
**INSTRUCTIONAL UNIT FOR IMPROVING RETENTION OF FEMALE
MBA GRADUATES IN POST-MBA CAREERS**

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ABSTRACT

Many female graduates of the top-10 MBA programs in America opt out of their post-MBA careers within 5-10 years after graduation because they are not educated about the reality of work-life balance in a post-MBA career, and they are not able to identify the key factors that would mitigate this issue. The purpose of this study is to answer the central research question(s) utilizing a qualitative study that incorporates an action research methodology utilizing pre-and-post instruction focus groups to provide insight into the effectiveness of a two-hour instructional unit for a sample of women entering top-10 MBA programs, the instruction being aimed to help this sample plan for the post-graduation career-family balance they might encounter. The overriding conclusion of the study was the finding that women who participated in the focus groups increased their knowledge and awareness about how they may be better prepared to stay in their careers by planning for the career-family journey. This conclusion lends itself to the opportunity to do further research on the use of instructional units in helping women better plan for their post MBA careers in the long-run.

Keywords: Action-research methodology, c-suite, career planning, consumer products, focus group, human resources, ivy-league, M.B.A., N Vivo, strategic planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many female graduates of top-10 MBA programs opt out of their post-MBA careers within 5-10 years after graduation because they are not educated about the reality of work-life balance in a high powered post-MBA career, and they have not planned for the key factors that would mitigate their exodus. The research of Sandberg (2012), Goldin and Katz (2008), Ely (2013) and Jane, Roberts, and Sinha (2018) has found that these females from the top-10 MBA programs exit their careers, and validates that there is a strong correlation between leaving and the occurrence of children. Jane et al. (2018) found that there is a gap in the literature pertaining to instructional units being taught to women who have been accepted to top-10 MBA programs, specific to planning for the career-family factors that quickly ensue post-graduation.

This study utilized a qualitative action-research methodology to provide insight into the effectiveness of an instructional unit for women entering top-10 MBA programs, aimed to help them plan for the post-graduation career-family balance they will encounter. The action research study utilized a focus group of six who were accepted to a top-10 MBA program. The women participated in the focus group prior to a training module, and again after the instructional session, to determine their knowledge of how they may be better prepared to stay in their careers managing the career-family journey. By having a small number of participants, this research was able to look in-depth at the topic of interest (Creswell, 2007).

This study is significant in its contributions to the knowledge base pertaining to the field of education in business administration. It impacts numerous constituents. First, it is significant to current and future females who intend to earn a MBA from a top business school, and, possibly, to a great subset of women earning an MBA. The study provides a better understanding of the challenges they will face in staying in the work force; thus, they might be able to pre-plan to navigate the existing challenges. Second, the business schools could also gain the same insights from the study, for the purpose of their future curriculums. Finally, the study is significant to business across America because when women exit business careers within years after graduating from a top-10 MBA program, the companies are left with a lack of female leadership and diversity, which manifests in sub-optimal financial performance (Jane et al., 2018). To maximize profitability, align with corporate social responsibility, and equal opportunity laws, businesses need women to continue in their corporate careers and become a vital representative force in corporate leadership. The “cost” of females exiting is evident up-and-down the value chain (McKinsey, 2007); financial performance is heightened when women are more represented in leadership through top management, C-suite, and board positions (McKinsey, 2007).

1.1 Background

The 1990s was the first full generation where women simultaneously had the right to vote (U.S. Constitution, 1920), to get an education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) with parity to men, join the workforce with equality to men (Civil Rights Act of 1964, 2017), and thus to have access to enter a top-10 MBA program. Acceptance into these top-10 programs is rigorous and requires purposeful intent (Sandberg, 2012). Thus, the decision of women to opt-out of their post-MBA careers (Bertrand, Goldin, and Katz, 2010), that women only a generation earlier could not have accessed, is not only compelling, but poses a need for understanding and solutions. Solutions are necessary because as women leave their careers, they do not maximize their potential, and there ensues a void in female leaders and diversity, which manifests in sub-optimal financial performance (McKinsey, 2007). There is a void in the literature as to instructional solutions to help women plan for the journey of post-MBA career-life balance could mitigate the pace of women leaving their careers.

The Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) believes the business schools must lead the change to help women prepare to advance throughout their business careers. This dialog must evolve and grow through curriculums that the *US News and World Report* should include as they rank business schools; curriculums life planning education, career advising, and mentoring (Jane,

Roberts, and Sinha, 2018). Jane et al. (2018) found that women unanimously voiced that when entering business school they were naïve about career-family balance and needed an educational discussion about work-life balance as part of their business school education. They shared that this type of guidance was virtually non-existent at each educational juncture leading up to business school, and should have been integrated into their educational learning in high school, college, and MBA programs. The women unanimously shared that business school is being entirely male oriented, with absolutely no mention of work-life planning, or anything other what is the traditional male path. They felt a shift from how to succeed in corporate America as a man has traditionally done, to a focus on success that incorporates work-life balance, should be an integral evolution of the MBA curriculum (as well during college and high school).

1.2 Problem

In the 2018 study and research, Jane et al. (2018) determined and asserts that little is being done at the top business schools to educate women, and men, on the challenges ahead of work-life balance. Of the top-20 MBA programs, two initiatives offered during business school were identified. The Stern School at New York University offers a course to students during their MBA studies named Women in Business Leadership. The curriculum aids female students in planning for their business careers over the long-term. Students write a career plan that includes thinking through their careers and work-life balance choices they could encounter. They develop a pro-active strategy for how exit their career for a period of time to raise a family, with the goal being that females need to plan for opt-out time, and for a re-entry plan (NYU, 2017). As well, the curriculum identifies companies that offer family-friendly leave policies (NYU, 2017). In 2014, the Tuck School at Dartmouth founded the Women's Initiative speaker series. Its objective was to empower females, cultivate diversity in corporate America, and create corporate cultures that are more female friendly (Reddit, 2017).

The idea is aimed at hearing women's voices and perspectives as often as you hear men's voices during business school. Furthermore, only two top-10 programs offer post-MBA career re-entry curriculums. Harvard has a program called MBA Path, for mothers with an MBA who want to re-enter the workforce (Harvard, 2015). As well, the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College has an 11-day program called Back in Business (Reddit, 2017) aimed at female MBAs who leave their career field, and encounter trouble re-entering the workforce, due to a lack of a direct path or recruiting processes (Reddit, 2017).

The main research question that guided this study is: How would an instructional unit affect women, who are embarking on top-10 MBA programs, as determined by (U.S. News and World Report 2017), regarding their knowledge around career-life planning?

Table 1 shows these Top-10 MBA Programs in the US. This study also provides an instructional solution and uses action research to ascertain if the instructional unit is helpful to the women as they prepare to enter a MBA program.

Table 1: Top-10 MBA programs in the U.S.
(U.S. News and World Report, 2017)

Stanford
Harvard
Wharton
Chicago Booth
MIT Sloan
Northwestern
Berkeley
Columbia
Tuck at Dartmouth
University of Virginia, Darden

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This action research consists of a two-hour instructional unit, focused on career-family planning, taught to women prior to entering business school. It would help educate them to the challenges of maintaining a career-life balance, as defined by the body of research. Participants were taught to write a “business plan for life”, a plan where they envision their life for the foreseeable 1,3,5,10, and 25 years, with instructions that took them through the thought process of career-family life planning. The Instructional Goal Statement was “the top-10 MBA students (learners) will use the instructional module to understand how to create a “business plan for life” that they will apply as they plan for, enter, and after business school.” Prior to the instructional session, an opening focus group session with pre-prepared questions that aligned with the central research question was held with the participants. Thereafter, the instructional unit lasted approximately two hours. Following this instructional unit, the participants attended a closing focus group so comparisons of answers could be made with the results of the ones taken prior to the instruction.

To collect data for this study, first a target population was identified (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Since it was not possible to collect data from everyone in the population, the researchers gathered data from a sample of the population (Yin, 2003). Women who had graduated college and were accepted to an array of top-10 business schools were considered. For convenience, women in Southern California were chosen, as it was easy to access them during the study. The women selected as the sample for this study were chosen because they met the primary criteria necessary to provide relevant study information. The characteristics of this learner group included a demographic of female learners aged 23-29. All of the learners in the course came from the same educational context in terms of having graduated at the top of their classes. However they differed in that they attended differing colleges across the nation, with different post-college work experiences. All of the population of learners had a strong intrinsic motivation and positive attitude toward the content.

2.1 Data Collection

The research question was answered using a qualitative research method of data collection regarding the personal experiences of the women to learn about the effectiveness of the instructional unit. The participants took part in pre-and-post instruction focus groups with questions asked with a focus on beliefs and belief systems. A qualitative design was utilized because beliefs and belief systems cannot be ascertained with quantitative methodology, which instead focuses on hypotheses testing, showing results in numerical format (Merriam, 1998). Also, a qualitative research method allowed for rich, descriptive data learned directly from the voices of the sample population of female participants on their perceptions of their experiences which were thereafter used to derive themes that explain the data (Merriam, 1998) with quotations, as opposed to statistics. This method aligns to the research question(s) as it allowed the researcher to collect data regarding the personal experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The research collected data through pre-and-post focus groups before the unit of instruction and after, with the participants, utilizing a list of semi-structured interview questions. The literature review, combined with the theoretical framework, formed the content of specific questions for the focus group. All of the focus group questions were carefully pre-planned, using the research question as a guide to be sure that useable data could be gathered for analysis (Merriam, 1998). Thus, the questions were carefully written as singular and open-ended, and worded neutrally to mitigate judgment, and to encourage rapport, with an intention to elicit deep, rich answers from the participants (Patton, 2002).

2.2 Instruments

Identical emails were sent to the women participants, who have been accepted to a top-10 MBA program, inviting them to participate. There were no other pre-qualifiers of any kind such as race, age, marital status, ethnicity, careers, income, color, geographic locations, or parental status. Hence, the women who participated in the study varied demographically. Once the participant sample was identified, the contributors participated in a focus group placing emphasis on post-MBA career-life planning. Then, as a group, they participated in the instructional unit. Thereafter, they participated in a post-instruction focus group on their awareness and plan for post-MBA career-life planning. These focus groups were conducted in person and sought to elicit each participant's narrative via a purposeful conversation (Patton, 2002). These women had not yet entered the MBA program, they were accepted to the programs to begin in the fall. The study was done with them in the months before they actually dispersed to their selected school. This included descriptions of feelings and thoughts, and also beliefs, perceptions, and perspectives, which lead to meaningful data (Merriam, 2009). This generated unique knowledge and comprehension of the research topic (Patton, 2002). All participations were audio recorded to capture accurate records. In addition, the handwritten notes were taken to support the audio recordings so the researcher could focus on the responses and make notes on matters that might need further attention. The focus group used pre-designed open-ended questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1989), designed so that participants could explain and elaborate in their own words, sharing as much, or as little, information as they choose (Polkinghorne, 2005). Participants were

advised prior to the focus groups about the option of not answering any question, and the option to exit the focus group at any time without consequences.

2.3 Procedures

To prepare for data collection, the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) training was completed, and an application for research approval was submitted to the institution's IRB. Also, participants were sent informed consent forms. Following IRB approval, data collection commenced.

2.4 Data Analysis

Creswell's (2007) steps of data analysis were utilized in the data analysis phase. First, the data was organized per the verbatim transcripts from the focus group. Second, they were crosschecked with the transcript for accuracy. The data gathered was condensed into smaller units for analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). From this, categories emerged and codes were created (Harding & Whiteside, 2013) finding commonalities, relevant to the research questions (Weber, 2011), and the codes were used to create an "analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an essence description" (Creswell, 2007, p. 196). Third, this research developed clusters of meaning from significant statements to create themes. Fourth, these significant statements and themes were used to write a description that presented the essence of the themes and focused on the common thoughts of the participants. Finally, an analysis and interpretation of the data gathered was developed.

2.5 Bias

To mitigate bias, the questions were prepared in advance and were carefully worded (Patton, 2002). When bias is mitigated, through the use of standardized open-ended questions, it increases the legitimacy and credibility of the data collected (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, so that the sample being studied was not a biased sample and represented varying aspects of the experience, the study consisted of participants who best represented the knowledge being sought, unbiased as to age, career paths, ethnicities, and religions.

2.6 Confidentiality

Ensuring validity and reliability means the study was conducted in an ethical manner, with integrity, and with respect for the process of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). The confidentiality of the participants interviewed was essential, and participants were assured all interview information were confidential. Thus, the information gathered was safely stored to ensure the confidentiality of the subjects following the APA list of ethical standards, including that the participants' names were re-coded with identifiers such as participant A, B, C, D, and so on (Dolly, Bell, & Meredith, 1978). In compliance with APA ethical standards, the researcher stored the confidentially collected data on a secure password-protected computer, and all hard-copy research materials were double-locked.

2.7 Reliability and Trustworthiness

The credibility and reliability of the research aims to be beyond question, beyond challenge, and provide pragmatic scientific evidence for the developing knowledge base. In alignment with ensuring credibility and reliability, this research transcribed and verified the interviews for accuracy. During coding, to ensure reliability “no drift in the definition of codes, or a shift in the meaning of codes during coding” (Creswell, 2007) was allowed or entertained. To be trustworthy the results should be consistent over time, and accurately represent the greater population (Golafshani, 2003). Partially trustworthiness is incumbent in the credibility of the research that remained open, and unsupported ideas were relinquished, despite personal opinions.

2.8 Limitations of this Study

This study had limitations incumbent in the shortcomings in the theoretical framework chosen, as well as the choice of the design, the sample population, the sample itself in terms of size and representatives, the measures utilized, and the process used for analysis (Creswell, 2007). The first limitation was sample of convenience. This research selected a sample of convenience instead of a random sample, and known groups with easy access were interviewed. The second limitation was geographical. This study interviewed only females who currently reside in Southern California. Women who reside in other regions of the USA that are planning to attend top-10 business schools could have different perceptions of the instructional unit; as well, the study looks at women in America, not at women globally. The third limitation was this was a focus group of six women, this presents issues of methodological rigor, researcher subjectivity, and external validity (Creswell, 2007). Results cannot be generalized to the overall population. Thus, the results of the study can only be suggestive of a larger population. The fourth limitation was the choice of problem. The researchers consciously chose to look only at women planning to attend a top-10 MBA program. Certainly, a study could have looked at all females planning to attain an MBA in America, or even at all women earning some type of master’s degree (e.g., lawyers, doctors, etc.), where there could be a similar exodus from careers.

2.9 Summary

Qualitative data collection is a rich and varied method for collecting information relating to people’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Merriam, 1998). This section identified and explained this action study, including: participants, how the focus groups were conducted, and how data was collected from the participating women’s perceived experiences.

3. RESULTS

This research utilized a pre-and-post instruction focus group of female participants. The focus group questions centered on critical considerations that might prepare women for the work-family challenges ahead. This section comprises the results of the analysis of qualitative data collected according to the central research question: “How would an instructional unit affect women, who are embarking on top-10 MBA programs, regarding their knowledge around career-life planning?” The data instrument used for collecting the qualitative data for this study was a

questionnaire created for this research; the same questionnaire was utilized in the pre-and-post focus groups. The open-ended questions utilized in the questionnaire were designed so that the participants could share their perspectives about the research topic. Overall, the study found that an instructional unit is beneficial to women entering top-10 MBA programs as to awareness regarding the journey ahead of career-family balance, and the need to create a plan to address the obstacles that they will encounter. The research utilized both NVivo and manual data management to identify codes and categories to analyze the qualitative data. These categories guided the data collection, from which codes were derived, and thereafter themes emerged.

3.1 Qualitative Data Analysis Related to Pre-Instructional Unit Focus Group

In the pre-study focus group, the following themes emerged:

1. **Lack of Work-Life Planning:** To this point, the women universally had given little to no consideration to planning for a work-life path. They were virtually unaware of the work-life balance they would encounter when they graduated from business school.
2. **Lack of Education on Work-Life Planning:** The women unanimously stated that there was no discussions in school up to this point about work-life balance and navigating that path. They were unaware of the journey ahead of work-life balance they would encounter when they graduated from business school.
3. **Lack of Corporate Support for Work-Life Planning:** The women unanimously said there are little to no discussions in the corporations they worked for about fostering an environment that promotes work-life balance. A common theme among the participants was that most corporations simply ignore the topic of work-life balance for mothers. They stated that they are trained on all types of diversity, but had not encountered any training on respecting the need for work-life balance. There is no talk by human resources about leadership supporting a culture of work life balance.
4. The women were aware of others women's corporate struggles. The participants expressed that they were influenced by seeing women at the director or executive level who had small kids who sacrificed being there for their children so to meet expectations at work. Male oriented workplace and culture was common, and they observed many men are hostile to women and not open and accepting of women in the professional roles, and that companies need to implement policies that provide accommodations for female employees who are mothers. The women did not feel the employers were flexible enough in the option of work-life balance. The women universally described that the work place just did not allow for enough balance. But, they had not given much consideration to the idea that they might need to think about proactive strategies to respond to these types of struggles.
5. The women had vague long -term professional goals. In terms of long-term professional goals, none of the women had specific aspirations. All participants expressed a long-term career vision, or goal, to be successful in that they would attain upward mobility on the

career ladder in a career in business. But, none of the women were clear on specifics of this long-term visions.

6. All of the participants expressed that they would never give up work. They planned to have families, and they assumed they would work and rise up the ladder, and juggle it all. They had not thought much about what it would be like to have a child and then return to the MBA corporate world in the capacity the corporate world would allow, fulltime, thus being 60+ hours a week. And, they had not thought about if they would subjugate their career decisions to their husbands' careers.
7. The participants had not thought much about the demands of having children and running a household. Many expressed they never had thought about anyone but themselves, and made decisions just about themselves, so had no idea about how this might change once they had children. They had little awareness of how labor intensive raising kids and taking care of a household for 3, 4, 5 people can be.
8. Lack of awareness around the exodus of top-10 MBA women from careers. The participants had universally no awareness around the research that women graduate from top-10 MBA programs leave their intended careers within 10 years post-graduation, rather than persisting on a traditional post-MBA career path. The conversation they had around this question was mostly to refute that this would not be the case for themselves.
9. The participants felt confident they could re-enter the workforce. They also felt secure that their intelligence combined with their top-10 MBA degree would allow them to go back into their careers later if they wanted, or needed to.

3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis Related to Post-Instructional Unit Focus Group

In the post-study focus group, the following themes emerged:

1. Awareness of the exodus of top-10 MBA women from careers. The participants shared they now had awareness that women that graduate from top-10 MBA programs leave their intended careers within 10 years post-graduation, rather than persisting on a traditional post-MBA career path. They shared that this was certainly something that they must think on and plan accordingly.
2. Post instruction, the participants expressed a need to plan for a work-life path. They had enhanced awareness around the concept that they would face work-life challenges when they graduated from business school and entered post-MBA careers.
3. Given their enhanced awareness of the male oriented culture of workplaces in corporate America, and the lack of flexibility for the needs of women when they try to balance career and family, the women expressed the need to build pro-active strategies to respond to these struggles. These might include looking for employers who are more family friendly.
4. Given that the women wanted to be successful in their careers post MBA, they shared that it would be important to plan for that long-term success in terms of specifically what

they wanted to achieve and how they would navigate that path given career interruptions related to children and family.

5. In the pre-study participants expressed that they would never give up work. But after the post-instructional unit, the women shared that they had a new awareness that they may indeed give up their careers when they have children as they were not sure that they could raise children successfully while meeting the demands of top-10 MBA careers and the demands of their husbands' careers. Given some thought process to the demands of raising children, they all expressed that they would want their children to be nurtured, supported, and given every opportunity for a happy successful life. They questioned whether a care-giver could provide the appropriate support for their children, or if they would even want someone else to be at the helm of raising their children. As well, they questioned even if they would want the father to be the lead care-giver. The women shared that it thus may be impossible to have the career they envisioned and raise their children successfully. Therefore, raising children may have to come at the expense of their own career progressions, at least temporarily.
6. The participants felt they must plan to re-enter the workforce. Post instructional unit the participants shared that although they are intelligent and would be armed with a top-10 MBA degree, re-entering the work force in the same capacity as they were at after a career interruption might pose challenges. And, this must be thought about and planned for.
7. The participants felt the discussion about work-life balance and navigating that path should begin well before the MBA program. They shared that they were surprised that this was the first time they had any sort of holistic instruction around this topic. They felt that the topic of work-life balance should be taught throughout a young woman's education, in high school and in undergraduate curriculums.
8. The participants felt that the discussion about work-life balance and navigating that path should be taught during the MBA program. They felt that it is incumbent on the business school programs to educate the students on the topic of work-life balance.

The main conclusion of this study was that an instructional unit is beneficial to women entering top-10 MBA programs, as to awareness regarding the journey ahead of career-family balance, and the need to create a plan to address the obstacles that they will encounter. Prior to the instructional unit the women had some knowledge that women struggle at work due to lack of corporate support for women with families. However, the participants had not thought about work-life planning, nor had they had any education on the topic. Their visions were to stay in the careers and be successful with little thought as to how children, marriage, and running a household might interfere. They had no awareness that there is a phenomenon amongst their predecessors, graduates of top-10 MBA programs, to leave the corporate world at an alarming pace within 10 years post MBA (Patterson, Damaske, and Sheroff, 2018). And, they believed that if they were to leave their career to have children it would be easy to re-enter that career.

After the instructional unit the women shared new awareness that there is a phenomenon amongst their predecessors, graduates of top-10 MBA programs, to leave the corporate world at an alarming pace within 10 years post MBA (Jane, et al, 2018). They now also had awareness that if they were to leave their career to have children it would be more difficult to re-enter that career than they had imagined. Thus, the participants shared that the instructional unit enhanced their awareness of the need to pro-actively plan for the work-life path ahead and their long-term goals. As well, they shared their belief that girls/women should be educated on the career-life challenges during high-school and elementary school and during the MBA program.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The research of Jane et al. (2018) suggests that while in business school, or just prior, a curriculum in “life training” prior to entering business school would be helpful to women to educate them on what is to come as to career-life balance. Just as we teach sex education for adolescents to understand that aspect of change to come, so too should there be “life training” to educate young women (and men) on the changing path ahead; leading to the realization that a plan would be a useful undertaking. Jane et al. (2018) suggests women should write a “business plan for life”, a plan where they envision their life for the foreseeable 1, 3, 5, 10, and 25 years, written within a career-family training curriculum which takes them through the thought process of career-family life planning.

The main finding of this study was that an instructional unit is beneficial to women entering top-10 MBA programs as to awareness regarding the journey ahead of career-family balance, and the need to create a plan to address the obstacles that they will encounter. Prior to the instructional unit the themes that were derived from the data included that the women lacked knowledge around the journey of post-MBA work-life challenges faced by women in corporate America. Thus, the women had not thought about work-life planning, nor had they had any education on the topic. Their visions were to stay in the careers and be successful with little thought as to how children, marriage, and running a household might interfere. They had no awareness that there is a phenomenon amongst their predecessors, graduates of top-10 MBA programs, to leave the corporate world at an alarming pace within 10 years post MBA. And, they believed that if they were to leave their career to have children it would be easy to re-enter that career.

After the instructional unit the themes derived from the data demonstrated that women shared new awareness around the journey of post-MBA work-life challenges faced by women in corporate America. They shared their belief that girls/women should be educated on the career-life challenges during high-school and elementary school and during the MBA program. To that end, the women shared that the instructional unit utilized in this study enhanced their awareness of the need to pro-actively plan for the work-life path ahead and their long-term goals.

The results of the data indicate that the use of an instructional unit is highly effective in building awareness in women about the need to pro-actively plan for the post MBA journey into corporate America, as their lives evolve to include marriage and children. This type of instruction would best be taught by the business schools themselves. Possibly, the top-10 business schools can

improve their value-add and brand equity by implementing initiatives for women before (and during) their business school experience through instructional units that address the journey of work-life balance. Foremost, business schools need to realize that, in the 21st century, their students are over 40% female approximately (Jane, et al., 2018), thus, it is time that the culture shift away from being male-centric with absolutely no mention of personal life planning, or anything other than that of a traditional male path. In addition, the research in this study reveals that young women are naïve about work-life balance and thus they need the curriculum to educate them on this important knowledge just like the schools educate on finance, ethics, and other areas. As business schools evolve and adapt to meet the needs of the 21st century female students by implementing these measures, more success from female graduates could result not just in the short-run, but also in the long-run. This will also have a positive impact of the reputation of the business school and thus on applications for future classes of the program.

The foremost strength of this study is that it is the first one of its kind to contribute to the scholarly literature on the topic of the effect of instructional units building awareness in women about the need to pro-actively plan for the post MBA journey into corporate America. This is significant as their lives evolve to include marriage and children. The next strength is in its potential benefit to numerous constituents: it is significant to future females who intend to earn a MBA from a top business school. The study provides a better understanding of the challenges they will face in staying in the work force; thus, they might be able to pre-plan to navigate the existing challenges. The business schools could also gain the similar insights from this study for the purpose of their future curriculum planning. The study is significant to business across America because when women exit business careers within years after graduating from a top-10 MBA program, the companies are left with a lack of female leadership and diversity. This manifests in sub-optimal financial performance. To maximize profitability, and align with corporate social responsibility, and equal opportunity laws, businesses need women to continue in their corporate careers and become a vital representative force in corporate leadership. The “cost” of females exiting is evident up-and-down the value chain (McKinsey, 2007); financial performance is heightened when more women are represented in leadership through top management, C-suite, and board positions (McKinsey, 2007).

There are several factors that may have skewed the results of these findings. The first being that the participants were all former undergraduate students or clients of the researcher, and this may have influenced their feeling of pressure to respond positively to the instructional unit. Further, the participants might have felt pressure to demonstrate their growth mindset around a topic that perhaps they were not really interested in engaging in at this juncture. As well, although the researcher made every effort to deliver the instructional unit in an unbiased manner, the participants may have been influenced by the energy and cadence in the way the instructional materials were delivered.

5. FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

In 2017 graduating female alumni from the Tuck School at Dartmouth College, had an average starting salary (with bonus) of \$148,000, which is at par with the starting salary pay of their male

peers in the cohort (Smith-Barrow, 2016). This income statistic is consistent across all of the top-10 business schools. These salaries put these graduates in the top 11% of income earners in the nation in their first post-MBA job (Smith-Barrow, 2016). So, these women, who only decades earlier primarily had to rely on a man's income to support a lifestyle, now have the opportunity to be among the nation's highest income earners on the day they graduate with a top-10 MBA degree. This opportunity was virtually non-existent only decades earlier; in fact, decades earlier women hardly had gained the trifecta of the legal right to vote, attain an equal education, and pursue equal employment. Yet, there is a lack of women attaining top leadership positions. Women are finding full-time corporate MBA work so daunting once they have children that they are opting out of the workforce. This leads to "vertical gender segregation" whereas promotions upward are awarded, women are mostly absent (Wirth, 2001).

This mass exodus of educated MBA women from the workforce can partially derive back to a lack of educational instruction at the business schools themselves (Rodin, 2011; Rodin 2013). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 and the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) of 1974 make it illegal to discriminate against females in education (Valentin, 1997). A further question that derives from this study is, "are women still being discriminated against a MBA program by nature of the programs being so male oriented?" To address this, at worst potential discrimination, at best, failing of the business schools to properly prepare female students for the post-graduation challenges they will face in corporate America as they have children, further studies of instructional units being taught in the actual pre-week to business school or in the first term of business school could prove illuminating.

Finally, further research is possible where this initial study is extended to cover females planning to attain an MBA in America, or even women earning a master's degree in other disciplines (e.g., lawyers, doctors, etc.), where there could be a similar exodus from careers.

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