

August 2015

Combining Work and Family: The Experiences of Gender and Ethnicity of Visible Minority Women in Leadership Positions

Alelie Ocampo

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sociology_masrp



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ocampo, Alelie, "Combining Work and Family: The Experiences of Gender and Ethnicity of Visible Minority Women in Leadership Positions" (2015). *MA Research Paper*. 6.
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sociology_masrp/6

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology Department at Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA Research Paper by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact tadam@uwo.ca, wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

Combining Work and Family:
The Experiences of Gender and Ethnicity of Visible Minority Women in Leadership
Positions

by

Alelie Ocampo

A research paper accepted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

Supervisor: Dr. Tracey L. Adams

2015

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of visible minority women in leadership roles. Gender and ethnicity intersect to shape the experiences of work and family for minority women. Although participants identified several advantages associated with being visible minority women in the labour force, they also identified several challenges; most notably their career pursuits conflicted with ethno-cultural and gender norms surrounding the maternal role. These expectations hindered career development needed to fulfill leadership positions in the workplace. Nevertheless all women in this study held leadership positions, and they discussed the personal strategies and organizational accommodations that contributed to their success. These visible minority women call attention to the significance of organizational policies and programs for opening up opportunities for minority women in leadership positions.

Keywords: visible minority women, gender and ethnicity, work-family conflict, diversity initiatives, organizational policies

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian labour force is changing due to demographic trends. The ethnic diversity of the Canadian population is rapidly growing due to the rise of foreign-born Canadians, Canadian-born visible minorities, and children of recent immigrants. According to a 2011 Statistics Canada study, the Canadian labour force of 2031 is projected to be significantly more diverse ethnically and culturally – where one person out of three will belong to a visible minority group (Martel, Malenfant, Morency, Lebel, Bélanger, and Bastien, 2011).

In light of the growing ethno-cultural diversity of the Canadian population, my research seeks to uncover the underlying experiences of visible minority people in the Canadian labour force. The voices of minority Canadians, especially women, are seldom heard as most research prioritizes the voices and experiences of the mainstream population. Visible minority women in positions of leadership are particularly invisible. For example, within the Canadian working population of 2001, 8.2% of visible minorities held senior manager positions (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi, 2005). In 2014, only 3.4% of top executives in Canada were members of visible minorities (Lamontagne, 2014); only a fraction of them were female. For example, in the highly diverse and metropolitan Canadian city of Montreal, Quebec, visible minority women account for 11.5% of the population, but represent only 1.9% of those in leadership positions (Cukier, Gagnon, Roach, Holmes, Khennache, and Bindhani, 2013). Thus, there is evidence that visible minority women are under-represented in management and leadership positions; however their experiences have been seldom studied by Canadian researchers.

This paper addresses this gap in the literature by exploring qualitatively the experiences of visible minority women in leadership roles. My study is designed to highlight the interplay between gender and ethnicity in the Canadian labour force by considering the organizational support for diversity and work-family balance, in conjunction with the ethno-cultural experiences of visible minority women. More specifically, my research seeks to explore the career development and family experiences of visible minority women in leadership positions, with an emphasis on celebrating ethno-cultural diversity.

The gender and ethnic composition of the Canadian labour force requires specialized attention from organizations, academics, and policymakers. Structural barriers of discrimination and inequality are still embedded in Canadian organizations, hindering the advancement of visible minority women. Canadian society is then denied the benefits of their human capital (Baklid, 2004). Research, programs, and policies to enhance diversity in the workplace are all crucial components to the future success of Canadian organizations, the economy, and the nation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The experiences of visible minority women in the workplace are fundamentally shaped by the structure of modern organizations. The work of Max Weber and Rosabeth Moss Kanter has been particularly influential in explaining this structure, and how it has impacted women. In this section, I first review the work of Weber and Kanter, highlighting the implications of their work for our understanding of the barriers experienced by women in the workplace. Then, I review the literature on the specific challenges experienced by visible minority women that have led to their under-representation in positions of leadership.

Social Organization of Bureaucracies

Bureaucracies are hierarchically structured, and governed by formal rules. Weber (1978) sees them as impersonal structures, in which promotion is based on adherence to rational principles. As Kanter (1977) and others show, this characterization casts bureaucracies as an area for men, since women were historically seen to be in charge of the personal, emotional aspects of social life. Following Weber's model of bureaucracy, Rosabeth Moss Kanter uses a sociological perspective to understand the significance of gender and power within the bureaucratic social organization of the 20th century corporation.

Located at the top of the office hierarchy, decision-making leadership positions were assigned to the managerial elite. Managers were expected to suppress irrationality, personality, and emotionality – characteristics traditionally attributed to men (Kanter, 1977). This segment of the bureaucratic hierarchy was expected to conform to a prescribed pattern of behaviour in order to guard their organizational power, status, and privilege (Kanter, 1977). Their conformity ensured the maintenance of social organization. Kanter (1977) argues that the historical development of management is fundamentally founded upon a “masculine ethic.” This “masculine ethic,” embedded in management ideals, shaped the role and image of the manager as male, systematically excluding women from leadership positions due to their association with irrationality, personality, and emotionality.

In this manner, upper management was maintained as a male preserve through process of exclusion. Kanter (1977) labels this “homosexual reproduction” where men reproduce themselves in their own image, in line with gendered expectations of masculinity and leadership (48). In later analyses the term “homosocial reproduction” has been more commonly used to describe this process through which men in top management share power

with socially homogenous peers who are found in similar social circles. Top managers share not only a gender, but also similar class and ethnic backgrounds, and therefore shared characteristics often as, White and Protestant men from elite schools (Kanter, 1977). Limiting access to men from socially similar groups allows for predictability and thus a shared understanding and mutual trust needed for collaborative decision-making tasks (Kanter, 1977).

As a means to reduce uncertainty within the office hierarchy, social strangers were excluded from management and leadership positions. Social strangers refer to those who challenge the homogenous composition of the managerial elite, “because the difference in appearance might signify a different realm and range of meanings in communication” (Kanter, 1977, 58). Classified as outsiders, women and visible minorities have been systematically denied access to the closed circle of management because they threatened the predictability of the office hierarchy, therefore disrupting the social organization of the bureaucratic structure. Placing emphasis on social conformity, these management strategies represent the foundation of gendered and racial maintenance of managerial and leadership positions.

Instead, women’s labour was concentrated in subordinate clerical and secretarial roles, where they performed the personal and emotional tasks that were deemed inappropriate for managers. Kanter (1977) argues that this sex segregation where men worked as managers and women as secretaries “reinforced limited and stereotypical views of the nature of women at work” (103). Furthermore, the basis of social similarity prevented women from establishing personal networks and mentorship opportunities with those in leadership positions (Kanter, 1977). Central to this gendered social organization is the fact that women

were denied access to decision-making positions, but were given power and control over all personal and emotional elements, dominating the “human side of the office” (Kanter, 1977, 101). Finally, Kanter (1977) demonstrates that the social organization of bureaucracies empowered men, but systematically denied women access to leadership positions. Following the fundamental principle of social similarity, the social position of visible minorities is further excluded from the office hierarchy and missing from this discussion.

Gender, Race and Leadership

Kanter confirmed that workplaces have a gendered and racial bias that inherently limits women and visible minorities. The deeply rooted organizational preference for social similarity is substantially significant in management levels and other leadership positions. This bias has several implications for visible minority women.

In a Canadian study examining the gender and race effects on promotion outcomes, Yap and Konrad (2009) revealed that white and visible minority women experience a promotion disadvantage. This means they are less likely than their male counterparts to gain promotions and advance within the organizational hierarchy. Promotions are important because they reflect an employee’s perceived performance, and have implications for wage outcomes, and job satisfaction; they also act as an indication of authority, and status within the organizational hierarchy (Yap and Konrad, 2009). Promotions are a reward for organizational commitment. Yap and Konrad (2009) find that the promotion disadvantage is the most drastic for visible minority women. Gross promotion rates reveal that 60% of white males receive one or more promotions, compared to 58.1% of white females, 56.7% minority males, and 52.6% minority females (Yap and Konrad, 2009, 600). In another Canadian study, Human Resources Development Canada (2001) revealed the under-representation of visible

minorities in high-income leadership positions. Within the Canadian workforce population in 2001, only 8.2% of visible minority men and women held senior manager positions (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi, 2005).

The national underrepresentation of visible minorities in high-income leadership positions was further studied in Montreal, Quebec. A 2012-2013 collaborative report between McGill and Ryerson University, titled *Women and Visible Minorities in Senior Leadership Positions: A Profile in Greater Montreal*, examined the statistical representation of women and visible minorities in senior leadership positions across six major sectors (elected officials, public sector, corporate sector, voluntary sector, education sector, and agencies, boards, and commissions). According to the report, women represent approximately 52% of the general population (of selected areas in Greater Montreal), but account for only 31.2% of senior leaders across all six sectors (Cukier et al., 2013). This leadership gap is even more apparent for visible minority women, who represent 11.5% of the Montreal general population, but in the study account for only 1.9% of leaders (Cukier et al., 2013). Cukier et al. (2013) reveal visible minority women had the highest leadership representation in government agencies, boards, and commissions (4.8%), and the lowest representation in the public sector (0.6%) and the corporate sector (0.2%). These national and metropolitan statistics demonstrate both a gender and racial disparity in management levels and other leadership positions in the Canadian labour market, as Kanter's theory of social similarity would predict.

Although Yap and Konrad (2009) quantitatively examine the nation-wide representation of racial minority women employed in a large Canadian firm, they are aware that their statistical findings do not fully capture the realities and experiences of racial

minority women. They note that the experiences of minority women are qualitatively distinct from those of white women and minority men, reiterating that the academic literature does not capture the real experiences of visible minority women.

The Business Case for Diversity

Given the demographic changes in the Canadian population, the increasing number of women entering the work force, and the rapidly growing visible minority population, there is a rising need for organizations and management to embrace and incorporate diversity (Kamenou, 2008). In the late twentieth-century, the “business case for diversity” was developed, based on the demographic changes in the American labour force. This initiative urged businesses to incorporate new strategies to recruit, motivate and retain workers from a diverse labour pool (Konrad, 2006). A multicultural organization was the new solution to enhance organizational performance, in which a diverse workforce would bring different perspectives, backgrounds, beliefs, and viewpoints.

The recruitment and retention of visible minorities falls into the realm of diversity and inclusion initiatives, executed through organizational policies and programs. Crucial to diversity initiatives, is the role of management. Cukiet et al. (2013) claim that managers are capable of influencing change across the organization; therefore the success of diversity initiatives relies on the commitment and effectiveness of managers.

If diversity is to be prioritized, then characteristics like ethnicity, culture, and religion must be considered in workplace initiatives. Existing quantitative and qualitative research on visible minority women in leadership positions predominantly focuses on their underrepresentation in high-status and high-income positions. The highly researched

leadership gap has revealed deeply rooted gender barriers for women, but these gender barriers are coupled with an additional racial barrier for visible minority women.

Ethnicity, Work and Family

Research has demonstrated that labour markets and work experiences have the capacity to influence women's marriage and fertility choices (Sheran, 2007). This is especially the case for visible minority women. Fernández and Fogli (2006) argue that a woman's culture and family expectations have an effect on her work and fertility outcomes, and thereby shape experiences of work-family conflict. Importantly, cultural values shape religiosity, and influence attitudes regarding marriage, contraception, and childbearing (Smock & Greenland, 2010). Fertility outcomes are also shaped by a woman's country of ancestry and the number of siblings she has. Fernandez & Fogli (2006) indicate that "women whose parents were born in countries where women had more children, tend to have more children themselves" (557). Thus, work and family outcomes are directly related to cultural upbringing and cultural values.

It is important to consider the significance of ethno-cultural background for visible minority women in leadership positions; their ethnic identity and cultural upbringing may influence their work and family experiences. To explore their experiences, qualitative methodology is needed. Listening to their voices, experiences, stories, and perspectives will help us identify the barriers minority women face, and the skills and attitudes that help them overcome these barriers and enter leadership roles (Cukier et al., 2013).

The Present Study

This study explores the depth and complexity of work and family experiences of visible minority women in leadership positions through the use of qualitative research methods. This research project was guided by the following questions:

- 1) How do cultural expectations concerning the appropriate roles for men and women shape the family decision-making of visible minority women in management or leadership?
- 2) To what extent are minority women's choices about child-bearing and child-rearing shaped by organizational norms, commitment to diversity, and the availability of family-friendly policies?

Previous research on Canadian visible minority women in leadership has been predominantly quantitative. Missing from these statistical reports are the lived stories and multidimensional experiences of those visible minority women who have attained leadership positions amidst the existing structural barriers (Cukier et al., 2013; Yap and Konrad, 2009). Exploring the interplay between gender and ethnicity within work and the family contributes to a much-needed understanding of the experiences of a rapidly growing proportion of the Canadian labour force and overall population. This research project aims to produce exploratory and descriptive results that are valuable to diversity literature directed towards academics, policymakers, management, and organizations.

METHODOLOGY

Recruitment

This study recruited participants living in a large city in Quebec, who were members of visible minorities and female, and who held leadership positions in their respective career

fields. This city has been an attractive destination for many immigrants, and is home to a diverse range of visible minorities.

The research was approved by a university ethics board. To attract participants, recruitment was pursued through the social networking website LinkedIn, specifically for its professional and business purposes. Due to the public nature of LinkedIn, posted photos and personal biographies stating job titles and work experience allowed for the identification of visible minority women in leadership positions. Company or personal email addresses are also provided on LinkedIn profiles. With this, potential candidates were contacted directly, informed of the study, invited to participate and provided with contact information and an official letter of information. Passive snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants, as women who agreed to participate in the study were invited to recommend eligible individuals and circulate the official letter of information over email or in person. For those women who showed interest in recommending other participants, a business card was exchanged containing contact information and participant criteria. Finally, interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions reviewed for themes to address the research questions.

Participants

Five female participants were recruited following specific criteria. Interviewed participants needed to: self-identify as members of a visible minority group and currently hold, or have recently (within 5 years) held a position in management or leadership within their workplace. In the following discussion, pseudonyms are used.

The term “visible minority” follows the definition in the Canadian Employment Equity Act, meaning persons “other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada, 2015). Participants included in the study were

asked to define their ethnicity in the interview. These women held a variety of leadership positions in a variety of industries; examples include president, founder, manager, executive, and owner. A summary of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Participant	Ethnicity	Marital Status & Children	Position & Title
<u>Amelia</u>	<u>Algerian</u>	<u>Single; No children</u>	<u>Owner of accounting firm</u>
<u>Judy</u>	<u>Pakistani-Indian</u>	<u>Married; 2 children</u>	<u>President of own consulting company</u>
<u>Nicole</u>	<u>Vietnamese</u>	<u>Married; 2 children</u>	<u>Organizational diversity advisor</u>
<u>Claire</u>	<u>Filipino</u>	<u>Married; 2 children</u>	<u>Owner of home staging company</u>
<u>Patricia</u>	<u>Filipino</u>	<u>Divorced; No children</u>	<u>Nursing leader</u>

Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted one-on-one at a location of the participants' choosing. Following a semi-structured questionnaire, interviews were in-depth and lasted 30-60 minutes total. Interviews were conducted in English, with some Francophone participants occasionally using French terms to express themselves. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to complete the consent form and formally agree to be audiotaped for the full duration of the interview.

The semi-structured interview questionnaire was intended to explore the participants' work and family experiences, with consideration of their ethno-cultural background and perspectives. The questionnaire was composed of three major sections.

- o The first section focused on the participant's career, her role and responsibilities, along with the challenges encountered leading up to her leadership position. In this section, participants were also asked about their workplace support

for diversity and organizational implementation of family-friendly policies and programs.

- The second section was centered upon family decision-making, taking into account the various strategies that allow these women to pursue their leadership positions with their family life. Questions in this section were intended to examine how visible minority women in leadership positions combine career and family, considering child-care, organizational support for work-family balance, and workplace flexibility.

- The final section contained more personal and complex questions, combining both career and family experiences with the participants' ethno-cultural background. Participants were asked to define their ethnicity and describe their cultural upbringing, in order to assess the influence of ethno-cultural background on career and family decisions.

This all-encompassing interview strategy allowed an in-depth exploration of the work and family experiences of visible minority women in leadership positions. More importantly, these interviews assessed the role of ethno-cultural background, and upbringing, values and traditions on interview participants' efforts to attain their leadership positions and enjoy family life.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. As a qualitative study, the content was primarily analyzed to determine the real-life experiences, perspectives, personal stories, and narratives of visible minority women in leadership positions. Following the initial analysis, recurring narratives and experiences common across all five interviews are

extracted. Interviews revealed the various strategies used by research participants to balance their work and family lives, keeping in mind their individual experiences of career development and approaches to family life (in terms of family values, childrearing, and spousal support according to their specific work circumstances). Particular attention was paid to the impact of ethno-cultural background on participants' experiences. In the following section, I present the major themes revealed by the data analysis. The theoretical and empirical implications of these results are explored in the Discussion section of this paper. In the following analysis of research participant interviews, selected interview quotes have been edited slightly to make them reader-friendly.

RESULTS

In interviews, visible minority women in leadership positions revealed the ways in which gender and ethnicity intersect to shape their career and family decisions. Reflected in the participants' interviews is the long-lasting significance of gender and ethno-cultural expectations that impact career development and work experiences, child-care, and women's roles as working mothers in leadership positions. In this section, I will discuss the positive and negative aspects of the intersection of gender and ethnicity identified by the respondents. Subsequently, I will explore the importance of organizational factors and personal strategies that enable visible minority women in leadership positions to cope with work-family challenges.

The Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity

Advantages

When discussing employment and promotion opportunities, most participants claimed that their status as members of a visible minority played a role in their careers. For instance,

Judy (Pakistani-Indian) and Claire (Filipino) identified advantages to being members of a visible minority group, as their ethnic backgrounds strengthened their leadership positions in their respective industries. With a previous career in accounting, Judy now identifies herself as a Human Resources Consultant with her own consulting company. Her roles include: teaching recruitment at a post-secondary institution, career coaching to MBA students, and working with corporations to provide diversity and cross-cultural management strategies. Specializing in organizational diversity, Judy strongly believed that her position was shaped by her status as a member of a visible minority:

I think definitely because I work in the area of diversity and being a visible minority is seen as an advantage. Training in the area of diversity gives me a sense of credibility.

Claire also referred to this sense of credibility derived from her ethnic background. As an owner of a home staging company, Claire was responsible for preparing homes to increase their selling value. This role required constant consultations with wealthy clients, in which her ethnicity was beneficial:

When clients first meet me, they feel very comfortable only because I am Filipino, and the reason for that is most clients come from wealthy families. Not everyone can afford this type of service, so with that in mind, these people typically have Filipino nannies or workers. So when they meet me, they are instantly comfortable. It is actually advantageous for me because I already have their trust in me.

Apart from advantages as a member of a visible minority group, Claire identified the importance of being a woman in an industry requiring interpersonal skills:

My field involves mostly women who are interested in designing and working with people, because you really need good social skills. This type of service is very personal and if you do not have that kind of personality, then it is hard for you to be in this kind of business – because you are in their homes, in their space, and you have to be very trustworthy.

Likewise, Amelia (Algerian) emphasized social skills and the significance of gender to her work in the personal finance industry. As a Certified General Accountant auditor and Chartered Professional Accountant, recently opening her own accounting firm, her core responsibilities involved one-on-one meetings with clients. She saw her gender as an advantage:

Today, women are more educated, more experienced, and have a different approach to things as opposed to men. Also, higher management positions require social skills and this is good for women, since we are good at dealing with people.

As visible minority women, Amelia, Judy and Claire felt they were advantaged in their respective industries. In the predominantly female industry of home staging, Claire was able to stand out professionally due to her ethnicity. Judy's status as a visible minority woman provided her with additional credibility in the field of diversity consulting, as her distinct experiences of gender and ethnicity enhanced her perspective. All three women felt their inter-personal skills, which they linked with their gender, were an advantage, allowing them to establish connections and foster working relationships with clients.

Challenges

Women also revealed experiencing many challenges that could be linked with their gender and ethnicity. For instance, Amelia recalled being promised a higher leadership position in a previous job once the company expanded. When the company grew and higher leadership positions opened, she was not considered as a top candidate and was denied the promotion. Amelia believes that:

It was strictly a visible minority issue. For example, top management was completely Quebecois and Caucasian people only, while visible minorities always occupied lower positions.

This experience illustrates the existing barriers for visible minority women attempting to achieve leadership positions. Although she was qualified and experienced, Amelia's professional credentials were insufficient, as her status as a visible minority was considered incompatible with the socially homogenous composition of higher management.

Several women also identified language as being a challenge in their careers. For instance, Anglophone participants described the difficulties of fitting into French-speaking and predominantly Caucasian-Quebecois work environments:

I asked myself if I could see myself integrating with upper management here knowing it is filled with French-Canadians? I think it was more of a language barrier, even though I could speak French, just not Québécoise that would always come up. So it could be because I was an Anglophone or a mixture of also being a visible minority. With Francophone companies here, being bilingual means a Francophone speaking English, but an Anglophone speaking French is simply an Anglophone. (Judy)

However, if I went to a French hospital, then I think I would not fit in. I have friends that work in French hospitals and say they do not feel accepted there. In French hospitals, nurses are treated differently. I hear that they do not work as well as a team, as opposed to English nurses. (Patricia)

These issues of visible minorities in Quebec-based companies will be further explored in the Discussion section.

Another challenge that women identified was work-family conflict. Many of these women grew up in cultures in which childbearing and child rearing were emphasized. Amelia explains that:

Algerian culture implies women take care of the family and the home, but they must be very educated. My mother was the type of person that knew everything and if you had a problem, she would know how to solve it. That maybe pushed me to become someone that is able to help others.

Amelia explained that her career decisions were shaped by her upbringing. Nicole also stressed the importance of her upbringing:

I grew up understanding that for my parents, I had to go to school, graduate from university, have a career, get married and have kids. Unconsciously, this is what I always wanted and this path is what my dad really wanted for his kids.

Embedded in the Algerian and Vietnamese upbringings defined by Amelia and Nicole, are ethno-cultural expectations of appropriate gender roles of women for family and work. Influenced by these expectations many participants valued both work and family, and reported experiencing work-family conflict. Amelia's response was to focus on career instead of child-rearing:

I consider my job to be my child because I dedicate so much of my time towards it, so adding another child would be overwhelming.

Other participants struggled to balance work and family. Of the five participants in this study, three were married with children. These participants emphasized their challenges as women who had to balance their family lives with rigorous work demands accompanying their leadership position. As they individually discussed their current responsibilities and previous career experiences, it was evident that these visible minority women in leadership positions dedicated many years to simultaneously building their careers and raising families. For example, when Nicole discussed her family decision-making, she stressed the importance of career stability for both partners and organizational support:

Job stability was not that important, since at that point we were stable enough within our jobs. Maybe it was more difficult when my husband worked at an accounting firm, but when he left to work at a larger organization it was much better because he had more flexibility and more family-friendly initiatives.

When both of us left accounting firms, I think that made it easier for us to decide to start a family.

To balance work and family, minority women in leadership positions relied on organizational supports and personal strategies. These will be described in the next section.

Overcoming Work and Family Challenges

Organizational Support

Participants highlighted the importance of diversity and inclusion policies and family-friendly programs in the workplace, especially those with previous work experience in large organizations. Diversity and inclusion policies traditionally prevent gender or racial discrimination within organizational operations. In contrast, while family-friendly programs (such as flexible work hours or on-site daycare) are intended to enable employees with children to balance their work commitments with family obligations. Together, these initiatives enable visible minority women in the labour force to balance their career objectives and family expectations.

Participants with children acknowledged how family-friendly programs at work facilitated their ability to balance work and family, by allowing them flexibility. Nicole explained:

My husband is also a senior at the same bank and the organization's policy makes it easy for employees. There is a daycare too and we can also work from home.

Judy echoed this opinion, similarly discussing workplace flexibility shared by herself and her husband:

It is always a juggling act. It is never easy, although there are certain conditions that if you have them, it makes it a lot easier. One of those things is

flexibility within the workplace...my husband and I have pretty flexible jobs. I can say that ever since I had kids, I never stayed on a nine-to-five schedule.

Although workplace flexibility was considered very important to both participants, they stated that the managerial implementation of family-friendly programs was crucial. Judy explained that her workplace had formal policies and managers who were understanding of employees with children:

You either have the manager that cares about employees with children and understands, or a manager that abides by the policies, but is not very empathetic.

Both Judy and Nicole acknowledged their progressive workplaces and expressed appreciation for the collaboration between organizational policies and managerial implementation. In contrast to Judy and Nicole's experiences, Amelia recalled an encounter that illustrates an unsupportive workplace and uncooperative management:

With another company, someone in upper management actually told me that we need to hire more single people, because it is such a hassle to figure out timetables for those with children...the issue is really about deadlines and clients. High season is when you need more staff and after that people get cut. So firms tend to hire less people who work long hours to avoid a lot of firings.

Thus, women reported that organizational practices and policies strongly shaped their ability to balance family and work responsibilities. Achieving this balance was especially important to the visible minority women interviewed.

Entrepreneurial Alternative

The interviews also revealed an alternative solution to the traditional structure of work that allowed respondents to balance their work and family lives. A common thread throughout the interviews was entrepreneurship. It is important to note that of the five

participants, three ran their own companies, while one participant developed a non-profit organization alongside her full-time leadership position. When asked about their decision to become an entrepreneur, most participants gave credit to career timing, explaining that it was “the right time” in their career to leave large bureaucratic firms and fully pursue their career objectives. As visible minority women with internalized gender roles and expectations, their conceptualization of “the right time” was associated with their potential family plans. Earlier, I mentioned Amelia’s decision to focus on her entrepreneurial career; she saw work and family as irreconcilable. In contrast, Judy believed that her position as a self-employed consultant provided her with more time to devote to her family:

With my previous experience at a Quebec-based bank, I worked four days a week, which was fine. Now, with my own company, it’s great because I have total flexibility with my schedule.

For some women, then, entrepreneurial enterprises help them to balance work and family. Although most entrepreneurial respondents emphasized career timing, it is clear that both career and family considerations shaped their decision-making.

Childcare and Childrearing

Apart from organizational support and entrepreneurship as an alternative to the traditional nine-to-five structure of work, research participants identified family-oriented strategies to overcome work-family challenges. Regardless of their industry or respective leadership position, participants with children discussed similar child-care arrangements. In addition to job flexibility, participants also stressed the importance of spousal support in child-care, and relying on family members for last minute emergencies. Interestingly, when discussing child-care arrangements with their spouses, both Nicole and Judy emphasized the equal sharing of caregiving between parents. Due to Nicole and her husband’s higher

positions at work, as well as their organizational and managerial support for work-family balance, they were able to take full advantage of their job flexibility:

Child-care arrangements are strictly between my husband and I. If my children are sick, both of us take care of them equally.

For last minute emergency situations, participants explained their reliance on family members as an alternative child-care strategy around work commitments:

My parents do not live very far from us, so sometimes they pick up my children from school if they are not feeling well, but if not, either me or my husband will leave work, so it is pretty much equal. We are pretty flexible if one of us has to stay home the next day. (Judy)

When they were younger, and neither my husband or I were available to take care of the kids, I would call family members and only family members. I was very lucky to have family members available and not have to hire a babysitter or have a stranger take care of my kids. (Claire)

Women seek to balance work and family, but they do so in a way that is shaped by their ethno-cultural upbringing. For example, Judy was the only participant who hired help for childcare. She explained that this childcare decision was shaped by her ethno-cultural upbringing:

Shortly after having kids, within Pakistani and Indian cultures, young children do not go to daycare. This is more North American culture, so I was very hesitant to put my kids in daycare. Eventually, I ended up investing in a nanny to take care of my first kid for around four years. It was just so unfamiliar in my culture to put young children in a daycare that I could not go through doing that.

As Nicole and Judy explain, though, it is not only their upbringing that is relevant, but that of their partners as well.

The fact that I am with a Swiss-Canadian, who shares the same values as me, makes it easier. But in a Vietnamese couple, I would think the woman would take care of the kids. It depends on the culture. (Nicole)

...I think there are many cultural influences from our parents for us women (visible minority women), like the child bearing feeling of guilt. Also, with my husband who is Quebecois, he is very liberal and fair with dividing tasks with me, but if I married an Indian person that had very strong cultural values, maybe that would be different as in what would be expected for me as a woman and wife. (Judy)

It is notable that these two women in this study married outside their ethno-cultural background. For Nicole and Judy, having partners from different backgrounds made it easier for them to separate themselves from their expected maternal role, and pursue their careers. Of course, ethno-cultural values shape not only decisions around who does what in the home, but also shapes decisions about child bearing and child rearing. Claire described the prominence of family in the traditional Filipino culture:

Being Filipino, all I know is to have a big family, get married, and have kids.

This gendered pressure to solely fulfill a maternal role was mentioned by all participants with children. As women in leadership positions, they have chosen not to devote themselves completely to child rearing, but these cultural expectations do shape their strategies for achieving work-family balance, as we have seen.

Interviews with visible minority women in leadership positions, revealed a common discourse of career pursuits conflicting with their expectations to fulfill an ethno-culturally determined maternal role. For visible minority women, the intersection of gender and ethnicity is accompanied by expected traditional roles that hinder career development needed to fulfill leadership positions in the workplace. These respondents demonstrated complete devotion to their work positions and career progression, but also prioritized their maternal

role. Those who married partners outside their ethno-cultural background shared progressive values of equality with their spouses, which extended to child-care and work. Participants sought work-family balance in the pursuit of their leadership careers.

DISCUSSION

Visible minority women in leadership positions revealed both advantages and disadvantages associated with being minority women in the workplace. Several respondents had careers in which their gender and ethnicity was an advantage in interacting with clients. At the same time, some respondents had experienced discrimination, and all voiced concern about work-family conflict. Further, several identified language barriers, and challenges with being an Anglophone in a Francophone working environment. In response to many of these challenges, the women valued flexible work environments, and some pursued entrepreneurial opportunities. They identified having a supportive spouse as being important as well. These findings both provide some support for previous research and provide suggestions for future research.

These personal strategies used to overcome work-family challenges reveal the complexity of the intersection of gender and ethnicity. Additionally, this intersection of gender and ethnicity shaped the intertwining of career and family objectives: having internalized ethno-cultural expectations and traditional gender roles, but wanting to pursue careers, these women faced work-family conflict. As leaders in their respective fields and fully devoted to their families, they were determined to seek out strategies or create situations that allow them to fully pursue their career objectives, without removing themselves from their role as mothers.

One strategy pursued by several visible minority participants was to leave large bureaucratic firms to pursue entrepreneurship; this strategy calls attention to the existing structural barriers in the workplace that hinder career advancement for working mothers and visible minorities. This finding is deserving of future research.

Another important finding in this study concerned the barriers faced by visible minority women trying to break into leadership positions in socially homogenous, Quebec-based companies. Firstly, management and top executives were characterized as predominantly male and Caucasian-Quebécois. Secondly, Anglophone participants emphasized the difficulties of fitting into French-speaking and primarily Caucasian-Quebécois workplaces. These major workplace barriers of gender, ethnicity, and language highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion initiatives in organizations.

This study of 5 visible minority women in leadership positions in a Quebec city is simply exploratory, and not generalizable. Nonetheless, these women's experiences both provide support for previous research on women in leadership positions (Cukier et al., 2013; Yap and Konrad, 2009) and point to important future research directions. As the Canadian labour force is projected to grow more ethnically and culturally diverse, these challenges faced by visible minority women call attention to the significance of organizational policies adapting to demographic trends. Organizational change is necessary to open up opportunities for minority women in management and leadership positions.

REFERENCES

- Baklid, B. (2004). The voices of visible minorities: Speaking out on breaking down barriers. Conference Board of Canada.
- Cukier, W., Gagnon, S., Roach, E., Holmes, M., Khennache, L., & Bindhani, P. DiversityLeads.(2013). *Women and visible minorities in senior leadership positions: A profile of Greater Montreal 2012–2013*.
- Fernández, R., & Fogli, A. (2006). Fertility: The role of culture and family experience. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 4(2-3), 552-561.
- Human Resources Development Canada. (2001). Recent immigrants have experienced unusual economic difficulties. *Applied Research Bulletin, Winter/Spring, Vol 7. I*.
- Kamenou, N. (2008). Reconsidering work–life balance debates: challenging limited understandings of the ‘life’ component in the context of ethnic minority women's experiences. *British Journal of Management*, 19(s1), S99-S109.
- Kanter Moss, R. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. *New York*.
- Konrad, A. M. (2006). Leveraging workplace diversity in organizations. *Organization Management Journal*, 3(3), 164-189.
- Lamontagne, Elyse. *Canadian Directors’ Compensation Practices, 20th edition*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2014.
- Martel, L., Malenfant, E. C., Morency, J. D., Lebel, A., Bélanger, A., & Bastien, N. (2011). Projected trends to 2031 for the Canadian labour force. *Canadian Economic Observer*, 24(8).
- Sheran, M. (2007). The career and family choices of women: A dynamic analysis of labor force participation, schooling, marriage, and fertility decisions. *Review of Economic Dynamics*, 10(3), 367-399.
- Smock, P. J., & Greenland, F. R. (2010). Diversity in pathways to parenthood: Patterns, implications, and emerging research directions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 576-593.
- Statistics Canada. (2015) *Classification of visible minority*. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/concepts/definitions/minority01a>
- Teelucksingh, C., & Galabuzi, G. E. (2005). *Working Precariously: The impact of race and immigrants status on employment opportunities and outcomes in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

- Weber, M., Roth, G., & Wittich, C. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* [Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. English]. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yap, M., & Konrad, A. M. (2009). Gender and Racial Differentials in Promotions: Is There a Sticky Floor, a Mid-Level Bottleneck, or a Glass Ceiling? *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 593-619.