



# How to Succeed?

## Voices from the Women in Chemistry Oral History Collection

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Frontiers of Discovery: AWIS at 40

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Philadelphia, PA



# What is Oral History?

- Narrated recollections of an individual
- Structured interviews
- Four to six hours of interviewing conducted over two or three days
- Minimally edited transcript for clarification
- All materials housed at the Othmer Library



# CHF Oral History Program

- 30+ years and 700+ Oral Histories
- WWII and Manhattan Project Science
- Polymers
- Toxic Substances Control Act
- Mass Spectrometry

***But few Oral Histories with Female Scientists!***



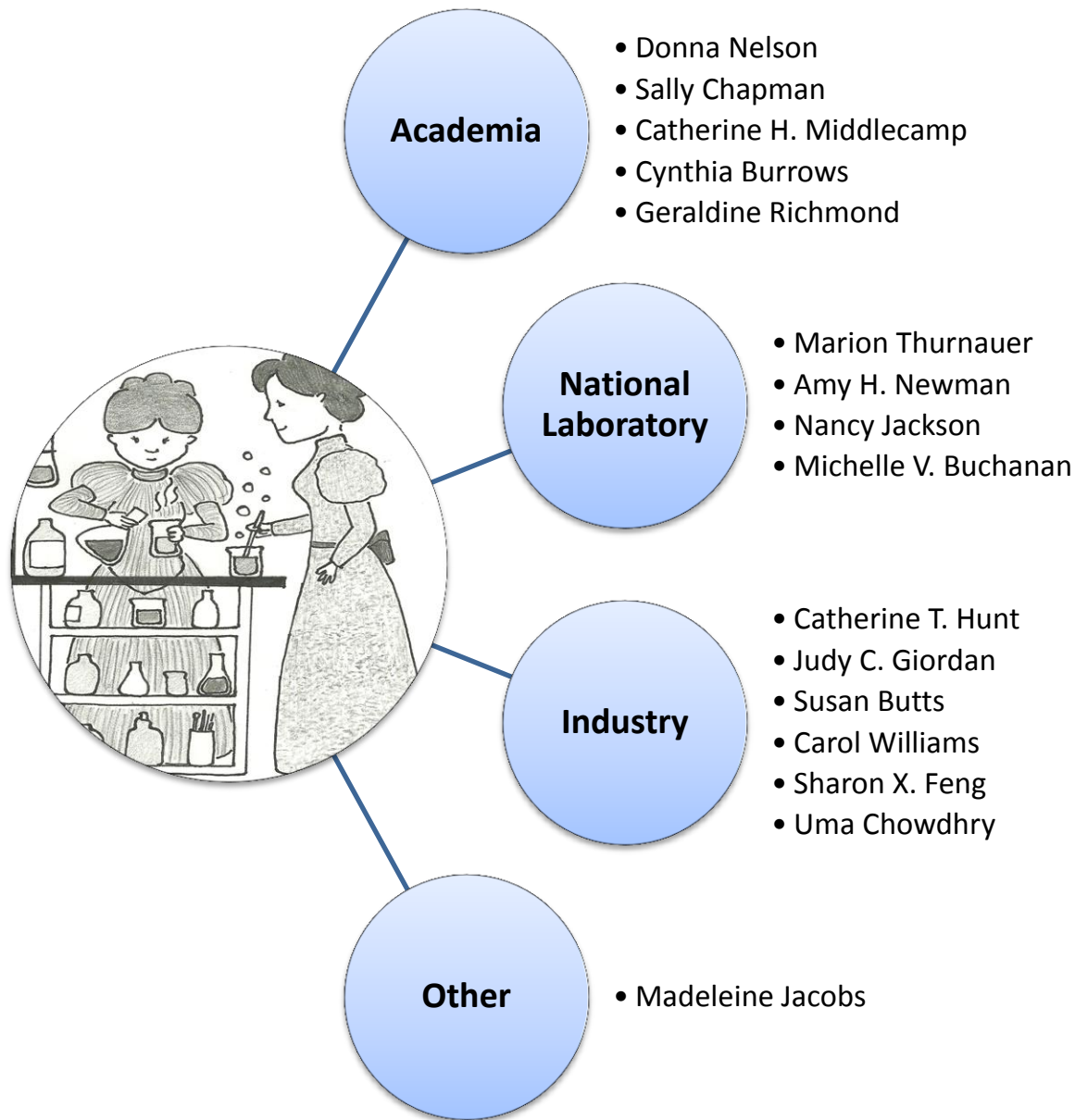
# Women in Chemistry

## Oral Histories

- Voices and stories of the unheard
- Filling silences and voids
  
- Stories of personal success
  - Marginalization → Persistence
  - Difficulties → Innovative Solutions



I do know a couple of things. I am not an isolated case of the uppity woman in the department, the one non-tenured woman, often it's a wife. I mean, I'm nobody's wife. I'm somebody's wife, but many of the other [...] women in the department, this one, that one, this one, that one, this one, are all Ph.D. chemists who were faculty wives, who were never hired in. Now, they're hired as lecturers for years here. I say it's been a tradition. But there's Cathys all over the country; not the same, but the same idea that there's a woman in a department that hasn't been "regularized." Some of us have been eventually brought on the faculty. Others like myself, I think, will never be brought on the faculty in chemistry.





# Project Goals

Focus on Women Since  
Title IX (1972)

More Oral Histories with  
Women

16 Added since 2008

Understand different  
avenues to success

Industry

Academia

National Laboratories

# Women in Chemistry

## Oral Histories

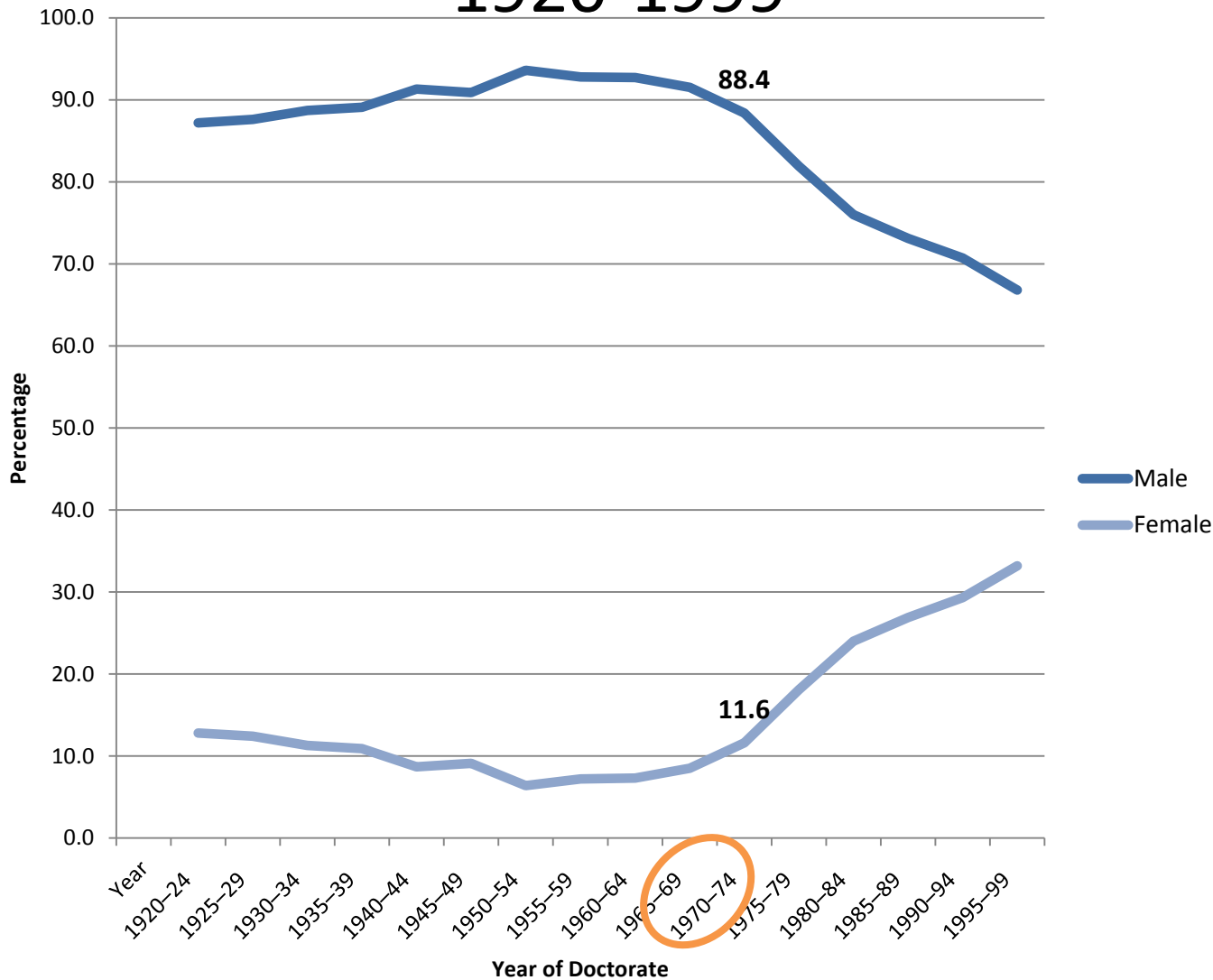


Original Focus:

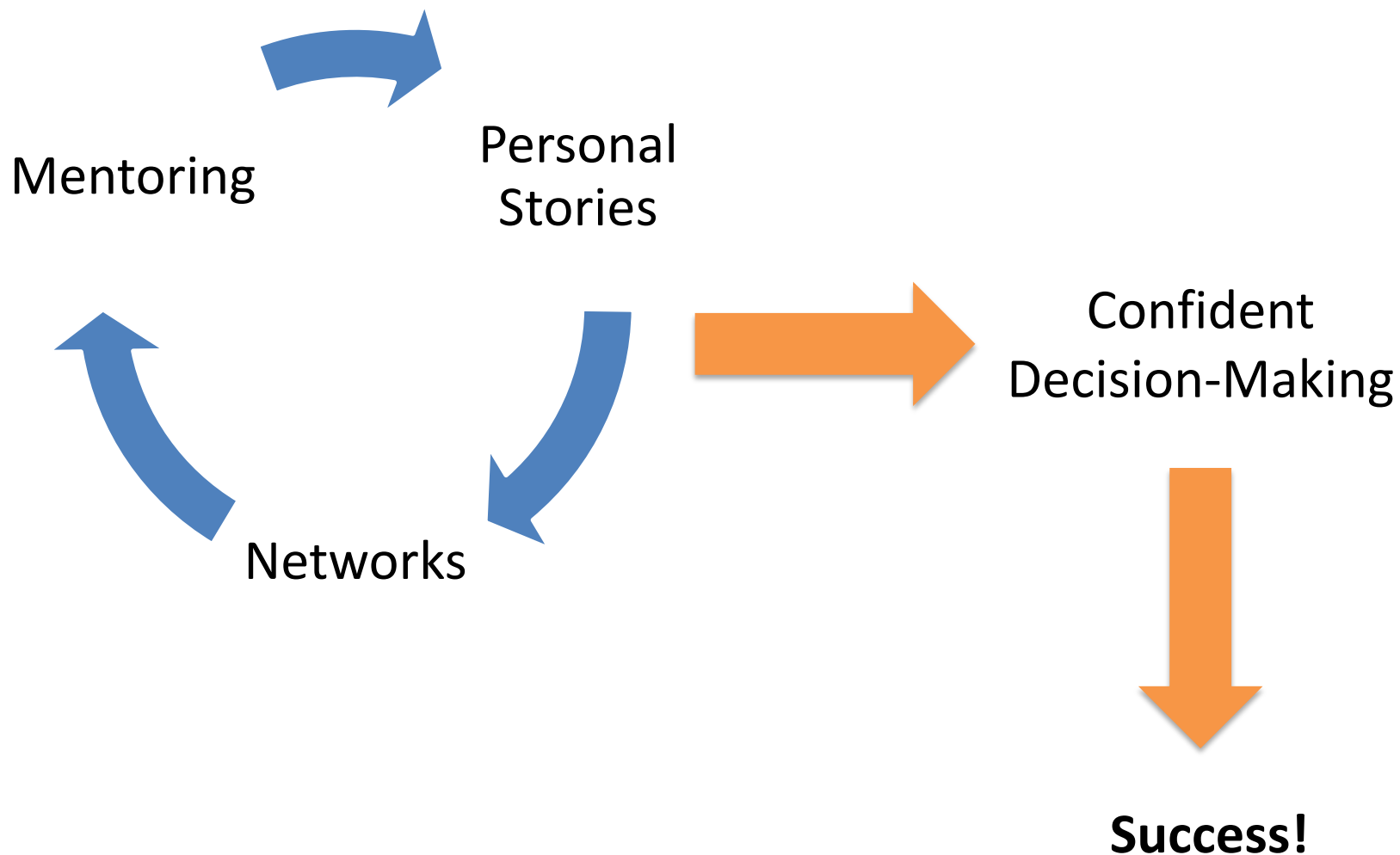
**Women who began careers since the  
1970s**



# Physical Science Ph.D.s: 1920-1999



# Understanding Success





And I just went ahead and did what I wanted, which I think is extremely important. You have to figure out what you want and then do it.



There in the chemistry department was a female, not a professor...but well, I guess she was a professor...not tenure track. And she knew I was pregnant. She was an old woman. And she...when she heard me say that I was going to only take off a week, she started in on me. She said, “You’re a bad mother. You’re going to be a bad mother. You can’t do this.” She said, “It will be horrible for your child. Your son will hate you when he gets older.” She said, “You will have a completely alienated relationship, and it’s going to,” and oh, she kept telling me all these things that were going to happen. And I just said, “Well, thank you for telling me.”



Your degree of success is directly correlated to your level of confidence that you can succeed. Not your arrogance, it's your confidence. I have to say there have been plenty of times in my life that I have had absolutely no confidence. But I'm part Italian, Sicilian, and bravado got me through. [...] So, step number one is walk into anything with confidence.

# Learn How To...



- Manage a Research Laboratory



- Effectively Communicate



- Formally or Informally Teach



- Write Grants



- Publish



- Survive Critical Transition Points



- Allocate Resources



I do remember talking sometimes to graduate students who really felt frustrated that their advisor wasn't mentoring them well enough, wasn't pushing. I say, "Well, all right. Go find somebody else." I mean, your advisor...what you want from your advisor is to be doing great science. If we could figure out ways where people could get the different kinds of support they needed from different people and felt comfortable that way, I think it works better.

# Learn From...



- Old Boys' (Old Girls') Network



- Informal Networks



- Professional Networks



- Mentors



- Peers



So, you want to make sure that you invest [your energy] in things that you really value, and make sure that you're not investing in what other people value that you don't. Make certain that you plan for [your life] to evolve with time. [Think beyond the] job you are in now. Is this where you want to be in ten years? Is this where you want to be in twenty years? And we normally, as women, don't necessarily think about that.

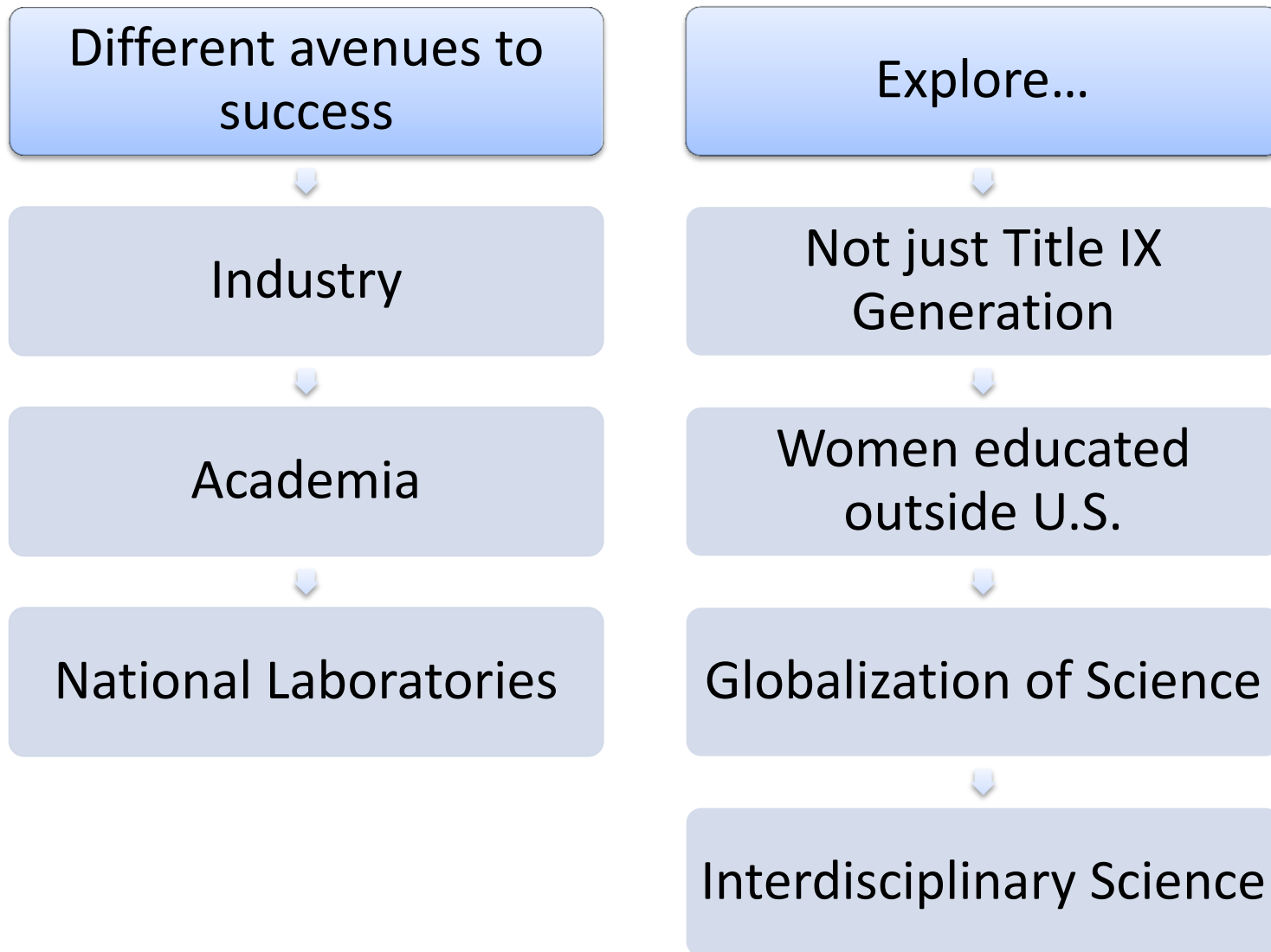


The problem is that there are not 50 percent women in those higher positions, so a lot of us end up being overburdened by the requirement of having a woman [on a committee]. I am a great example—and I don't mean great in a good way—because people know that I am a woman scientist. I participate actively. I typically do a good job when asked to participate in these committees, and so, when there's something to be done, Amy Newman's name comes to the top.



We wanted to be judged on our science and not on other personal issues. We didn't want that to become a factor in that tenure decision.

# Expanded Project Goals





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