. These significant others gave them added encouragement to keep them pursuing the directions they had been socialized to choose.

### Summary

The literature has suggested that women have lower expectations for success than men, are less confident in their abilities, are more likely to attribute their failures to lack of ability, are less likely to attribute their success to ability, and are more likely to exhibit a learned helpless response to failure (Eccles, 1987). This deficit perspective has evolved because research has focused on the question “How are women different than men?” rather than “Why do men and women make the choices they do?” The Eccles Theory (1987, 1994) argues that sex differences in educational and vocational choices result from different expectations for success and different values, both of which are affected by gender-role socialization. This research supports this notion of choice and examines the impact of early childhood parental socialization on these choices.

This research began with the purpose of examining the impact of childhood themes on women’s aspirations for leadership. The voices of leaders and non-leaders in the fields of business and education were compared. Using the Eccles et al. (1987, 1994) Expectancy Model of Achievement-Related Choices as a guide, this investigation attempted to shed light on this relationship. The wealth of qualitative data gleaned from

the eight participants affirms the research questions by acknowledging the impact of childhood themes on the women's educational and career choices. In fact, the impact is extensive and appears to outweigh the impact of other segments of the theory. The Eccles' (1987, 1994) model suggests that an individual's peers and teachers are equally important to the decision making abilities of females. Although these individuals play a role, this research indicates that of greatest impact is the gender socialization that occurs in the early childhood home by the parents. These gender-role stereotypes are powerfully embedded by the age of five (Huston, 1983) and children continue to validate their behaviors and aspirations in terms of these stereotypes (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Huston, 1983).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Interpretation of Results

This research illuminates the relationship between early childhood themes and the adult women's aspirations for educational and vocational achievement. By giving these eight women a voice, they have shared the intimate gender-related experience of their formative years and, through in depth conversations, they have provided rich descriptions of the messages they received. These messages were examined and the relationship between these messages and their career choices were apparent.

This research supports the Eccles (1987, 1994) theory that women's aspirations for leadership are not sex based differences, but differ among women based on the influences of early childhood experiences, primarily parental expectations. Instead of attributing sex differences in achievement patterns to females' lack of confidence, low expectations, and/or debilitating attributional tendencies, the theory legitimizes females' choices. These choices, however, are strongly impacted by early childhood messages and socializers.

This research shows that these messages are a result of the parents' expectations and not parental modeling of typical gender-roles. That is, when the parents endorsed gender-biased themes of female helplessness or submissiveness, the females saw themselves as helpless or submissive as they entered into adulthood; they also made educational and career choices based on these socialized competencies. When the themes of female

heartiness, independence, and expected educational achievement were prevalent, the women's educational and career choices reflected those themes.

In summary, the underlying themes that have emerged from this research include the following: a) childhood messages regarding career options highly impact career choice, b) females are more likely to choose higher education when parental expectations include this aspiration, c) women are less likely to aspire to leadership roles when sent messages of female helplessness and submissiveness, d) women are more likely to choose careers which they are socialized to value, e) a woman's self-esteem is directly related to her perceptions of her mother and f) mentors are needed for women to move into leadership roles. The findings of this research are discussed relative to the themes or messages that prevailed in the childhood homes of the women participants.

*Childhood messages regarding career options highly impact career choice.*

The results of this research support the Eccles' (1987, 1994) theory showing that women make the choices they do as a result of a combination of factors including: a) one's expectation for success in the options made available, b) the relation of these career options to one's long and short term goals, c) the individual's gender role perception, and d) the potential cost of investing time and effort in the options seen as available

The Eccles' model (1987) states that individual choices are influenced most directly by the value the individual places on the array of choices perceived as appropriate and by the individual's estimates of the probability of success at these various options. Individual differences are assumed to result from the socialization experiences, the

individual's interpretation of her own performance history at various related achievement tasks, and by the individual's perceptions of various behaviors and goals (Eccles, 1987).

This research supports this theory as it clearly shows women entering into occupational fields that are closely tied to the parental messages sent to them in their early childhood homes regarding their place and expected capabilities. Five of the eight participants were expected to go to college. These five achieved that expectation. Two of the eight were socialized for domestic roles and they pursued careers linked to this area. Participants selected domestic fields when those areas were reinforced in their childhood homes. Higher education and professional careers were pursued when they were viewed as viable options.

The impact of childhood messages as evidenced in the Eccles' (1987, 1994) theory and as clarified in this research, is also supported by the developmental theory of Super (1990). This theory recognizes the family as a strong source of influence on self-concept and on career maturity.

Empirical literature also gives credence to the primacy of parents in shaping children's career aspirations (Grotevant & Cooper, 1988; Mortimer et al., 1986; Schulenberg et al., 1984). Much of this literature, however, has focused on the structural features of the family, such as socioeconomic status or parental occupation, rather than the parental socialization process (Grotevant & Cooper, 1988; Schulenberg et al., 1984). Findings of this sociological literature indicate that the parents' level of education and occupational status are associated with children's educational and occupational aspirations. This is not a finding of this study. Family processes including expectations,

attitudes and behaviors have proven to have impacted educational and career aspirations and not parental levels of education or career choice. In fact, only two participants had a parent that earned a college degree. Fourteen of the 16 parents represented in this study had a high school education or less.

*Females are more likely to choose higher education when parental expectations include this aspiration.*

The Eccles (1994) model acknowledges the influence of one's parents, teachers, role models, and peers on educational and occupational decision-making. This research acknowledges the importance of these intimates but has identified the role of parents as the strongest socializer impacting life long career decision-making choices. Five of the participants stated that college was not an option, it was an expectation, and they lived up to that expectation. Parental expectations regarding abilities, education and career options have been shown to have an over-riding effect on the adult woman's career selection and her ability to move into leadership roles.

Several investigators have documented a positive link between parents' expectations for their children's eventual educational attainment and the children's own educational expectations and self-concepts (Halle, Kurtz-Costes & Mahoney, 1997; Phillips, 1987). This research and the research of Eccles (1987, 1994) show the powerful influence of parental expectations on educational attainment.

It is critical to note that the gender-roles played by the parents of the participants did not indicate a pattern in the educational and career outcomes of the women interviewed. All eight participants reported the typical male-female gender-roles of father as

breadwinner and mother as homemaker as apparent in their homes. This stereotypical role modeling did not impact the women's educational or occupational choices. The educational level of the parent also did not predict the educational achievement of the child. What influenced them significantly were the *expectations* that their parents had for them regarding these areas. If college was a priority, college was pursued. If the parents expected higher educational goals, the women attained them. If the parents did not place *value* on higher education attainment either did the children. The groundwork for future leadership aspirations was woven into the messages sent about viable career options, educational worth, and themes of female heartiness and independence.

*Women are less likely to aspire to leadership roles when sent messages of female helplessness and submissiveness.*

Decision-making regarding career choice is a complex interplay of socialized influences. Parental expectations and perceived messages regarding female helplessness and submissiveness are strong parental scripts that have been shown to impact occupational and career choice. This research shows a relationship between the childhood themes they received regarding the role of the female in regards to themes of helplessness and submissiveness, either sent to them directly or observed in their mothers. The three participants, who grew up in homes where females were taught to be submissive, did not aspire to leadership roles. These members of the non-leader group have also transmitted the notion of females as submissive in their current homes.

This research demonstrates the effects of environments permeated with messages of lesser female worth and roles characterized by submissiveness to the males in the

family. The effects of these underlying themes were shown to effect the women's perceptions of their capabilities and promulgated this role into their current home and occupational environments.

Prior research shows that sexual inequality still occurs in families (Atwood, 2001). Sexual inequality still occurs between husbands and wives and also reveals itself in the different ways that parents treat male and female children. This parental bias puts daughters at a disadvantage.

Clinical theory and research address parental bias within families. The literature shows that preference for male children has been documented over time (Horney, 1939). More recent theorists have also explained the role of sexism in stunting the development of girls and women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Debold, Wilson & Malave, 1993; Jack, 1993; Kaschak, 1992, Luepnitz, 1988; Miller, 1986; Westcott, 1986).

According to Dowling (1981), the themes of helplessness are socialized as typical feminine behavior. Tibbetts (1980) supports this theory by suggesting that women have been socialized to experience satisfaction and achievement vicariously by functioning in a supportive capacity, in other words in a submissive role. This was evidenced by the stories of Tracy (EN1), Beth (BN1), and Rose (BN2). They were socialized to experience satisfaction by taking care of household chores. Tracy (EN1) and Rose (BN2) were also socialized that men are in charge. These theoretical constructs all support the Eccles' Theory (1987, 1994) showing the effect of socialized helplessness on women's career choice making ability. Dowling (1981) terms this the "Cinderella Complex",

stating that women learn early in life not to have high self-esteem and to be helpless. This behavior, as illuminated, presents a conflict for the female as she attempts to enter and advance within the male dominated hierarchy.

The results of this study continue to support the claim that sexist thinking remains present in our homes and continues to promote the belief that women are helpless and not capable of leadership. The themes of female helplessness and submissiveness were common themes in the early childhood homes of the women reporting limited educational and career opportunities or aspirations.

*Women are more likely to choose careers which they are socialized to value.*

Women make decisions based on the value they *learn* to place on certain tasks and on their *learned* confidence in their ability to complete the task. These beliefs have been strongly influenced by parental expectations and impact women's movement into leadership positions. Four of the participants of this study entered into the field of education because it was an expected choice for women. Three participants explained that they valued their career selection because it allowed them to balance a career with motherhood. Two participants remain in education and one in house cleaning because of the flexibility those careers provide in managing dual roles. The findings of this research support Eccles Theory (1994) showing that choice regarding career decisions is based on a balance between task value and task cost. The choice options, however, are strongly influenced by socializers, primarily parents. Gender-role socialization influences our hierarchies of core personal values.

The research of Shakeshaft (1989) asserts that women are limited by societal expectations, parental guidance, self-aspirations and society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles. Men are socialized to seek professional success while women are socialized to assume the traditional role of homemaker and mother. Finding a balance, then, between family and career remains a compelling task. Since females are traditionally expected to manage the home and the children, aspirations for a career with additional responsibility may not be valued over family obligations.

Marriage and family responsibilities are commonly accepted as one of the most significant barriers to female movement into leadership. Many women report feeling increasing pressure as they add a career to home and family responsibilities (Shakeshaft, 1989). Women are taught to value the domestic role and are unable to fathom a balance between the two and, therefore, abandon any serious plan for career advancement.

*A woman's self-esteem is directly related to her perceptions of her mother.*

Of note here is the relationship between the women participants' perceived self-worth and their perceptions of their mothers. The developmental theory of Super (1990) supports Eccles' (1987, 1994) theory as it recognizes the family as a source of influence on self-concept. This research brought to light the subtle, yet deep, effects of negative maternal memories on the adult women's self-esteem.

This research tapped into the area of self-esteem and investigated the participants' descriptions of their mothers. When compared to the scores on the Index of Self-Esteem, a relationship was evident. The women who used negative referents to describe their mothers were also the women whose scores on the ISE indicated lowest self-esteem.

Interestingly, these women were members of the non-leader group. These messages of perceived maternal helplessness or submissiveness impacted the beliefs these women held regarding their own strengths, talents and educational worth. They perceived their mothers as helpless or submissive and then based their beliefs about their own capabilities on these perceptions.

According to Betz (1994), the important variable influencing individuals' perceived range of career options is not their measured abilities, but their beliefs concerning their competence in various domains. If the women in this study received negative female references and messages of female helplessness and submissiveness, it would be postulated that they would develop low self-efficacy expectations in regards to career choice and leadership aspirations. The results of this investigation lead us to believe that this is true. The messages sent to Tracy (EN1), Beth (BN1), and Rose (BN2) about female worth resulted in lower self-esteem scores and no expectations for leadership roles.

A potential moderator of the messages that parents provide to their children about achievement-related values and beliefs is the quality of the parent-child relationship (Mortimer et al., 1986). Children are more likely to internalize positive aspirations for themselves if they experience a warm, supportive parent-child relationship and their parents communicate messages of positive capabilities and aspirations. If the relationship is one peppered with criticism and demeaning themes, the child internalizes these scripts and carries them on into adulthood. Beth's (BN1) mother described as critical and degrading, socialized Beth to believe that she "is not easily educated", reflecting her

mother's perceptions of her competency. Beth (BN1) continues not to attempt tasks that she has *learned* will be difficult for her. She has selected a career path that clarifies her expected competencies of housekeeping and decorating.

As summarized by Eccles (1987), Betz (1994) and Bandura (1977), career decision making is influenced strongly by self-efficacy or self-confidence in performance and persistence of the career options viewed as available. Null or hostile environments, then, may mean the difference between reaching and giving up aspirations that the individual may have had since childhood.

*Mentors are needed for women to move into leadership roles.*

The educational and career paths chosen by these women were strongly influenced by their parents' expectations for them. The groundwork was set by the themes of achievement that permeated their childhood homes. Mentors played a role in persuading the women to take that first step into the leadership arena. Encouragement and voiced confidence in the women's abilities were paramount in the women's choice to *opt in* to the leadership field. The leaders in the study had strong parental encouragement to pursue advanced educational and occupational goals. Their success in leadership was a result of the interplay between their abilities and their perceived capabilities by their male mentors.

The research shows that mentoring relationships can hasten a woman's movement into leadership (Ragins, 1989). Since women have less experience with organized politics and have fewer resources for career guidance, mentors serve to overcome these disadvantages. This study showed the impact of mentors on women's advancement into

leadership. Three of the four leaders voiced that the support and assistance received by male administrative mentors greatly influenced their willingness to step into leadership positions. The encouragement and training received gave the women the confidence needed to tread into this frightening arena. It is interesting to note that the mentors mentioned in this study were male. The research suggests that women would fair best with women mentors; however, the scarcity of women in leadership positions limits this possibility (Ragins, 1989).

#### *Overview of Findings*

In summary, the underlying themes that have emerged from this research include the following: a) Childhood messages regarding career options highly impact career choice, b) Females are more likely to choose higher education when parental expectations include this aspiration, c) Women are less likely to aspire to leadership roles when sent messages of female helplessness and submissiveness, d) Women are more likely to choose careers which they are socialized to value, e) A woman's self-esteem is directly related to her perceptions of her mother and f) Mentors are needed for women to move into leadership roles.

The findings of this research, as summarized in Figure 4, supports the Eccles model (1987, 1994), but augments parental expectations as the prime faction influencing women's occupational and educational choices.

This model abbreviates the findings of this study yet it serves to clearly expose the vital factors revealed in this analysis. Parental expectations and aspirations were shown

to outweigh all other influences and greatly predicted the adult women's beliefs about themselves, their capabilities and their potential for success in available career options.

The effects of teachers, and mentors appeared only to massage the pre-existing educational and career aspirations. Although movement of women into leadership may have been encouraged by a mentor, the stage was set by the expectations communicated to these women by their parents during their formative years.

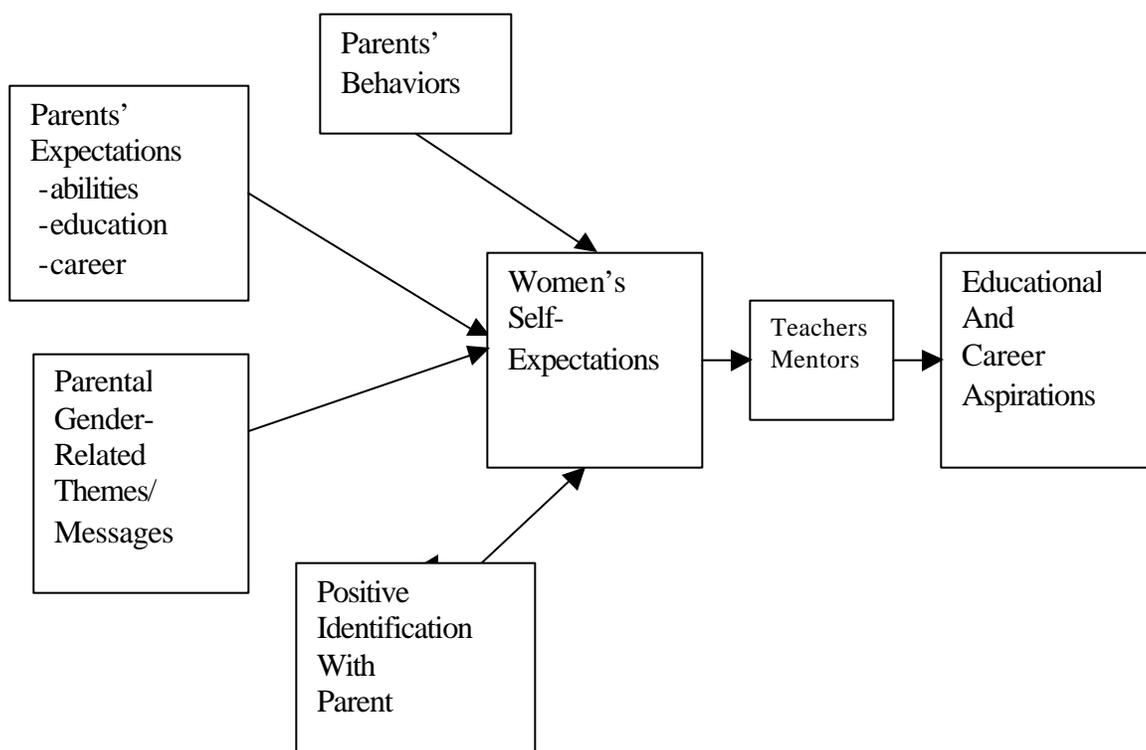


Figure 4. Model of Socializers Effecting Women's Educational and Career Aspirations

### Generalizations

The issue of generalizability is often in question when a qualitative investigation is undertaken. Since this study relied on a small purposive sample of women, all from the same geographic region, generalizability may be decreased. The limited professional affiliations selected may also limit generalizing the findings to other populations. It should be noted, however, that although this sample size was small, the wealth of information gleaned from the purposive sample provided an in-depth look at the phenomena of the effects of childhood themes. Since the findings support Eccles Model (1987, 1994) as well as other research, the findings may be representative of a much larger population.

### Limitations

As with any research, limitations exist. The limited sample size and geographical area are obvious confines. Another limiting factor may be the accuracy of the participants' perceptions. In this study, the data collection depended largely on the willingness of the participants to share their experiences in an open and honest fashion. Although the participants were thorough and open in their sharing of life experiences, their ability to recount or interpret the actual messages present in their homes may have slanted the results obtained. The strong socialization forces at play may have inhibited the participants from making accurate judgments regarding the messages they received, the choices they have made, and their own capabilities.

### Implications for Research

This research makes salient the importance of parental messages on the educational and career choices of adult women. The themes prevalent in their early childhood homes have been shown to have a lifelong effect on their perceptions of female options, self-esteem and self-competencies. This research shows the strength of the themes of helplessness and submissiveness as well as heartiness and independence. Although the purposive sample size was limited, as was the geographic region, the information illuminated the *Verstehen* (understanding) of the impact of childhood themes on leadership aspirations. Through these in-depth interviews immersion into the everyday reality of the women participants has allowed us to “feel it, touch it, hear it, and see it--in order to understand it” (Kotarba & Fontana, 1984, p. 6).

The implications of this research are quite complex and reveal the need for further investigation in many areas: a) Additional research is warranted to further explicate the impact of early childhood themes, b) Theoretical models for undoing the limiting gender-biased messages sent to our children need to be tested, c) The perceptions of self-esteem and self-competencies need to be measured and compared, and d) The impact of the male voice needs explored. A discussion of these areas follows.

#### *Today's Gender-Related Themes*

Further investigations illuminating the gender messages in today's homes are recommended. A qualitative study involving young parents may be useful in assessing the messages present in today's early childhood homes. This research examined the

messages present in the early childhood homes of adult women. The need for assessment of existing recurring themes is apparent.

Identifying children's gender-role perceptions may also be useful in further illuminating the messages regarding gender that are being sent to our youngsters today. A replication of the Sadker and Sadker (1994) study assessing children's perceptions of their lives if they were the opposite gender could provide a current picture of themes permeating our homes and our schools today.

#### *Perceived Self-Esteem vs. Perceived Self-Competencies*

The findings of this research have opened the door to the need for further investigation into the relationship between parental expectations and women's leadership aspirations. Given the apparent relationship between a woman's perceived self-worth and her eventual movement into administrative roles, a more comprehensive look at self-esteem may be enlightening. This research utilized a self-report method which relied on the individuals' abilities to see themselves. The results, then, reflect self-esteem scores based on self-perceptions that are based on socialized expectations. In other words, the woman may see herself in a positive light because she is doing well at meeting the expectations of her parents.

An attempt to measure the individual's perceived competencies rather than feelings of self-worth may serve to ferret out this socialization influence and give a more complete picture of the woman's assessment of her abilities. As noted by Betz (1994), the important variable influencing individual's perceived range of career options is not their measured abilities, but their beliefs concerning their competence in various

behavioral domains. This research failed to assess the participants' feelings of competence. This added venue may lend additional support to the theory being tested.

### *Attitudinal Change*

Parental messages have been shown to influence the career paths chosen by the women participants. Although the need for parental education is obvious, of equal importance is the re-sending of messages regarding gender in an effort to re-educate our young to more gender-neutral ways of thinking. Research on attitude change and children is an avenue for future exploration.

To develop more effective intervention strategies, researchers need to look to other theoretical models of sex typing and to models of stereotyping and discrimination. To date, no known research is available that investigates models of attitude change and children (Bigler, 1999). Cognitive-developmental perspectives might be particularly useful in examining the cognitive processes involved in the revision of children's gender-role beliefs (Liben & Bigler, 1987). Understanding the cognitive processes involved in the re-teaching of revised gender messages seems crucial for designing effective intervention strategies.

Implications for practice include attitude change interventions based on adult models (Crocker, Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Hamilton, 1981; Rothbart, 1981). Further research in the area of these models and their usefulness in attitude change relative to young children will be crucial to the adaptation of such models in our homes and educational institutions.

*Voices of Support*

The sharing of stories such as those told by these participants and the widening of conversation about gender-role stereotypes, parental expectations, task value, choice and the impact of early childhood has the potential to nourish the growth of the stifled. Both women and men must participate in this discourse in order to affect the fundamental structures of leadership by short-circuiting some of the power that has kept those structures in place. As Weedon (1987) pointed out about the potentially negative and/or positive power of discourse, “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile, and makes it possible to thwart it” (p.111).

The women leaders in this research spoke about the influence of mentors in their efforts to overcome the negative nuances associated with entering into the administrative arena. The need for support and encouragement from those holding leadership positions is critical. Since the majority of leadership positions are currently held by men, the power of the male voice is needed if society is going to encourage and welcome women into leadership.

Research is needed in the area of male voice in order to ascertain the avenues available for reaching this powerful population. Research by Skrla et al. (2000) indicates this need as it addresses the silence that exists at the level of educational administration about the discrimination that women face. Other researchers (Anderson, 1990; Chase & Bell, 1994; Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Marshall, 1993; Reyes, 1994; Rizvi, 1993) have

criticized educational administration for its disinterest in examining and challenging inequalities within the profession.

This research and the findings of this study support the need for male mentoring and voiced support for advancing females into leadership roles. Male dominated groups such as universities and professional organizations must develop pro-equity discourse on women's issues and must welcome, encourage and nurture it ((Skrla et al., 2000).

Future research and inquiry into the scope of male awareness and available avenues for education would result in opening these pathways for communication. We can no longer be comfortable with the silence of the man. Both men and women need to speak up and speak out in order to eliminate the problems of sexism and silence.

#### Implications for Practice

The literature shows that women are not entering into the field of leadership at a rate comparable to men (Adkinson, 1981; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2003; Golub & Canty, 1982; Hansot & Tyak, 1981; Hudak, 2001; Shakseshaft, 1987; Tindall et al., 1978). The literature also indicates that women are not choosing to enter into this arena due to conflicts with balancing career and motherhood (Eccles, 1994).

The research summarized here suggests that given the socialization history of most women, and given the integrated lives many women want to lead, this choice is both reasonable and predictable. Eccles (1994) summarizes that most women know that women in male-dominated occupations often face discrimination and harassment and other more subtle forms of disapproval from their colleagues, friends, and relatives. The

anticipation of these kinds of negative experiences can also deter women from selecting male-dominated and excessively time-consuming occupations.

The results of this study indicate that women are socialized not to choose such career options that would interfere with the gender-stereotypic role of female. The aspirations for “accountant” or “lawyer” or “the field of medicine” as shared by the women participants in this study have been abandoned so that occupational choices mesh with gender responsibilities.

The administrative arena suffers because of inadequate support of women’s dual roles. The absence of women’s talent and perspective from leadership positions is a great loss for humanity. If we are to facilitate women’s choice to enter into leadership and to consider a variety of occupational options, efforts need to be made to undo the limiting messages sent to women regarding their abilities and career choice options.

This perspective indicates that specific types of interventions are necessary if we want to augment the female’s choice to aspire to leadership. We need to focus our attention on the new messages that are needed if we are to truly encourage and welcome women into leadership roles.

In order to combat the negative or limiting messages that are being sent to our children about female-stereotyped options and abilities, efforts need to be made to shed light on these misconceptions and to send new, gender-fair messages that will encourage women to make educated career choice decisions.

Using the dimensions of the Eccles Theory (1987, 1994) as a guide, recommendations for change follow. Gender-role stereotypes, socializers’ beliefs and

behaviors, differential aptitudes, and achievement related experiences are discussed across various life sectors. These may help us understand the changes that may encourage women to *opt in* to leadership.

### *Gender-Role Stereotypes*

Bigler (1999) states that gender stereotyping is both pervasive among children and resistant to change. This research also shows the lasting impact of the socialized gender-bias that takes root in early childhood. Changing the parental messages sent to our children will not be an easy task. Parent education needs to occur to inform mothers and fathers of the impact of their words, actions and expectations. Efforts focused on addressing new parents through our school system may be a first step. By creating a gender-fair environment in our schools and communicating messages of female strength and heartiness, we may begin to weaken the messages of gender-bias existing in the homes of our young children.

In order to begin to send new messages, highly effective interventions will be needed that utilize a combination of strategies based on solid theoretical foundations. To date, models of attitude change have not been tested on children (Bigler, 1999). Social psychologists, however, have posited several cognitive models that may be useful in revising the socialized stereotypes of children (Crocker et al., 1984; Hamilton, 1981; Rothbart, 1981).

Bigler (1999) discusses three models which may lend themselves to attitude change regarding gender. These include: the bookkeeping model, the conversion model and the subtyping model.

The *bookkeeping* model purports that as stereotype-inconsistent information is presented the perceiver gradually adjusts and revises her stereotypic belief relevant to the new information. Therefore, if we expose our young girls to female superintendents and female principals, we should inspire increasingly egalitarian beliefs about women and leadership over time. If we take our students on field trips to meet women lawyers, doctors and government officials, we can enhance their perceptions of viable options.

The *conversion* model states that if a person is exposed to highly salient and convincing stereotype-inconsistent information a sudden change in attitude can occur. Therefore, if we allow our children to engage with dynamic, competent women leaders in various arenas, a sudden and dramatic decrease in sex stereotyping should occur.

Finally, according to the *subtyping* model, as stereotypic-inconsistent information is presented; the original stereotype becomes differentiated into subtypes, with one particular subtype representing the disconfirming evidence. So, according to this model, exposure to a dynamic female superintendent will leave other areas of gender stereotyping unaffected but would produce a stereotype of female superintendents that is embedded within the gender stereotype.

These intervention strategies are based on straightforward models about gender role learning. Their application to gender-stereotypic attitudes and children has not been investigated; however, the implications suggest that these strategies may warrant further research.

### *Socializers' Beliefs and Behaviors*

The effects of parental messages on the adult woman's aspirations for educational and occupational achievement are clear. Changing gender-biased messages of female helplessness and submissiveness to ones of heartiness and independence are necessary if we want to begin the journey to a gender-fair society.

In order to change how our young girls perceive themselves and their capabilities, we need to provide new social scripts at an early age which illuminate the strengths and talents of the female gender. This researcher proposes the idea of using social stories to communicate new messages to our children. *Social Stories Unlimited* (Gray, 1994) is an approach to teaching social skills through improved social understanding. Social stories have been found to be an effective tool for teaching social and communication skills to a wide variety of children with special needs.

Initially developed for children with Autism, these stories provide a student with accurate and specific information regarding what occurs in a situation and why. Each story is tailored to meet the specific needs of the situation. Repetition of these stories results in changed behavior over time. Simply stated, they provide alternative life scripts in an effort to thwart ill-conceived ideas or behaviors. Utilizing this strategy to send unbiased gender messages regarding educational and career opportunities is an exciting prospect. The following social story is a simple example exemplifying the untapped possibilities.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Chloe. She studied hard in school. When she grew up she went to Harvard and learned to be a doctor. Now she works with her nurse, Tom, and together they help children get well.

Social stories, created by both parents and teachers, can help send gender-free messages and themes of educational and career options to our children.

Another strategy that could be employed in our schools is based on the intergroup theory of Tajfel, Billig & Bundy (1971). Intergroup theory asserts that the mere act of categorizing individuals into social groups is sufficient to produce intergroup prejudice and discrimination. By categorizing like-individuals together we increase intergroup bias including in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel et al., 1971).

The common classroom practice of grouping boys and girls separately for school work or play activities lends itself to gender-bias. It sends the message to our children that we are different from one another, often leading to gender-stereotyped generalizations that can be damaging to both sexes. Statements such as “The boys have finished first” or “The girls are being very quiet” can serve to typify one sex as portraying certain negative or positive characteristics. Children are likely to believe that people in that group share meaningful and unseen characteristics. That, then, is how the seeds of gender stereotyping are planted.

Psychologists who study groups recommend that teachers organize classrooms by using educationally relevant groups, or groups whose membership changes frequently (Bigler, 2005). So, for example children who are learning about the months of the year

could be asked to line up by their birthdays. They could be asked to sit in groups according to the color of their clothing.

In summary, teacher behaviors can play an important role in shaping student's gender attitudes. By highlighting student personalities or skills, rather than gender, our schools can serve to decrease gender stereotyping bias.

### *Differential Aptitudes*

If practitioners and scholars concerned with the field of education value quality female administrators, then efforts must be made to understand how women's decisions to enter administration can be supported and facilitated (Young & McLeod, 2001). This research has shed light on the socialized confidence or lack of confidence within our females. It has also heightened our awareness of the learned value that women place on maintaining gender-stereotypic career choices. If we are to encourage women to choose careers that deviate from this path, then we need to send new messages regarding their capabilities.

This research has shown the impact that childhood themes have on women's aspirations towards professional careers and leadership. The findings of this study suggest that we must work toward undoing the limiting messages that may have been sent to our young women in their formative years. Delivering new, gender-fair messages regarding abilities and career options is paramount. A concerted effort must be made by our schools to reach this goal.

Administrators have a responsibility to facilitate the establishment of a school environment in which all teachers, staff, students, parents and community members know

that equity is a high priority. Climate, curriculum, instruction and career options are areas where gender equity must become a priority.

Mewborn (1999) suggests solutions for creating a gender-equitable school environment. She suggests replacing instructional materials that contain evidence of gender bias including: sexist language, photos or stereotypical roles. Career days are suggested as a means of opening options to our girls. Instruction needs to be tailored to provide equitable teaching practices.

#### *Achievement-Related Experiences*

This research and the research of others have shown that women often do not aspire to leadership because they are socialized to manage multiple roles and multiple goals (Barnett & Baruch, 1978; Crosby, 1991; Eccles, 1994). The need to balance both career and motherhood can hinder a woman from aspiring into the administrative field.

The findings of this study indicate that occupational choices are not made in isolation from other life choices. It is clear through this research that many highly competent women experience a conflict between traditionally feminine values and goals and the demands of traditionally male-typed highly competitive achievement activities. In order to balance their dual roles and to avoid typically negative experiences associated with a male-dominated environment, they opt not to share their talents in this arena.

If we are to welcome women into these new arenas, we need to facilitate more equitable treatment and more family-sensitive social policies and supports. Positive achievement-related experiences through mentorships can provide women the

experiences they need to eliminate fear and to resend messages of worth and ability including competency, heartiness and success. As stated by Doyle (1999),

Mentors open doors. By sharing contacts, wisdom and experience, revealing destinies previously unforeseen and accelerating the journeys to those destinations, mentors are catalysts in the development of future leaders and heroes (p. 31).

Of equal importance, as heard in the voices of the women participants, is the power of male mentorship and male support. Given the current status of female underrepresentation in leadership arenas, the support of males is needed to give credence to the benefits of female leadership. Not only do we need to mentor each other, the men in power must realize the value of their efforts in reaching the goal of gender-equity in the workplace. Female leaders need to reach and teach male leaders. Unless women are given encouragement and support by the men currently in administrative positions, the barriers will remain solid. The *silence of the man* will only serve to hinder female's movement into top administrative roles.

### Summary

Using the Eccles Model of Achievement Related Choices (1987, 1994) as a guide, this study attempted to ascertain the effects of early childhood themes on women's aspirations toward leadership. Through the avenues of interviews, focus groups, surveys, and checklists women from both education and business shared their lived early childhood experiences. An analysis of the data obtained illuminated the relationship between the messages they received and the educational and career choices they made.

The impact of early childhood parental messages on women's career aspirations was a recurring corollary in this investigation. Themes prevalent in the women's early childhood homes regarding gender-roles, expectations for success, and career aspirations influenced the choices the women made in their personal and career paths. Role models in regards to parental education or parental careers did not prove to affect the women's educational or vocational aspirations. Neither did gender-stereotyped role models of the parents. The messages sent to these women about their own capabilities, and the expectations their parents held for them were of greatest impact. These women did not model their parents, but, rather, modeled the expectations their parents had for them. These expectations or messages determined what choices the women made regarding their educational and career goals. These messages formed the women's values regarding education, career choice and motherhood.

“The habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference.” Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

*To find her, it is necessary for women to return to their instinctive lives, their deepest knowing. So, let us push on now, and remember ourselves back to the wild soul. Let us sing her flesh back onto our bones. Shed any false coats we have been given. Don the true coat of powerful instinct and knowing. Infiltrate the psychic lands that once belonged to us. Unfurl the bandages, ready the medicine. Let us return now, wild women howling, laughing, singing....*

-Estés (1995, p. 22)

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Appendix A  
Introductory Letter

# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 Forbes Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15282

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Although women have made gains, the shortage of women in leadership positions remains a far-reaching concern in all management arenas. As women, we are faced with both internal and external barriers that may affect our career choice decisions. These barriers may be the result of how we are socialized as children. In order to take a deeper look at how our career choices were influenced by our early childhood environments and thus, to inform our understanding of current socialization practices, I am conducting a study of select women in the Erie/Pittsburgh area.

I am currently a doctoral student in the Duquesne University School of Education Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders. I am in the process of conducting my dissertation study. The selected focus of my research is studying *The Effects of Childhood Themes on Women's Aspirations Toward Leadership Roles*. I intend to investigate the effects of socialized gender roles and the influence of early childhood messages on women's career decisions.

My investigation will involve one ninety minute interview, the completion of a checklist, a self-esteem inventory and a follow-up focus group with a small number of women. In addition, you will be asked to journal personal gender-related experiences

over a two-week period. Given your unique career choice your participation in this investigation would be extremely helpful. I recognize your busy schedule so I am willing to arrange all contacts at your convenience both in time and location.

I will be contacting you by phone within the next week to answer any questions you may have and to give you further information regarding the nature of my research. I hope that you can assist me in my quest to further investigate this avenue of study.

Regards,

Janet R. Wojtalik  
Doctoral Candidate 2006  
Duquesne University

Appendix B  
Informed Consent

# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 Forbes Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15282

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** The Effects of Childhood Themes on Women's Aspirations Toward Leadership Roles
- INVESTIGATOR:** Janet R. Wojtalik, 508 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, Erie, PA 16509  
814-864-3725 (H) 814-490-1858 (C)
- ADVISOR:** Dr. Mary Breckenridge, Mercyhurst College  
814-824-3035
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the effects of childhood themes on women's aspirations towards leadership. You will be asked to allow me to interview you, complete a checklist, self-esteem inventory, two-week journal and participate in one focus group meeting. The interviews and group sessions will be tape recorded and transcribed. When audiotapes are transcribed all identifiers of you, your employer and anyone you talk about will be deleted or disguised.
- These are the only requests that will be made of you.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There are no risks involved. Through the 90 minute interview and 90 minute focus group you will benefit by sharing your experiences and thus contributing to the study and its results. This research may influence your understanding of links between ways of socializing our children and career choice aspirations, and thus future action.

- COMPENSATION:** There will be no compensation for your involvement. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for return of your response to the investigator.
- CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your name will never appear on any survey or research instrument. While a number will be assigned to your responses so the responses can be linked, the number will never be connected with your name in any form or any place. No identity will be made in the data analysis. Your responses will only appear in narrative data summaries. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Based on federal guidelines all materials will be destroyed five years following completion of the research.
- RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.
- SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.
- VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

---

 Participant's Signature

---

 Date

---

 Researcher's Signature

---

 Date

Appendix C  
Open-Ended Interview Guide

### Open-Ended Interview Guide

This study will be guided by the following response prompts:

1. Please describe the dynamics of your family during your early childhood years. Include: the role of your mother, the role of your father, your place in the family, your parents' occupations.
2. Describe yourself during that time. Were you shy, outgoing, dependent, independent, fearful, brave, aggressive, nurturing, sad, happy, mischievous, etc?
3. Who were your heroes?
4. In looking back, what do you see as the predominant gender roles communicated to you during these early years? What do girls do? What do boys do? How were they communicated? (e.g. directly, indirectly, etc.)
5. What activities were you encouraged to participate in as a child? (dance, sports, karate, scouting, gymnastics, etc.)
6. What were your parents' career aspirations for you?
7. What were your career aspirations as a child?
8. What educational/career options were offered or encouraged?
9. What were your favorite fairy tales, cartoons, movies or T. V. shows as a child?
10. Who was most influential in your life in regards to career choice? (person or event) Why?
11. What do you believe about women? About men? Has this changed over the years? Why? (e.g. role in the family, leadership ability, etc.)
12. Were the themes of female helplessness or male dominance prominent in your childhood home? Please cite examples supporting your answer.
13. How would your life be different if you were born male?
14. What were your parents' educational levels?

Appendix D

Gender-Message Assessment Checklist

Gender-Message Assessment Checklist

Which of the following attitudes or statements were implied or communicated to you during your early childhood years?

Please check all that apply and comment as appropriate.

\_\_\_ Boys are strong. Girls are weak.

\_\_\_ You can be anything you want to be when you grow up.

\_\_\_ You should dress *like a girl*.

\_\_\_ Big boys don't cry.

\_\_\_ Girls are afraid of bugs.

\_\_\_ You are just like your dad.

\_\_\_ You were good at sports, math, science, etc. *for a girl*.

\_\_\_ Boys are messy. Girls are neat.

\_\_\_ Boys are bossy. Girls are sensitive.

\_\_\_ The man is always in charge.

\_\_\_ Daddy is the boss.

\_\_\_ Mommy is the boss.

\_\_\_ Just wait till your father gets home.

\_\_\_ Dad works. Mom manages the money.

\_\_\_ Girls grow up to be mothers, teachers and nurses.

\_\_\_ You should go to college.

\_\_\_ You should grow up and marry a rich man.

\_\_\_ Girls are helpless.

\_\_\_ Girls should know how to fix things.

\_\_\_ Women cook and clean. Men work and earn money.

\_\_\_ It's wrong to "throw like a girl", "run like a girl", or "cry like a girl".

\_\_\_ Always let the boy win.

\_\_\_ Boys have bad tempers. Girls are calm.

\_\_\_ Mom is in charge. She makes the rules and enforces them.

\_\_\_ The woman always waits on the man.

\_\_\_ The woman takes care of chores inside the house. The man takes care of chores outside.

\_\_\_ Men are bosses, women are secretaries.

\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

Appendix E  
Index of Self-Esteem (ISE)

INDEX OF SELF-ESTEEM (ISE)

This questionnaire is designed to measure how you see yourself. It is not a test so there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by placing a number by each one as follows:

1. Rarely or none of the time
2. A little of the time
3. Sometimes
4. A good part of the time
5. Most or all of the time

Please begin.

1. I feel that people would not like me if they really knew me well. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I feel that others get along much better than I do. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I feel that I am a beautiful person. \_\_\_\_\_
4. When I am with other people I feel they are glad I am with them. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I feel that people really like to talk with me. \_\_\_\_\_
6. I feel that I am a very competent person. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I think I make a good impression on others. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I feel that I need more self-confidence. \_\_\_\_\_
9. When I am with strangers I am very nervous. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I think that I am a dull person. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I feel ugly. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I feel that others have more fun than I do. \_\_\_\_\_
13. I feel that I bore people. \_\_\_\_\_
14. I think my friends find me interesting. \_\_\_\_\_
15. I think I have a good sense of humor. \_\_\_\_\_

16. I feel very self-conscious when I am with strangers. \_\_\_\_\_
17. I feel that if I could be more like other people I would have it made. \_\_\_\_\_
18. I feel that people have a good time when they are with me. \_\_\_\_\_
19. I feel like a wallflower when I go out. \_\_\_\_\_
20. I feel I get pushed around more than others. \_\_\_\_\_
21. I think I am a rather nice person. \_\_\_\_\_
22. I feel that people really like me very much. \_\_\_\_\_
23. I feel that I am a likeable person. \_\_\_\_\_
24. I am afraid I will appear foolish to others. \_\_\_\_\_
25. My friends think very highly of me. \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F

Open-Ended Focus Group Prompts

### Open-Ended Focus Group Prompts

The Focus Groups will be guided by the following response prompts:

1. Please discuss any significant gender-related experiences that you feel have impacted your career decisions.
2. Has any one person played an important role in your life and your career choice?
3. What messages were sent to you during your childhood that you feel formed your beliefs about the capabilities of men and women?
4. What gender-related issues impact you now in your current position?
5. What changes in our media, schools, books, videos, movies do you see as necessary for our children to grow into gender-fair adults?