

# **Chapter 7**

## **Summary, Conclusions and Suggestions**

*(In this chapter the summary, conclusions and suggestions are presented.)*

This diagnostic and descriptive study of women executives in India, with specific reference to gender bias and work life balance examines the structure and agency of women executives in India. The findings are based on the data collected through one on one interviews of 105 women executives working in various organizations located at Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Gurugao and Delhi and a survey of 90 women executives from different geographical areas of India. A model based on Layder's Adaptive theory is used to classify data and Bourdieu's social theory and McNay's performative agency are used to understand the dynamic relation between structure and agency of women executives in India. I will be presenting the summary of findings and the discussion under each research question raised at the beginning of this study under the two focal areas, i.e..Gender Bias and Work Life Balance.

## 7.1 Summary

### 7.1.1 Work Life Balance

Work life balance is one of the main challenges that working women face. Increase in the number of working women has not reduced their work at home. It has added to their responsibilities (McNay, 2000). Work and life issue has been explored in many perspectives. The impact of work life conflicts on career; the impact of work on life vis-a-vis life on work; the types of opting out decisions taken by women, and the solutions to work life conflicts are some of the areas which are heavily researched by many researchers (Buddhapriya, 2009; Sundari & Sathyaranayana, 2012; Parikh & Shah, 1994; Burchielli et al., 2008; Chandra, 2012; Baldridge et al., 2006). In this study, work life balance is explored in terms of structure and agency.

### What economic, cultural and social factors, define the context of women executives in India?

The broad factors which constitute the context (field) of women executives include globalization, increased employment opportunities, emphasis on educational attainment, and changes in socio cultural attitudes. In Layder's model, this refers to the context. Bourdieu calls it the field. The broad trends in the social, economic, political and cultural society form the ground in which the structure-agency dyad are explored. These macro forces form the structure which influences the world view and the perceptions of women executives. It also forms the objective reality in which they express their agency, because these trends also act as enablers and open new opportunities for women.

#### Globalization and Employment Opportunities

The context of Indian women is affected by globalization, which has thrown up many employment opportunities. This coupled with the fact that education is an obsession in Indian middle class families has created a pool of talent, which includes women. Availability of jobs and the need for upward mobility increases

the chance of women seeking jobs. At present India is in a state of metamorphosis as the waves of liberalization and sustained economic growth have created many opportunities. However traditional values and gender stereotyping prevail. This mix of realities creates constraints and enablements for women (Malhotra, 2001; Jain, 2010; Budhwar et al., 2005). And their way of negotiating these forms their agency.

### **Education**

The demographic profile of the interview and survey sample show that 78% of 105 interviewed women executives and 70% of 90 respondents of the survey, hold postgraduate or professional degrees. Tertiary education is important in upwardly mobile Indian middle class. In a study testing impact of education on the socio economic status of women, it was found that education changes attitudes of women. It creates a favourable attitude towards women's equality. Women begin to question social norms and patriarchal attitudes and seek liberation. As they become conscious of their power, they begin to enter into different fields of public activity (M. B. M. Gupta Sarita; Shah, 1982). The emphasis on tertiary education and the increase in employment of women after the structural changes in the economy have created opportunities of equal access in the formal sector (Bhaumik, 2008). However, this is a reality for only a small pocket of women in India, while majority of them continue to live in totally different socio economic situations and are deprived of access to basic resources and amenities of life.

### **Socio-Cultural Values**

Education and westernization are also changing the mindset of women. The conflict between cultural beliefs and changing identities of working women (in these case, executives) presents an interesting field to study their actions and reactions. Rama Bijapurkar, a well known market consultant and director of many companies, in her book 'We Are Like That Only' speaks of the Indian way of adaptation, which integrates tradition and modernism in interesting ways. She believes that Indians have high cultural tenacity and are averse to completely discarding the old ways (Bijapurkar, 2009). This is also evidenced

in the narrative of women executives when they speak about marriage, family and motherhood.

### **Doxa – Marriage and Motherhood**

The importance to ‘marriage’ and ‘motherhood’, which is also a traditional value, is evidenced in the demographic profile wherein, 75.56% of 90 women executive respondents of the survey and 82.86% of the interviewed women happen to be married people. Only 16% of the survey sample and 14% of the interview sample were single and this number included those women who were young and had intentions of marrying. Majority of women executives in the survey sample have children (66.67%) and (33.33%) have no children. This includes women who are single too. Among the executive women in the interview sample, (80.95%) have children and only 14.29% do not have children. The sample without children comprises younger executives [below the age of ]who may eventually go in for marriage and have children.

The predominance of the gendered habitus is also evidenced in the narrative of women executives.

- Essentially women executives define themselves in terms of their family. Role identity as a mother is more predominant than that of an executive.
- They also logically reflect on the pros and cons of the traditional values and way of life. For example, as regards joint-family set up, they speak of arrangements wherein the extended family of in-laws or parents can be located in the same place but not in the same house. This takes care of the need for privacy while facilitating the need for support for both families.
- They also emphasize on the importance of passing on the ‘family values’ to the next generation. They believe this is done better when they live with grandparents. Women executives also express that they too will need to support their own children’s careers as their parents did for them.
- Family is perceived as an important learning ground, and skills such as time management, people management, collaboration, teamwork, stakeholder management, etc., (which are of significance at work place) are internalized at home.

- Conflict is perceived more on the home front, in terms of being a ‘good mother’.
- Career is seen as a means of seeking ‘personal worth’, while motherhood is seen as a definition of ‘self’.
- Sensitivity to social sanction and approval for various women issues (as expected in relationship oriented and collectivist cultures) is admitted.

### **Agency in Terms of Career**

However, the rising need to individuate and the available career opportunities coalesce with the need to uphold traditional social values. So women executives are faced with a need to blend the two. In this process they internalize some socio-cultural beliefs, challenge some, and reject some beliefs. The analysis of the data from interview and survey reveals the following: Cultural Arbitrary (internalized socio cultural beliefs)

- Socio cultural beliefs regarding marriage and motherhood are internalized. They speak of the larger role of women. They believe that ‘marriage’ and ‘motherhood’ are a conscious choice and also provide emotional fulfillment.
- Loss of promotions and coveted positions due to extended leaves for maternity, or child care is not perceived as unfair. They in fact feel that in the long run they stand to gain, as motherhood enriches their life.
- The need for self-fulfillment and individuation appears in their narrative but they also speak with clarity about their dharma and the priorities that their dharmic roles create.
- They believe that personal appearance and behavior play more important role for a woman as compared to a man. (A traditional belief that women are more accountable for their own appearance or conduct in society).
- The role of an Indian woman as defined by epics covertly influences their sense of self-worth. Consequently, the apprehension that following a career would make them appear ‘selfish’ in social opinion drives their perception of bias and makes them sense a general lack of respect. (Based on findings of the Kano model on social perceptions of women executives) Reflexivity (lucidity of the subjugated)

- They acknowledge the conflict created due to multiple roles of ‘executive’, ‘wife’, ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’. They speak of guilt and admit that it is difficult to blend the roles. But they also reiterate that it is a personal choice to choose to be either an executive and a mother or executive or mother.
- They admit that being career women entail certain social costs. There is a popular notion that career women are belligerent and pushy and therefore not fit for family life.
- They contest traditional notions by questioning the role to be taken by men in child rearing.

They are also conscious of the degree of internalization of the social role definitions and the impact of social conditioning. They appreciate the subtle role diffusion taking place in society as men are increasingly sharing the household chores and supporting their wives in their careers.

1. The survey regarding the socio cultural perceptions of women executives reveals that they are cognizant of inequities in social roles relating to shouldering of responsibilities at home, the devaluation of their contribution to society and the general lack of respect.
2. The fact that their conduct, appearance and behavior come under scanner more as compared to men is reported emphatically by women executives. They also recognize that they have to play conflicting roles and the priority accorded to family is not acknowledged by society. This conscious acceptance indicates that women executives feel that respect to them in terms of their role is a critical issue to be taken seriously by all stakeholders in society.
3. Some traditional beliefs are totally dismissed by women executives and this shows that there is a definite change in the perception of social beliefs. The traditional beliefs, which are rejected, include the belief that a woman’s role is predominantly in kitchen at home while it is the duty of man to earn. Wife has a lower status than that of her husband. A wife ought to earn lesser than the husband.
4. They also say that the increase in the number of women at the work place will not have any deleterious effect on families.

**What is the nature of influence that familial, social, professional factors have on women executive's career and personal life?**

The more immediate factors that affect women executives are home and work place. In Layder's model they are called setting. The actual work life conflicts are faced in this setting. Women executives speak in detail about the supporting and influencing factors at home and at workplace.

**Home**

- Family is seen as an important support by women executives. The support by family takes the form of reducing the degree of emotional strain and guilt experienced by women executives who have children to be cared for. It helps to handle physical work, and ensures supervision of maids. The family values are also given by grand parents to grand children. However women executives also reiterate that to maintain family connections, there is a need to nurture relationships through proper communication and a spirit of give and take.

- In the survey, help from family was rated as the second highest source of support. On an average, women executives rate support from 'hired help' and 'family' as the highest. Support from 'bosses' and 'management' is perceived lower than other supports, while support from 'co workers' is rated higher.

- Questions on how women executives perceived spousal support drew mixed opinions. While some women said that support from their husbands in the form physical help in parental and household duties, career related advice and emotional support helped them to pursue careers, some spoke of their husband's attitude as a deterrent to their pursuing careers. The women who perceived their husbands to be nonsupportive trace it to patriarchal attitudes. They say that their spouses believe that parental duties and household management are a woman's job and consequently do not help their wives. Besides they expect their wives to sacrifice their careers if needed. Women executives also admit that this social role conditioning among men is dependent on family upbringing.

- Even women factor in the role of mother as part of their self-definition. They also acknowledge that the attitudes of men are changing over a period of

time and men are progressively sharing household duties.

- Hired help or external social support systems were also given a prominent position by women executives in work life balance. Hired help in terms of cooks, baby sitters, maids were rated as highest contributors to effective work life balance in the survey, with an average score of (6.02). Family came second in this list.

- Women executives said that the maids sometimes were a part of the family and were indispensable. Some say that there are inherent problems associated with maids in terms of undesirable/unclean habits, and actions of maids which affect the children left under their care. Globalization has increased opportunities and desire for upward mobility among maids is depleting their availability. The need to maintain and value maids is emphasized by women executives for maintaining work life balance.

### **Work Place**

- Organizations are seen as supportive of work life balance by women executives. Support is perceived in terms of tangible facilities offered by the organizations, while boss's attitudes and work culture are seen as intangible factors that affect work life balance.

- The organizational facilities offered include creches, flexitime, work from home options, off site and on-site child care, reentry after a break, Sabbaticals, part time jobs, alternate roles and training. Of the various facilities offered to women executives to facilitate work life balance, a few are used by them extensively.

- Survey reveals that the most popularly used facility is the flexible schedule, especially in the IT industry and services industry. Manufacturing and Automobile Industry use maternity and paternity benefit more. On-site child care is not preferred in all the industries except automobile where a mild preference is shown. Offsite playschool and child care too are not considered useful by women executives. Women executives explain the reasons behind their preferences. They cite distance of work place (in terms of commuting) and quality of daycare, as reasons which affect usage of these facilities.

- As executives they are also aware of the costs involved in offering these facilities and so they refer to the cost benefit analysis of facilities offered by the organization in their narratives.
- Majority of women executives agree in varying degrees about effectiveness of flexi time facilities. They rate consulting positions second but the lowest score is given to shared positions as a way to reduce work life pressures. Compressed work times and split location were given a modest score by women in IT industry, where these facilities are offered.
- Family get-togethers and vacations are the most preferred ways of taking a break from work. Fitness schedules and hobbies received lesser scores.
- Majority spend 8-10 hours, some about 10-12 hours while a few spend more than 12 hours at work.
- Willingness to relocate is high among majority of them, while some said a categorical no to relocation.
- Women executives say that work culture and attitudes affect work life balance. When organizations view employees as investment, the loyalty of employees and their eventual reentry into work is possible.
- Majority of Women executives feel that it is preferable to have female bosses while some prefer male bosses. Having a role model helps in handling stress of work life balance according to the respondents.
- Women feel they have greater control on their work environment as they are in higher positions and feel they can make a difference to those in lower levels by offering them the needed support.

### **What are the conflicts that work and home create for women executives?**

The family centric habitus makes women executives perceive the conflict more at home than at work place. Their perception of work as an avenue for realizing their self-worth makes it seem more like a personal desire as compared to home, which is seen as a duty. The analysis of the responses of the women executives

to the interview and the survey reveal-

- Women executives speak of the reaction of their children and the impact of a career on them. The reaction of parents, spouse or in-laws is less mentioned.
- Women executives feel that children need the mother in the formative years and reiterate that family is their first priority. They feel that helping the child through school academics is an important task.
- They speak of guilt, when they cannot be there for their children in the early childhood period.
- However, they also acknowledge that children learn to be independent and self-reliant, when their mother is not always available. Children usually pick up what they are exposed or habituated to.
- Speaking of psychological insecurity, women executives say the child must have a mental picture about where their mother works and how the office looks like. They are sensitive to the mother's interest in them and can easily make it out when there is mere lip service. It is in this sense that they say quality time is more important in the quantitative time.
- Women executives report that the needs of the child vary with age and as such sensitivity is needed to handle them in an appropriate manner. The mothers must adapt and be open in communication.
- They also say that while the child needs attention during the formative years, they need space to grow as they grow older and so by loosening the apron strings without too much of interference, they are able to ensure that space.
- They opine that working provides their children with a better quality of life and makes them achievement oriented.
- Depending on the degree of importance given to motherhood and career, working women make different trade-offs. The career decisions of women executives reveal four types tradeoff between career and home.
  - Those that give family priority, completely drop out of a career to be with their children. Women executives say that work life issues are difficult to balance and certain situations on the home front can preempt this decision.
  - Down trading a higher position is another trade off that woman executives

use to handle work life pressure. New and higher positions are accompanied by the necessity to spend time and energy to learn the ropes, and this time and energy is not easily afforded.

- Some women change the very line of their business. This is done when they inadvertently discover their passion for another job which fits their schedule and does not affect their duties at home.
- Some women consciously opt out to join careers in which better work life adjustment is possible. Another tradeoff used by women executives is a temporary layoff from work, till their home front can be managed.
- There are definite costs for such decisions in terms of promotions. Women executives are agreeable to these costs. Reentry can be stressful because, new skills have to be learnt, colleagues may move much higher in the organization and there may be some reactions from others because of the decision to take a break and reenter.
- The factor analysis of the survey responses confirms (what is said in the interview) that there is a variation in the way women executives approach the issue of work life balance. The seven beliefs distilled are ‘Pro Family belief’, ‘Optimizing belief’, ‘Quality time belief’, ‘Pro Career belief’ , ‘Hired help dependency’, ‘Egalitarian belief’ and ‘Balancing belief’.
- This variety in responses is in consonance with the belief of Lois McNay, when she says that agency among women is uneven and asynchronous because of the variance in the embeddedness of the gendered habitus (McNay, 2000).

### **How do they cope with these conflicts?**

Women executives spoke a length about the coping strategies they consciously use to handle work life conflicts. They discussed the emotional and physical costs of balancing both home and career.

- Women executives say that guilt about not being able to give enough time for children is the biggest outcome of work life conflict. This is further accentuated when a support system is not adequate or when family members

criticize or disapprove them. Respondents feel there is a need to acknowledge and address guilt by seeing the positive outcomes of being a working mother and being realistic about what one can handle.

- Physical and emotional stress is another factor, which appears in the narrative of women executives. Personal time is the first casualty of stress. It includes compromising on sleep, personal hobbies and consequently, their health. They speak of ‘existential angst’, which is experienced when one is overworked or stressed. There seems to be a high degree of awareness concerning health and mental relaxations. Respondents feel it is necessary to eat the right diet, have adequate hours of sleep, pursue a hobby or read to mentally relax.

- They said that work stress should not spill into reactions at home and vice versa.

- Personal traits, upbringing, goals in life and the amount of determination that a person possesses, determine the ability to handle work life conflicts.

- Coping strategies used by women executives speaks of empowerment. The responses of women executives mainly speak of attitudes and actions that are personal in nature. They are less about the need to change external situations. While a few specific actions are spelt out to manage home and career, most of them concentrate on managing oneself.

- Reflexivity is evidenced when women executives say that internal clarity about what one wants in life, introspection, and decisiveness is necessary while coping with work life conflicts. They say that there are definite costs to pay and so these qualities are a must.

- In terms of attitudes, an openness to consider new options, eschewing the obsession to have an orderly kept home, a degree of giving in to others is necessary according to women executives.

- Women executives emphasize the need to set expectations right at home and at work. They feel that some obvious sacrifices should be made to satisfy the family needs so that they feel that they are the first priority. Giving quality time to children, maintaining phone contact and dependability are necessary for maintaining familial relations.

- The ability to plan and say ‘no’ when required is a skill to be learnt, according to women executives. Managing relations with extended family (in-laws, sibling’s families and parents) is also seen as important by women executives. This is done by setting priorities right and communicating with them. They form a valuable support to balance work and life.
- Creating boundary lines or distinctions between work, home and self were seen as important by women executives. They describe the need to be objective, to prioritize and to make mental shifts. Their narrative reveals lucidity born of the facing of the conflicts between two fields- home and work.
- The underlying theme of empowerment is discernable through the narratives of the interviewed women executives. They draw boundary lines of what they can emotionally or physically do and redefine their roles at home and at work.

### **What does their agency imply in terms of their self?**

The self implies the way women executives see themselves. It includes their understanding of their own traits, the way they perceive the impact of work life conflict on their health, emotional stability and time. It also inferred from the agency they exhibit as they cope with the work life issues.

- The upbringing and the personality traits impact the way in which work life conflicts are perceived or dealt with. Women executives rate themselves as confident, emotional and process oriented at work. They also believe that they have an adaptable way of thinking, which can be holistic and linear.
- At work they are collaborative and territorial. They also believe they are more inclusive than hierarchical. The survey also reveals that women executives feel that their job gives them a high sense of self-worth.
- They also think that being a woman makes them a better executive.
- They admit that their motivation to work is to supplement family income. Working women rated self-image of ‘traditional wife’ and ‘appearance of success’ lower than the other beliefs. The image of ‘mother first and boss next’ also

received a high score.

Their agency is revealed by the following facts discerned from their narrative-

- Willingness to delegate routine household activities. They overcome traditional image of woman doing all the physical labour at home.
- Recognition that child rearing cannot be delegated reveals the entrenched gendered habitus. Consequently their narrative expresses a strong sense of guilt about motherhood. To ensure that the children have better upbringing, they seek help of the extended family for this duty.
- Vacations are spent for family. Personal time receives least priority.
- Need to work to as an expression of self-worth and to provide better lifestyle for the family.
- There is also an increased awareness that the load of home management and parenting falls exclusively on women. They feel that their spouse must share at least some part of this load.

The agency and self-construal reveals that their familial role identity is strong and their home will always have greater importance than their career.

### **What are the implications of such agency on their society?**

In collectivist cultures, the need for social approval is high and the self-construal is based on social identity. The familial role is doxic and unquestioned. Women executives perceive their role as a mother as a primary role and so a career becomes secondary to them. The quantitative findings too highlight the relative importance given to gender roles and family vis-a-vis career. The self-construal in collectivist cultures is based on a fundamental connect with others and role in group (family), the group primacy is a part of the doxa. Therefore the dissonance reported by women executives is more on the home front. Gendered habitus limits prevent women from radically challenging the role of wife and mother. The entry into work place has not freed women executives from home responsibilities, but has increased the load and the role conflict. The insecurity and guilt generated from the conflict of self (living one's life) and family (living

for others) forces women executives to examine their motives and measure their action. Thus the conflict between fields creates an emancipatory situation in which women take regulated liberties, which alter the structures in incremental stages.

Women executives believe marriages and careers are compatible if one chooses a partner who will support one's career. They continue with modified versions of the ancient joint family by locating their extended family close to them to use their support in bringing up children. They use hired help for routine household work and use vacations for quality time with family. While some traditional ideas are rejected, the basic values revolving around family roles are not changed. They seek a little more support from their spouses but essentially accept a more prominent role in child rearing. In conclusion it can be said that women executive's agency expresses itself as a proving of self-worth more than a proving of equality with men. Familial role is the dominant feature in collectivist cultures and so the dissonance is experienced more on the home front than in organizations. The fear that increase in the number of working women will affect families adversely is unfounded as the career remains a secondary consideration (as compared to family), even among women who have successful and demanding careers.

### 7.1.2 Gender Bias

Indian society is patriarchal. Patriarchal structures percolate through all institutions and express in the form of subtle biases which executive women have to contend with in their social and organizational setting. Deference to men (father or husband) is taught and women internalize it. Patriarchal cultures also have rigid role definitions and this creates stereotypes. Social constructs define masculine and feminine roles and challenging them has repercussions. These stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are not only social constructs but also get internalized by both men and women. These stereo types create a given structure, which have to be faced by women executives in organizations.

**What is the nature of gender bias (discrimination) against women executives in India?**

Patriarchy and stereotyping in society manifest as particular attitudes in organizations. Women executives were asked if they encountered these attitudes in the work place.

**Heroic masculine cultures**

- The bias of masculine culture in the organization is reported but it manifests more as a focus on performance due to the pressures of global competition and the recession in the economy.
- The patriarchal culture of the society which gets reflected in the organization as its members are conditioned socially to expect certain behaviours is also acknowledged by women executives as a reason for the masculine culture.
- Majority of women executives believe that the bias of heroic masculinity is not present in corporate India. They opine that family friendly policies, holistic evaluations, equal opportunities provided by the organizations make them people centric. They also say that quality of work is valued over quantity of hours spent in the organization.
- Some of the women executives interviewed say they have encountered this bias but it is dependent on certain conditions like organizational history, number of women in the organization, organizational level and the wider culture of the place where the work place is located. They feel it is also supervisor dependent and that once a woman executive proves herself and gains credibility, she is unlikely to encounter this bias again and again.
- Some admit that the bias of heroic masculinity definitely exists. Some of them consider it from a management point of view and say that the increased competition and emphasis is bound to create a more masculine culture. The recession and the pressure of increased population seeking scarce jobs in India, also heighten this competition.
- An industry wise analysis of the responses shows that the respondents who feel the absence of heroic masculinity are spread across industries (with the

exception of shipping industry) evidencing that the bias of heroic masculinity is not experienced by majority of women, across industries, in India. Consultancy, Health, and Insurance sector report absolutely no bias. However since the number of women executives interviewed from Insurance and Shipping industry is less than 3 and therefore any conclusion will be unwarranted. The Banking, Finance and IT industry which are heavily dominated by women in India and have a fair number of executives at the very top levels, report the existence of bias to “a moderate extent”. This can be because of the prevalence of recession which seems to have put a performance pressure on these industries, making them more bottom line oriented and less long term oriented.

- An organizational level wise analysis of responses reveals that higher levels (very top include VPs, MDs, Country Heads, Global Heads, Directors, CFOs and CEOs) and top (General managers, Associate Directors, and AVPs) feel that heroic masculinity exists more than upper middle levels (Managers, Administrative executives and Senior managers). This could be because at higher levels the pressure of delivering performance increases and nurturing activities may be relegated. As expressed by the women executives, the impact of competition, market realities and recession promotes the masculine culture.
- The impact of the wider culture of the place enters the organizational culture too. The women executives working in north Indian states of Delhi and Gurgaon report greater bias than the south Indian states. Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai have the maximum women executives who categorically deny bias. Mumbai presents a mixed picture with 45% reporting bias and 55% reporting no bias of heroic masculinity.
- Some of the respondents who identified bias said the culture of the organization, culture of the place where the offices are located and the overall culture of the country which is patriarchal create masculine attitudes in the organization. Market conditions like competition and recession, which force organizations to become more stringent about hiring, promoting and women and providing flexible schedules was also quoted as a major reason of the bias of heroic masculinity in the organization by some of the respondents. Other

reasons quoted were Individual factors like the personality of supervisors and the need to prove oneself in the organization before being accepted. Women executives said that both men and women have to prove themselves and that once they establish their credibility, the pressure decreases. They did not feel this bias is gender specific.

### **Tokenism and Think manager; Think male**

- The gender bias of ‘Think manager, think male’ and ‘Tokenism’ is low in India incorporation.

- The bias of ‘Think manager think male’ manifests as reluctance to report to a woman boss or as reluctance among clients to interface with a woman manager. It is influenced greatly by social and organizational culture. Women executives do say it is negligible. There is no marked aversion to deal with women but there is hesitation. The impact of it is that women executives begin to adapt masculine behaviours and are often more aggressive than necessary.

- Most of the women report that they have not encountered tokenism in organizations.

- The narratives also reveal bias when women executives said that they needed to prove themselves initially, to be accepted at higher levels. However they assure it is the same for men managers. A few of them who report about tokenism say it manifests in the form of sidelining women or making them feel unwelcome or unnecessary in meetings. It can also be in the form of completely ignoring the woman executive or passing a few insensitive jokes or comments. Personality of few men was responsible for this bias and it was not generally encountered by women executives. In fact some women executives said they are treated with greater deference and respect and often get greater visibility as compared to their male colleagues.

- The correlation between the responses to Heroic masculinity and the resultant biases was also calculated. The degree of non-parametric (spearman) correlation between the variables- TMTM (“Think Manager, Think Male”) and Tk (Tokenism) with HM (Heroic Masculinity) at significance level of 0.01, (2 tailed) is low, showing that Heroic masculinity in India Incorporation does not

manifest as Tk and TMTM. The correlation between TMTM and Tk is slightly higher at 0.564.

- In terms of level in the organization, higher levels report greater bias (HM-26, TMTM-4 and Tk 7) than lower levels (HM- 5, TMTM-0 and Tk 1). The sample of senior executives interviewed were classified as- upper middle category (Managers, Administrative executives and Senior managers) which was 19% of the total sample of 105 women executives; the top level (General managers, Associate Directors, and AVPs) which constituted 26% of the executives; and the very top level (VPs, MDs, Country Heads, Global Heads, Directors, CFOs and CEOs) which was 55% of the total executives interviewed.
- The bias of TMTM and Tk are reported only in Chennai and to some extent in Mumbai. The bias of HM is reported in Delhi and Gurgaon to a greater extent as compared to other states in India

### **Cultures of advantage**

- Masculine cultures create a set of norms which privilege men and disadvantage women subtly. These are called cultures of advantage. One such advantage, especially at higher levels is networking opportunity. At higher levels, this is an important skill on which women miss out and it consequently creates a set back while aiming for higher growth.
- Distinguishing between professional and personal/social networking, women executives speak of their constraints in professional and social networking. Responsibilities at home, social mindset which looks at intermingling of men and women with disfavor and personal attitudes prevent women from socializing and building contacts out of work hours or work setting.
- They however admit that networking is very important as it impacts performance in a career. It creates political suaveness, aids decision making by creating access to vital information, increases comfort level within the group and sometimes networking with the top creates strategic visibility. In organizations with matrix structures, networking with peers is seen as strategic, by women executives. They also felt that reaching out to different stakeholders enhances performance.

### **Homophily**

- The gender bias of homophily is the tendency to prefer people who are similar to oneself. When asked about this bias, an overwhelming majority feel that they do not encounter homophily in the organizations. 29% say a categorical ‘no’ and 44% say ‘it may exist in other organizations’. 27% say ‘it exists’ and quote various reasons for its existence.
- Women executives who said they encounter homophily (27%), say it is natural to prefer people of your own sex. Some attribute it to the masculine culture. Age and upbringing impacts this tendency. Women bosses, they say can be exclusive when there is the ‘queen bee syndrome’. Diversity is seen as lip service as the number of women in top management is dismally low. Those women executives who say this bias does not exist (29%), explain the low number of women at the top with other arguments. They say that at the top level comfort is important, constant dissenters are counter-productive, so top management chooses people who they are comfortable since capability is already proven by then. Some believe performance alone is the criteria and not gender. Some others say that the low number of women at the top is because women opt out much earlier and so there is a reduced pool. 44% of the interviewees say they have not come across this bias in their organization but it could exist in some other organizations.

### **Double Bind**

- As far as the bias of double bind is concerned, 51% of the sample says that the bias of double bind exists, 28% are neutral and 21% believe it is not an issue. Some respondents were of the view that aggressiveness is a trait, which both men and women need to use, and it is resisted by others. Women alone do not face any special censure when they are aggressive. They say that aggressiveness or non-aggressiveness is a personal characteristic. As long as people accomplish their tasks, and they are capable, they get respect from others. Gender they feel, does not act as a factor in this. Some others expressed that aggression is not needed at all. Women and men who are firm are very effective leaders. It was also pointed out by a respondent that women have to transcend gender and

look at others and oneself as a person.

- Those that say that the double bind exists, describe the ways in which they encounter it. When women are aggressive, it is not tolerated. Soft styles of managing are criticized as ineffective. Women are considered emotional. Women executives say that very often they have to play up to these expectations. They feel they are seen as women first, and a manager later. Women also feel that that they have to be exceptional to be accepted and so they have to prove themselves much more than men.
- Social expectations, stereotyping, organizational culture has a bearing on this. North India has greater stereotyping than the South of India. Individual maturity was seen as an important criterion in this bias. Some women executives said men had big egos and that they are threatened by strong women, while a greater majority felt that double bind is internalized and women are defensive, over reactive, and aggressive. They felt that men are more balanced. They felt that women dislike confrontations and tend to bring their psychological complexes to work, more than men.

#### **Attributing gender as a reason for success**

- When asked about this bias, most of the women (57%) said that they cannot say anything about it, as they have not experienced it. 7% conceded it could exist in some organizations, but denied personal experience. 14% said a categorical ‘No’. They say that their organizations are open and supportive of women and 22% say that they have either personally experienced it or have seen a colleague go through it.
- Many of the women executives say that it is not successful women alone that draw criticism, even men face it. The criticism they feel is personality based and not gender. Some others felt that it is a general tendency to put people down if they are successful. Some women executives however, insisted that this bias exists and women get the back-lash of criticism more than men. Women have their physical appearance and looks being deliberated far more than men.
- Women executives claim that much of the calumny comes mostly from

women rather than men. And this too is more prevalent in social circles as compared to organizational circles. Jealousy is usually the cause of such slander. Women executives acknowledge that it does affect them. Many of them do not confront it. They also fear the social repercussions of such gossip.

### **Devaluation**

- Only a minority of women executives (9%) said that they felt devalued in their work place. 39% said a categorical ‘no’ and the rest (52%) said they personally had no experience of it but it maybe there elsewhere.
- Women executives feel that confidence issues do not exist for them. Self-confidence is not gender specific.
- Low self-worth usually prevents marketing oneself or demanding one’s needs. Girls are brought up in families in India to be accommodative and sacrificing, which may be internalized. • Women say they usually lack negotiation skills because they find it difficult to ask for a raise in pay or demand a higher position. They expect higher ups to take note of their needs and requirements without their asking for anything and actions initiated in their favour.
- Women are perceived to be risk averse as compared to men. When asked about it, there are divergent responses. While some women executives felt they are risk takers, some others believe they are not and quote reasons for it.
- Another stereotype about women is that they lack vision. When asked about it women executives disagree about it.
- Devaluation begins at home, but most of the women executives say they received support from their families.
- Women executives say that by being in the corporate arena for long time, many skills and abilities are acquired. Be it marketing oneself or communicating one’s terms.
- Women executives say that women tend to look at their work as a job and not as a career and so this impacts their performance and rating
- Women executives believe that mentoring and executive coaching impart required KSAs to women and prepare them for higher positions.

### **Cinderella Complex**

- When questioned about Cinderella Complex, 47% of the women executives said they had either seen others using it or had used it themselves, while 17% denied the use of it. 36% couldn't say anything definitely about it.
- Women executives say that they do not see the employment of feminine wiles in organization. While some others say that it is not gender specific. Manipulations can be employed by either sex to accomplish their own ends.
- Women executives who say that the Cinderella complex does not exist give reasons for their belief. One is that at higher levels, there is a greater need to perform. As such Cinderella complex may exist at lower levels but not at higher levels. The other is that by the time women come to that position, they are older and more matured in their attitude. They also stated that performance is the criteria at higher levels and not feminine wiles. Using feminine advantage at higher levels may work to the women executive's disadvantage as the competition is high and organizations are meritocratic in their culture and performance determines promotion.
- Some women executives say that the use of feminine wiles in corporate setting exists and they say it expresses itself subtly or grossly. Women executives cite multiple reasons on why the subtle use of feminine wiles is done and the forms it takes. Insecurity was identified as the main cause for using wiles. They felt it was unprofessional. Some women said the usage of feminine wiles will depend upon the city and the organizational culture. Some professions are stereotyped and these feminine strategies work in those industries (Air hostesses, for example). Age also was considered a determining factor.
- Appearance, emotional behavior, and sweetness of demeanor were considered ways of using feminine wiles. Some women executives however said that there can be a much discrete use of femininity and gave examples of it.
- Some women executives felt that it was unethical to use feminine wiles, while some others felt that there is nothing wrong in using feminine advantages when men have so many other advantages.

**What are some of the other organizational and social prejudices that women executives face in India?**

The survey results and the interview findings reveal a similar trend. In the survey, the following organizational perceptions were rated higher-

- When women exercise authority, it is viewed as aggressiveness by people in the organization.
- The actions and behaviour of one woman executive are generalized to the entire segment of women workforce.
- Women who have career interruptions are less successful as compared to those with uninterrupted careers.
- When women take time off for children or insist on not staying for long hours it is interpreted as a lack of commitment to the job.
- Women have to prove themselves through great efforts much more than men to gain professional respect.

In the interview, cultures of advantage, double bind and Cinderella complex were identified by more number of people. These findings evidence that masculine culture and stereotyping are perceived by women executives. However, with reference to organizational policies and practices like reward mechanisms, public posting, counseling, advisory teams and reentry, women executives did not report any particular bias. When asked to assess social attitudes women executives did not report any particular bias. However, two attitudes, viz. “Low achievement among women is due to their other directedness” and “ambitious women get censured”, were reported as marginal biases. These two aspects showing gender stereotype are also in consonance with other perceptions.

**How do they perceive subtle barriers/biases at their workplace?**

The patriarchal culture that exists in Indian society, percolates into organizations too creating subtle symptoms of masculine culture: viz. tokenism, double bind etc. Organizational philosophy which ought to integrate organizations, can further or diminish these beliefs. Masculine cultures promoting competition, ag-

gression and tangible measures of success can imperceptibly marginalize women. Women will tend to react to this, either by blindly absorbing the culture and exhibiting masculine behaviours or by establishing the submerged identity by using feminine behaviour which fits the existing stereotype to get what they want in organizations. Among the biases reported by women executives, double bind and Cinderella complex are rated higher, confirming the modification of praxis to cope with the habitus at work.

Women internalize the bias they experience from childhood. This devaluation gets internalized and leads to a lack of self-confidence. Consequently, risk aversion and conservativeness in action develops. This can impact their ability to strategically envision the organizational action. Women are thus seen unfit for higher positions. Yet another, method of coping (identified in research) is called ‘Cinderella Complex’, namely using feminine wiles to get work done. Women executives report that respect given to their role in society is low.

However, they report high levels of confidence in their abilities and skills. Despite costs, the need to seek a career stems from the need to acquire social capital that accrues to members of a society by making investments in certain fields. Jobs provide a sense of self-worth and monetary rewards which ensures a better quality of life. Every field has underlying principles or nomos which members have to subscribe to in order to avail of the capitals it provides. And so, women executives too in an self-enlightened manner accept the forfeiture of promotions and career advancements, when they take a break for maternity or other familial callings. They do not hence perceive this as bias.

One more reason for this perception is that the familial role is doxic and unquestioned. Women executives recognize their role as a mother as a primary and so career becomes secondary to them. Career as a luxurious role of self-indulgence, in collectivist culture, preempts the perception of bias in organizations which tend to give rewards to commitment (which women with families are not perceived to have.) Contrary to this, in individualist cultures the sensitivity to bias will be different.

**How do they cope with subtle biases at work place? (agency)**

Women executives describe many ways of coping with biases.

- To survive in organizations with masculine cultures they suggest shifting to roles that demand less hours or less travel. Some others expressed that the increase in the number of women at the work place will dilute the masculine culture. Some women expressed that the masculine culture in organizations can be used to bring out the latent, masculine facet in oneself.
- Tokenism and think manager; think male were considered as minor biases and speaking about tokenism they said, being the only woman on the board or in meetings can sometimes add to visibility. Very often, they would get more courtesy and respect from male colleagues.
- Women executives also report that homophily could be because there is a reduced pool available as there are lesser number of women at higher levels. They also said women tend to opt out for familial reasons and also may have lesser aspiration as compared to men.
- Almost 51% of the interviewees reported experience of double bind. While discussing causes and forms in which double bind is experienced, women executives also reflexively consider the attitudes in women, which exacerbate the bias. Women are sometimes defensively aggressive and tend to overreact, while some women tend to avoid confrontations. Maturity in attitude will reduce this bias to a great extent, according to them. Some even said that men are sometimes more balanced than women and women react because they have internalized the double bind.
- While speaking about devaluation in organizations, women executives say that when women look at their work as a job and not as a career, it impacts performance and rating. They believe that by being in the corporate scene for long, skills to market oneself and communicate ones needs can be developed, even if there is an initial disadvantage.
- Regarding cultures of advantage, mainly networking disadvantage, women executives said since they cannot golf or drink with their peers, they found their

own networking styles which are different from the men's networking styles. They include lunch and breakfast bonding, shopping, email and videoconferencing, floor walks and being part of forums and (women only) networks.

- Some executives view Cinderella complex to be unethical, while some others say that using the feminine advantage is in no way wrong. Subtle use of femininity to achieve one's goals is used at higher levels.

### **How does it affect their self-construal?**

The undertone of all the narratives is that women executives feel that the onus to prove themselves and break through the barrier is theirs. Career as a luxurious role of self-indulgence, in collectivist culture, preempts the perception of bias in organizations which tend to give rewards to commitment (which women with families are not perceived to have.) Also the identification with the familial role makes women executive sense inequity at home and in society, more than at work. They look at workplace as a place where they can achieve self-worth. They perceive that the society devalues their social and familial role.

A complete picture of the findings is presented in a tabular format in figures 7.1 and 7.2.

## **7.2 Human Resource Implications**

In the area of work life balance, the findings of this study have many implications to HR departments. Retaining feminine talent to increase diversity at top levels is a concern for corporate organization. The following implications are noteworthy.

- Women executives in India have a higher dependence on hired help as compared to their counterparts across the world. They however express fears in hiring help in terms of safety and their influence on upbringing of the child. It is for this reason they opt to use help from extended family. Organizations can help in organizing reliable hired help.

Figure 7.1: The summary of findings in the area of work life balance

AREA	QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS		QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
DEMOGRAPHICS	INTERVIEW	SURVEY	SECONDARY SOURCES
Position	VP/HEAD/GM- 40% MD/DIRECTOR- 27%	VP/HEAD/GM- 13% MD/DIRECTOR- 14%	The global gender gap report of 2012 classifies India on position 105 in a study of 135 countries. The gender gap was measured on the criteria of economic participation (123 <sup>rd</sup> position), educational attainment (121 <sup>th</sup> position), health and survival (134 <sup>th</sup> position) and political empowerment (17 <sup>th</sup> position).
Education (professional)	78% highly educated	70% highly educated	
Marital status	82.86% married	75.56% married	
WORK LIFE BALANCE (CONTEXT)	Socio cultural beliefs- (average score, N=90) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women have to take maximum responsibility on the home front.(4.99)</li> <li>Gender based discrimination exists in the society, in terms of respect given to women. (4.33) (48% believe it exists, 23% give a more midway score, while 23% believe it to be less in the society.)</li> <li>Gender based discrimination exists in the Indian culture, in terms of role definition. (4.01)(52% of sample gives high score)</li> <li>Personal appearance and behaviour is more important for a woman as compared to a man.(4.31)</li> <li>The woman's contribution at home is devalued in our society.(4.27)</li> </ul>	STRUCTURAL CHANGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education- increased attainment makes women question roles and norms.</li> <li>Employment- Globalization increases jobs</li> </ul> CULTURAL PERSISTENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Good girl' syndrome- cultural legacy prevents overt rebelliousness and increases acceptability.</li> <li>Collectivist attitudes- familial responsibilities are more important than their career</li> </ul> PRIMARY DATA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They prefer modified versions of joint family</li> <li>Role identity with family</li> <li>Marriage and motherhood is important.</li> </ul>	
Underlying beliefs (Analyzed with Kano)	Derived value is high for- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role of women defined by the Epics</li> <li>Career women are seen as selfish people</li> <li>Gender is a silly issue and is overrated</li> </ul>	• Social costs of differing exist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role as a mother more important than career. Nuanced motherhood</li> <li>Conflict is perceived more on the home front, in terms of being a 'good mother'.</li> <li>Career is seen as a means of seeking 'personal worth', while motherhood is seen as a definition of 'self'.</li> <li>Sensitivity to social sanction and approval for various women issues is admitted. (as expected in relationship oriented and collectivist cultures).</li> </ul>	
WORK LIFE BALANCE (SETTING)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support from 'hired help' (6.20) and 'family' (5.74) scored higher than support from bosses and others.</li> <li>Maternity and paternity benefits and flexi schedules are the most used organizational facility.</li> <li>Family get-togethers' and vacations are preferred stress busters.</li> <li>60.84% spend 8-10 hours at work. 25.84% spend 10-12 hours at work.</li> <li>33.33% are willing to relocate. 31% say 'no' and the rest are ambivalent.</li> </ul>	FAMILY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces the degree of emotional strain and guilt</li> <li>Helps to handle physical work and ensures supervision of maids</li> <li>Transfer of values</li> </ul> SPOUSE- mixed opinions HIRED HELP- Need to maintain them emphasized ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater control on their work environment as they are in higher positions.</li> <li>Cost benefits analysis.</li> </ul>	
WORK LIFE BALANCE (SITUATED ACTIVITY)	Factor Analysis reveals the work life following beliefs underlying coping strategies- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pro Family belief</li> <li>Optimizing belief</li> <li>Quality time belief</li> <li>Pro Career belief</li> <li>Hired help dependency</li> <li>Egalitarian belief</li> <li>Balancing belief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reaction from children</li> <li>Reaction from family and others.</li> <li>Need to balance both- (Career Vs. Home)</li> <li>Actual actions- Opting out completely Down trading a position Opting out temporarily Choosing a less demanding career</li> </ul>	

Figure 7.2: The summary of findings in the area of gender bias

AREA	BIASES INCLUDED	QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
CONTEXT (Structural Bias)	Patriarchic Attitudes		Patriarchic attitudes percolate through institutions
SETTING (Organization's cultural bias)	Stereotyping		Exist, but in an overall sense, are on a decline Experienced in the form of comments and discrimination
Cultures of Advantage		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes (16%), No (60%), Maybe (24%)</li> <li>• Highest reported in Shipping Industry, IT, Banking and Services</li> <li>• Perceived more at the very Top level (46%) and lesser at upper middle level (24%) in the organization</li> <li>• Perceived more in Delhi and Gurgaon and less in Southern states</li> <li>• Highest quoted reasons are – culture (33%) and market conditions (23.8%), stereotypes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is dependent on certain conditions like organizational history, number of women in the organization, organizational level and the wider culture of the place where the work place is located.</li> <li>• It is also supervisor dependent and that once a woman executive proves herself and gains credibility, she is unlikely to encounter this bias.</li> <li>• From a management point of view the increased competition, the recession and the pressure of increased population seeking scarce jobs in India cause masculinity in culture.</li> <li>• Other reasons quoted were Individual factors like the personality of supervisors</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibilities at home, social mindset which looks at intermingling of men and women with disfavor and personal attitudes prevent women from socializing and building contacts out of work hours or work setting.</li> <li>• Networking is important as it impacts performance in a career. It creates political suaveness, aids decision making by creating access to vital information, increases comfort level within the group and sometimes networking within the top creates strategic visibility.</li> <li>• The different networking styles include lunch and breakfast bonding, shopping, email and video conferencing, floor walks and being part of forums and (women only) networks.</li> </ul>

AREA	BIASES INCLUDED	QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
SITUATED ACTIVITY (Experienced bias)	Tokenism Think manager; Think male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The gender bias of 'Think manager, think male' and 'Tokenism' is low in India incorporation.</li> <li>95% of the women report that they have not encountered tokenism in organizations</li> <li>The 5% do report tokenism</li> <li>The correlation between the responses to Heroic masculinity and the resultant biases was also calculated. The degree of non parametric (spearman) correlation between the variables - Tntm ("Think manager, think male") and Tk (Tokenism) with Hm (Heroic masculinity) at significance level of 0.01, (2 tailed) is low, showing that Heroic masculinity in India Incorporation does not manifest as Tk and Tntm. The correlation between Tntm and Tk is slightly higher at 0.564.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The bias of 'Think manager think male' manifests as reluctance to report to a woman boss or as reluctance among clients to interface with a woman manager</li> <li>It manifests as sidelining women or making them feel unwelcome or unnecessary in meetings. It can also be in the form of completely ignoring the woman executive or passing a few insensitive jokes or comments.</li> <li>In terms of level, higher levels in the organization report greater bias than lower levels.</li> <li>Delhi and Gurgaon reports greater amount of tokenism as compared to Chennai and Bangalore.</li> </ul>

AREA	BIASES INCLUDED	QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
SITUATED ACTIVITY (Experienced bias)	Homophilly	29% 'No', 27% 'Exists' and 44% say 'It may exist in other organizations'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is natural to prefer people of your own sex.</li> <li>• Some attribute it to the masculine culture.</li> <li>• Age and upbringing impacts this tendency.</li> <li>• Women bosses, they say can be exclusive when there is the 'queen bee syndrome'.</li> <li>• Diversity is seen as lip service as the number of women in top management is dismal low.</li> <li>• At the top level comfort is important, constant dissenters are counter productive</li> <li>• performance alone is the criteria and not gender.</li> <li>• Some others say that the low number of women at the top is because women opt out much earlier and so there is a reduced pool.</li> </ul>
Double Bind		51% of the sample says that the bias of double bind exists, 28% are neutral and 21% believe it is not an issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressiveness is a trait, which both and women need to use, and it is resisted by others.</li> <li>• When women are aggressive, it is not tolerated. Soft styles of managing are criticized as ineffective.</li> <li>• Women are considered emotional. Women executives say that very often they have to play up to these expectations.</li> <li>• North India has greater stereotyping than the South of India.</li> <li>• Individual maturity was seen as an important criterion in this bias.</li> <li>• Double bind is internalized and women are defensive, over reactive, and aggressive. They felt that men are more balanced.</li> <li>• They felt that women dislike confrontations and tend to bring their psychological complexes to work, more than men</li> </ul>
Attributing gender as the reason for success			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 57% said that they cannot say anything about it</li> <li>• 7% conceded it could exist in some organizations,</li> <li>• 14% said a categorical 'No'</li> <li>• Women have their appearance being discussed far more than men.</li> <li>• Women executives say that much of the calumny comes from women and not men. Women executives say that it does affect them. Many of them do not confront it. They also fear the social repercussions of such gossip.</li> </ul>

AREA	BIASES INCLUDED	QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
SELF (Internalized Bias)	Devaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9% said that they felt devalued in their work place.</li> <li>• 39% said a categorical 'no' and the rest</li> <li>• 52% said they personally had no experience of it but it maybe there elsewhere.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women executives feel that confidence issues do not exist for them. Self confidence is not gender specific.</li> <li>• Girls are socialized to be nurturing and sacrificing and this may be internalized.</li> <li>• Women say they usually lack negotiating skills because they find it difficult to ask for a raise or demand a position. They expect to be noticed.</li> <li>• Women are perceived to be risk averse as compared to men. When asked about it, there are divergent responses. While some women executives felt they are risk takers, some others believe they are not and quote reasons for it.</li> <li>• Another stereotype about women is that they lack vision. When asked about it women executives disagree about it.</li> <li>• Devaluation begins at home, but most of the women executives say they received support from their families.</li> <li>• Women executives say that by being in the corporate scene for long, skills are learnt. Be it marketing oneself or communicating one's terms.</li> <li>• Women executives say that women tend to look at their work as a job and not as a career and so this impacts their performance and rating</li> <li>• Women executives believe that mentoring has huge benefits for women and prepares them for higher positions.</li> </ul>

AREA	BIASES INCLUDED	QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
SELF (Internalized Bias)	Cinderella Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 47% of the women executives said they had either seen others using it or had used it themselves.</li> <li>• 17% denied the use of it.</li> <li>• 36% couldn't say anything definitely about it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women executives who say that the Cinderella complex does not exist give reasons for their belief. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One is that at higher levels, there is a greater need to perform.</li> <li>• The other is that by the time women come to that position, they are older and more matured in their attitude.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• They also stated that performance is the criteria at higher levels and not feminine wiles.</li> <li>• Some women executives say that the use of feminine wiles in corporate setting exists and they say it expresses itself subtly or grossly.</li> <li>• Insecurity was identified as the main cause for using wiles. They felt it was unprofessional.</li> <li>• Some women said the usage of feminine wiles will depend upon the city and the organizational culture.</li> <li>• Some professions are stereotyped and these feminine strategies work in those industries (Air hostesses, for example).</li> <li>• Age also was considered a determining factor.</li> <li>• Appearance, emotional behaviour, and sweetness of manner were considered ways of using feminine wiles.</li> <li>• Some women executives felt that it was unethical to use feminine wiles, while some others felt that there is nothing wrong in using feminine advantages when men have so many other advantages.</li> </ul>

COMBINED FINDINGS OF GENDER BIAS AND AGENCY OF WOMEN EXECUTIVES IN INDIA	
OVERALL FINDINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparatively, Double bind and Cinderella Complex are reported to a greater extent than other biases. Tokenism and Think manager; think male bias is less than 15%. Devaluation was also reported lower indicating that women executives report high levels of confidence. Heroic masculinity and Homophily are moderately reported, indicating the influence of the patriarchal culture inherent in the Indian society.</li> <li>In the Interviews, cultures of advantage, double bind and Cinderella Complex were identified and described by women executives</li> <li>Patriarchal culture dominates</li> <li>Slight change in attitudes towards executive women</li> <li>High self confidence</li> <li>Career- an avenue of self expression</li> <li>Low perception of bias at work</li> <li>Society devalues the social and familial role</li> <li>Gender bias exists as a general disrespect for women</li> </ul>
AGENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marginally challenge the structures- express a nuanced form of agency..</li> <li>They perceive that the society devalues their social and familial role.</li> <li>Gender bias -general disrespect for women in Indian society.</li> <li>The workplace is used to prove self-worth.</li> <li>Primacy of motherhood- challenge concepts of ‘ideal/traditional mother’.</li> <li>They place family above a career. Career is an investment in self to feel more fulfilled</li> <li>This ‘being your own person’ is the agency.</li> <li>Personal empowerment.</li> </ul>

- While flexi time is a preferred facility, women executives raise pertinent questions about cost effectiveness to organizations and the problems of coordination with other colleagues in terms of work.
- Women executives also dispel presumptions about their aversion to travel or do foreign stints. Organizations can devise a system through which they can initiate discussions with them and offer foreign assignments to women executives who are willing to take them.
- Stress is reported more at home front than at organizational front. Organizations can help by being sensitive to issues at home. This adjustment goes a long way in retaining female talent in organizations.
- Women executives are well educated and organizations can encourage open communication. This will not only allow women to voice issues but also help in framing effective and clear policies which address specific needs of women executives.
- Marriage is an important part of Indian doxa. Since the role identity of women executives with marriage and with motherhood is strong, organizations must design strategies which help women through major humps in their lifecycle. These humps are usually- at the time of marriage, pregnancy and birth of children (especially the first child, when motherhood too, is a new experience.)

The HR implications in the area of work life balance for women executives is presented in table 7.1.

In the area of gender bias, the following findings have implications for HR departments.

- The motivations of women executives to pursue important careers are mainly the need for personal fulfillment and the need for financial emolument. Women executives say the need to provide greater standard of living

Table 7.1: The HR implications in the area of work life balance

S. No	ISSUES IDENTIFIED	HR IMPLICATIONS
1	Hired help is most used	Provide / organize reliable hired help
2	Flexi time	Criteria involved, locations
3	Relocation	Do not presume aversion to travel or to do foreign stints
4	Stress is perceived on the home front more than in the organization	Sensitivity
5	Highly educated	Open communication, clear Policies, procedures
6	Marriage important	Subtle attitude towards marriage in organizational culture
7	Role identity with motherhood	Retention strategies

often motivates their career choice. Pay packs and growth opportunities can thus be major incentives in retention strategies of women executives.

- The most reported biases are double bind and Cinderella complex, both of which stem from a predominant masculine cultures in India and consequently in Indian organizations. There is an urgent need to promote education about subtle attitudes and biases that are unconsciously absorbed by both women and men. These biases are rarely questioned and therefore persistent in the culture of organizations. This awareness will go a long way in creating a conducive environment for women.
- The unconditional acceptance of bias also results in low reporting of bias in organizations. There is a passive acceptance of nomos. Mentoring and education can free women executives of many subtle inhibitions.
- Networking is differently by women executives. Organizations can facilitate this networking and help women executives draw from these networks not only important contacts and information but also emotional support.

- Organizations can increase the pool of eligible women executives by providing mentors, succession planning and also providing flexibility at crucial junctions in their lives.
- Issues of bias are mostly faced by women executives with their immediate bosses. Grievance handling in extreme cases is necessary. The recent provision of prevention of sexual harassment committees in all organizations will provide systematic redress and much needed awareness in these issues. (However, there are lesser instances of sexual harassment at higher levels of management.)
- This study also reveals the coping strategies that women executives use like down trade positions or seek careers which are less demanding. The understanding of these strategies will help organizations in designing better retention strategies.

The HR implications of subtle gender bias faced by women executives in India is presented in table 7.2

### 7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the self-construal and the agency in collectivist cultures is different from that of individualistic cultures. People raised in individualistic cultures tend to be idiocentric (emphasize competition, uniqueness, hedonism, self-reliance and emotional distance from in-groups), while collectivist cultures are allocentric (emphasize interdependence, sociability, family integrity, feel close to in-groups and respond to their needs) (Triandis & Suh, 2002). The interdependent ways of defining oneself creates a nuanced version of agency. Two trends stand out, in this regard. One is that the gendered habitus and the cultural arbitrary is deeply entrenched in the psyche of Indian women executives and marriage and motherhood will be reiterated in their lives as a primary goal. The other is that while they do perceive devaluation in society

Table 7.2: The HR implications in the area of gender bias.

S. No	ISSUES IDENTIFIED	HR IMPLICATIONS
1	Reasons to pursue career- financial emoluments and personal fulfillment/ self expression	Provide / Pay, Mentoring
2	Double Bind and Cinderella complex masculine culture	Education
3	Low reporting of bias- passive acceptance of nomos	Mentoring
4	Ways women network	Facilitate
5	Increase the pool of eligible women for top positions	Succession planning, flexibility at crucial junctions
6	Supervisor bias	Grievance handling
7	Coping strategies	Down trading positions, career change etc.

for their role at home, their essential habitus prevents them from making large or exclusive investments in a career.

The career is sought more as a form of self-expression. Consequently their perception of bias in the work place is low. Work life issues are seen as a greater challenge than gender bias at work. To cope with challenges in work and in life, and to cope with stereotypes at work and at home, women executives express a nuanced form of agency. Their regulated liberties are defined within the cultural framework and so they marginally challenge the structures that surround them. Women executives continue to marry, but choose partners who will support their careers; they continue with modified versions of the (ancient) joint family system by locating their extended family close to them, to use their support in bringing up children. They use hired help for routine household work and use vacations for quality time with family. While some traditional ideas are rejected, the basic values revolving around family roles are not changed. They seek a little more support from their spouses but essentially accept a more prominent role in child rearing. They perceive that the society devalues their

social and familial role. And gender bias exists more in the form of general disrespect for women in Indian society.

Their coping strategies speak of personal empowerment. The workplace is perceived as a facilitating environment where they can achieve self-worth. The home is essentially considered as supportive. Spousal attitude, support of extended family and hired help are seen as supporting factors. The conflict thus, is viewed with the doxic understanding of a woman's position in society. They do not question the primacy of motherhood, but probably only challenge some of the factors which constitute 'ideal mother'. They place family above a career, but believe pursuing a career affords an investment in self which enables them to feel more fulfilled. This 'being your own person' is the agency that is discerned in their narrative. They reflexively consider their constraints and seem keen to look at their own limitations in terms of attitude or accomplishment.

This study also needs to be placed in perspective with findings of other studies in order to discern its differential contribution to Indian gender literature. The impact of structural changes on women managers, in terms of the socio cultural and economic factors, which affect women executives is discussed by Budhwar et al. (2005); Parikh and Shah (1994); M. B. M. Gupta Sarita; Shah (1982). The low number of women executives at the very top level is because family responsibilities curtail women professional's pursuit of careers according to (Buddhapriya, 2009). A feeling of unease for not meeting social approval and the tendency to believe that parenting and running the household is their primary duty was reported by (Sundari & Sathyanarayana, 2012). Yet educated women, from the upper-middle and middle-middle class in India seek careers. The motives which govern women executives were studied by (Singh, 1994) and he found that supplementing income was not the main motivation. Women too seek professional competence and work satisfaction. Urban educated women define themselves differently from their rural counterparts. In a study of achievements, goals and means in the north of India, Agarwal and Misra (1986) found that the urban population had more differentiated sense of independence than the rural population, which was more oriented towards social approval. Also

the urban group differentiated between personal and family success whereas the rural group considered these to be more interdependent (Nath, 2000). Women executives report higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction as compared to housewives according to (Nathawat & Mathur, 1993). Thus the findings of this study are in consonance with other studies in India about women managers.

The differential element of this study is that it explores the sociological impact of the agency of women executives on the society and their self-construal process. The coping strategies, and the nature of bias, support systems and other influencing factors have been explored in depth and will form a valuable contribution to gender studies in India. The study focuses on women executives occupying positions in upper echelons of management, unlike other studies which are focused on women in middle management positions. These women have reached high positions and so their perception of bias in organizations will be different as compared to those in middle management.

## 7.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

The limitations of this study reveal promising leads to further studies.

The present study discusses the sociological angle of agency and structure. The psychological angle and the process of self-construal can be examined for a more holistic picture about agency in women executives.

Cross cultural comparison among other Asian countries to further explore nuances of agency in varied cultures, is another area worth exploring.

This study confines itself to executive women in corporate settings. Women entrepreneurs or those who have given up corporate jobs to start their own ventures will be able to give a more graphic and detailed account of agency. While structures can be better explored by studying women in NGO's and in Government jobs.

Views of men colleagues, spouses of women executives, extended family can be integrated to reveal the nature of the pulls and pushes of work life conflict from the perspectives of the different stakeholders in the setting.

The male experience of gender bias and of work life issues, will also contribute greatly to gender literature.

The balancing of masculine and feminine traits, (androgyny in management) and the ways of accessing the ‘inner feminine’ or ‘inner masculine’ will contribute to our understanding of gender and self-construal.

India has a wide variety of social realities for its women, and structure-agency studies can be done in various strata. While many studies have been done in these areas, changing times and the impact of structural changes has resulted in newer expressions of agency in women’s lives, which make it a fresh area of enquiry.

The impact of religious symbolism and character portrayal of women in Indian epics, on self-construal and the habitus of women in India is also another promising area to explore.

“A Nation’s progress is measured by the status of its’ women”, said Jawaharlal Nehru. And the improvement of this status is dependent on society, institutions, men and women themselves. Their redemption has huge implications and is the basis of growth. The individual urge for growth manifests as their agency at a material level and at higher levels of consciousness, it is the urge for spiritual discovery of being. Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba says, “Women have a very crucial role in individual and social uplift. They are the makers of the home, the nation and the world. They are the mothers who shape the generation to come. So, they must enshrine in their hearts the spiritual urge towards light and love, wisdom and bliss.”

