

*A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING WORK-
NONWORK CONFLICT AMONG FEMALE ACADEMICS*

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING WORK-NONWORK CONFLICT AMONG FEMALE ACADEMICS

HEATHER PETHERICK

For nearly two decades research on the issue of work-nonwork conflict has been conducted from the perspective of competing demands and limited time. Still, our knowledge is not complete. In an attempt to gain a richer understanding of the perceptual experience of work-nonwork conflict, and thus provide a more informed basis from which future research strategies may be developed, this study employed a phenomenological approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with female academics who were married with children. The findings gave rise to nine structural descriptions that conveyed how participants perceived work-nonwork conflict. The structural descriptions were divided into two overarching themes, institutional and individual, based on the context of their influence. Moreover, the research offers a characterization of work-nonwork conflict based on the frequency and intensity of conflict. I theorize that an individual's perception of work-nonwork conflict will change over time. Implications for the academic institution, the individual, and for future research are presented.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

For nearly two decades the research on the issue of work-nonwork conflict has been conducted from the perspective of competing demands and limited time. It has recently been argued that a phenomenological approach to the study of work-nonwork conflict may reveal new insights about the intersection of temporal demands and personal meaning (Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). In order to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of work-nonwork conflict, and thus provide a more informed basis from which future workplace policy and research strategies may be developed, this research employed a phenomenological approach to understanding work-nonwork conflict among female academics with young families.

Since the early 1980s, increasing attention has been paid to the issues of balancing work and nonwork responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kirchmeyer, 2000; Kofodimos, 1993; Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980.). The terms work and nonwork are used to distinguish between two broad life domains. Work, or employment, is commonly used to describe those activities for which an individual is paid; how one earns a living. Alternatively, the term nonwork is used to refer to all non-paid activities such as volunteering, family and childcare responsibilities, leisure pursuits, and religious affiliations (Staines, 1980). Concerns about achieving balance between the work and nonwork domain has been fueled by increasing demands at work, rising numbers of dual income and single parent families, and “changing expectations regarding self-fulfillment” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p.76). Moreover, the challenge to successfully combine both work and nonwork obligations is one that is faced by many people. In Canada, 58% of the women and 71% of the men 25 years old and over are employed (Statistics Canada, 2002).

Despite the pervasiveness of work-nonwork conflict in modern society, relatively little progress has been made to mitigate the challenges faced by employers and employees with families. The consequences of work-nonwork conflict are considerable. Employees often experience high stress and low job satisfaction (Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992; Smith, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002), and feel torn between obligations to their employer and obligations to their families and other nonwork interests (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Newell, 1992). Many employees, particularly females, end up making painful trade-offs between full-time work and the care of dependents (Newell, 1992; Perlow, 1998). Employers suffer lost productivity from employees who are either physically absent from work or mentally preoccupied with personal matters (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Thompson, et al., 1999). There is also a loss of qualified labour when mothers withdraw from the workforce because of incompatible work and child-care arrangements (Kossek, Noe, & Demarr, 1999; Newell, 1992).

To date, most research in the area of work-nonwork conflict has concentrated on the organization of work and the careful allotment of employees' time between work and nonwork domains (Parasuraman et al., 1992; Smith et al., 2002). However, this approach tends to neglect much of the perceptual experience of time and work-nonwork conflict. In order to supplement our current understanding of work-nonwork conflict, as a uniquely human experience, a more qualitative approach is appropriate. Yet, such a stance is relatively rare in the literature. In the past decade, the few authors who have adopted such an approach have produced meaningful and insightful results (Daly, 1996a; Daly, 1996b; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). For example, Thompson & Bunderson (2001) recognize both the contribution and limitations of the quantitative perspective of time in the work-nonwork literature, and posit that paying special attention to the meanings people attach to

their time will lead to new understandings of work-nonwork conflict. Further they offer a meaning-based, rather than time-based, model to predict the experience of work-nonwork conflict based on the extent to which time is spent in identity-affirming or identity-discrepant domains. Thompson & Bunderson's model draws heavily on Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory and Stryker & Serpe's (1982) identity theory to hypothesize that "...perceived work-nonwork conflict will be exacerbated when individuals [occupy] their time with activities that they perceive to be inconsistent with their identities" (p. 25). In order to expand our understanding of work-nonwork conflict, as a human phenomenon, this study was designed to explore the personal conditions and interactions that shape an individual's perception of work-nonwork conflict.

Research Design

Problem Statement

One of the strongest and most scholarly rationales for a study follows from a need in the literature for increased understanding and dialogue about an issue. As suggested by Barritt (1986), the rationale

is not the discovery of new elements, as in natural scientific study, but rather the heightening of awareness for experience which has been forgotten and overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice (p. 20).

Accordingly, this study is designed to increase our awareness and understanding of work-nonwork conflict, by exploring the underlying meanings assigned to work and nonwork by individuals. A group that is of particular interest to this study is that of mothers working in academia. The reasons behind this interest are two-fold. First, as the researcher I am personally motivated to achieve a greater understanding of work-nonwork conflict among

female academics because of my own affinity for this demographic. I am an early-career academic, currently pursuing her graduate degree, whom aspires to successfully combine both career and family. With great personal concern I have contemplated media accounts of the phenomenon we refer to as work-nonwork conflict and asked myself, “Is this the whole story?” Second, I expect that the lived experiences of this group of individuals will tender rich descriptions of work-nonwork conflict. Attaining an advanced degree, working in a competitive career field, and raising a family are considered by many to be daunting tasks on their own. But to combine all three, as do mothers working in academia, seems a likely context for work-nonwork conflict to occur.

Specifically, the research problem is to uncover what perceptions, interactions, and/or conditions create the experience of work-nonwork conflict for mothers working in academia. Based on the insights provided through this study this research seeks to contribute to the current body of knowledge by (a) providing a re-conceptualization of work-nonwork conflict that includes a more perceptual dimension, and (b) exploring the implications for both the institution and the individual.

Purpose Statement

While a few studies have examined work-nonwork conflict among university faculty (for example: Schultz, Chung, & Henderson, 1989; Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977) none have examined the phenomenon strictly for women. Given the intricacies of gender and merit in academia, what is work-nonwork conflict among female academics really like? A phenomenological study devoted to understanding women’s lived experiences as both academics and as mothers best lends itself to examining this question. Moustakas (1994) defines a phenomenological study as one that seeks to describe the meaning of experiences of

a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals. Using this methodological approach, the researcher reduces the experiences to a central meaning or to an “essence” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to better understand work-nonwork conflict among mothers in academia. Work-nonwork conflict is defined as an individual’s perception of conflicting obligations between work and nonwork domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001).

Research Questions

From the perspective of female academics with children, what issues influence their perception of work-nonwork conflict? In order to develop a methodology in support of this central question, the following specific research questions were posed:

1. What constitutes work-nonwork conflict from the perspective of the individual?
2. What work and nonwork conditions mitigate the conflict for the individual?
3. What work and nonwork conditions exacerbate the conflict for the individual?

Significance of the Study

Theoretical Significance

This study promises to enrich the current literature by providing a new means of examining the phenomenon of work-nonwork conflict. Specifically, the study will demonstrate the usefulness of a phenomenological approach to understanding the experience of work-nonwork conflict from the perspective of the individual. It is anticipated that uncovering new insight about the relationship between work and nonwork roles, and the forces that shape these roles will add to our understanding of the multi-dimensional construct, work-nonwork conflict. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the research will encourage other

academics to adopt similar qualitative approaches to studying the phenomenon of work-nonwork conflict in hopes of advancing this field of inquiry.

Practical Significance

The research has practical significance for both employers and employees who experience work-nonwork conflict. By examining the perceptions of individuals that experience work-nonwork conflict we will gain new knowledge about the factors that shape work-nonwork conflict. Such knowledge will be useful to similar individuals, in terms of employment and life-stage, in understanding and perhaps mitigating their own experience of work-nonwork conflict.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Scholarly literature involving work-nonwork conflict began to gain momentum in the late seventies, as modern society felt the strain of wives and mothers entering the workforce in record numbers. Since that time, many parents have struggled with the challenge of how to be engaged in the workforce without sacrificing the quality of home life. To date, much of the research on issues surrounding work-nonwork conflict has been conducted from a time-based perspective.

There is a plethora of research that views work-nonwork conflict predominantly as a time-based phenomenon (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Smith et al., 2002; Pleck et al., 1980). In their summary of a U.S. Department of Labor employment survey, Pleck et al. (1980) identify excessive work time as the primary cause of conflicts between work and family life. While Greenhaus & Beutell's (1985) review of the work-family literature identifies three types of conflict, time-based conflict was found to be the most salient among the works they reviewed. Smith et al. (2002) studied the work time of over 500 employees and developed a model to predict the relationships between time, work-family conflict, and psychological distress. Based on the assumptions of a time-based perspective, scholars have developed frameworks such as boundary management (Nippert-Eng, 1996) and resource theory (e.g., Robinson, 1977) to explain empirical findings. For example, the research by Nippert-Eng (1996) on boundary management examines the various ways one separates work and nonwork expectations in time and space through visible, and often daily, rituals. Nippert-Eng identifies a range of boundary management preferences; from highly segmented or mutually exclusive domains to a permeable boundary and integrated work and nonwork domains.

The emphasis of this research on temporal demands between work and nonwork domains is understandable; no one is immune to the expendability of time. As Thompson & Bunderson (2001) so aptly summarize, “Time is finite and zero sum in the sense that an hour spent at work can never be reclaimed for nonwork pursuits and vice versa” (p. 18). Despite much of this work, it seems our understanding of work-nonwork conflict is somewhat limited.

Conceptualizing Work-Nonwork Conflict

For the vast majority of people living in the industrialized countries of the world work and family exist as dominant, but separate, spheres of modern life. Today work and family are most often physically and temporally separate. And while the workplace and the home consist of vastly different cultures, expectations, and members, these domains do not operate independent of one another (Clark, 2000). Moreover, Clark urges that, “employers, societies and individuals cannot ignore one sphere without potential peril to the other” (p. 749). Staines’ (1980) spillover theory and compensation theory presents further evidence that work and family life influence each other. In his examination of these two hypotheses, Staines distinguishes spillover as a positive association between work and nonwork, and compensation as a more negative association between domains. The author defines spillover as the situation where the “worker’s experiences on the job carry over into the nonwork area, and possibly vice versa, such that there develops a similarity in the patterning of work and nonwork life” (p. 111) while compensation suggests that the work domain is somehow deficient and drives the employee to seek compensatory fulfillment in the nonwork domain.

Ontological Issues

Using a qualitative view of work-nonwork conflict we can begin to critically examine much of the discourse surrounding work-nonwork conflict in scholarly literature and the popular press. Such work commonly makes reference to ‘work-nonwork balance’ as some

desirable state where conflict is minimized (Caproni, 1997; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, in press; Kofodimos, 1993; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). Similarly, Clark (2000) defines balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict. Yet, with all of the research that has been done in this field there is still no definite answer to the much-posed question, “What is the optimum allocation of time between work and nonwork domains?” Scholarly literature has yet to delineate the proper ‘balance’ for employees. Moreover the elusiveness of the concept seems to suggest that it is both unique to the individual and not exclusively a matter of hours and minutes.

Following from a critical analysis of the literature, we begin to recognize that there exists a dichotomy on the definition of work-nonwork conflict from an ontological basis (see Figure 1). Some scholars view work-family conflict as a situation of imbalance created when an individual allocates an unequal amount of time or effort across domains (Clark, 2000; Greenhaus, et al., in press; Kirchmeyer, 2000; Kofodimos, 1993). Such a perspective is time-based and suggests a quantitative approach to inquiry. Meanwhile, other scholars argue that the quality of one’s roles determines whether conflict is experienced (Bailyn, 1993; Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Burke, 1989; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). Accordingly, this view is meaning-based and suggests a more qualitative approach to inquiry. In light of these ontological differences, an understanding of work-nonwork conflict can only be enriched by valuing both approaches.

In their review of the literature Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) distinguish three forms of work-nonwork conflict: a) time-based, b) strain-based, and c) behavior-based conflict. The authors acknowledge that time-based conflict is often the most salient and explain that it occurs when devoting time to the demands of one domain consumes time needed to meet the

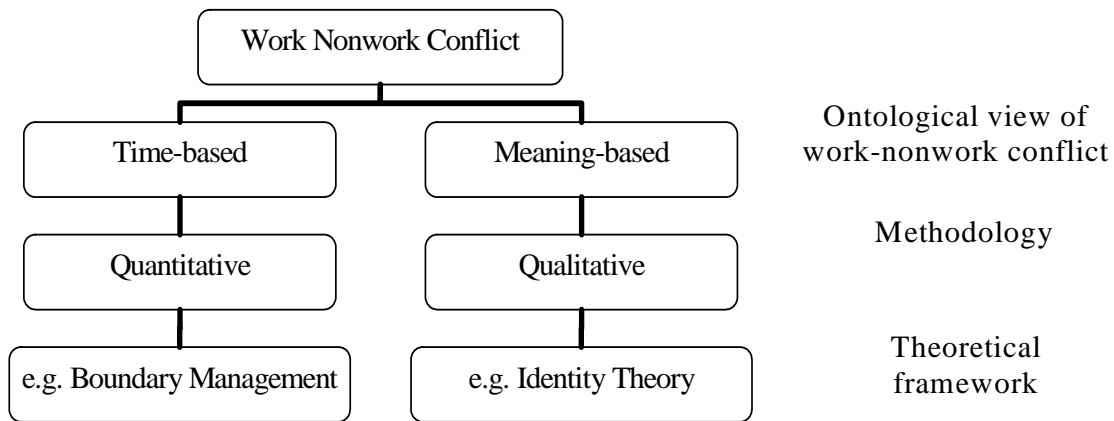


Figure 1. Ontological dichotomy of work-nonwork conflict within existing literature.

demands of another. Strain-based conflict occurs when strain from one domain (e.g. fatigue or anxiety) makes it physically or emotionally difficult to meet the demands of the other domain. Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) described behavior-based conflict as a form of spillover in which behaviors developed in one domain interfere with role performance in another domain. For example, a nurturing approach to problem solving might be effective at home but ineffective in an aggressive workplace, such as a police force. The authors' recognition that time-based conflict is the most salient provides some explanation as to why few scholars since have focused their efforts on expanding our knowledge on either strain- or behavior-based conflict. Instead, time-based conflict seems relatively overstated in the literature. And yet, as Thompson & Bunderson (2001) illustrate;

It is not difficult to think of cases where emotional considerations outweigh purely quantitative time considerations. Who would say, for instance, that 2 hours of angry time with the family are more desirable than a half hour of harmonious time (p. 20)?

In focusing on a time-based perspective of work-nonwork conflict researchers inadvertently neglected these perceptual considerations that are indeed relevant to the intersection of work and nonwork.

In a recent study by Greenhaus, et al. (in press) work-family balance was conceptualized as being “independent of an individual’s desires or values” (p. 4). The authors defined balance as achievable through equal time commitment across roles, rather than a range of different patterns of commitment. Contrary to their hypotheses, they found that individuals who spent more time on family tasks than work, rather than an equal amount, invariably experienced the highest levels of satisfaction. Greenhaus, et al. conclude that a strictly quantitative definition of work-family balance could not fully explain these empirical findings. Further, the authors suggest that a subjective measure of work and family roles is necessary to more fully understand the meaning and consequences of work-family balance.

Following this vein of thought, a new approach has begun to emerge in the literature that examines work-nonwork conflict and the concept of ‘balance’ from this perspective. Rather than viewing time strictly as a commodity to be partitioned economically between life’s different roles, a few scholars have adopted a phenomenological view of time (Daly, 1996a; Daly, 1996b; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001) to supplement our understanding of competing demands. Proponents of this view argue that it is not how much time you devote to a particular life domain, rather it is the significance or meaning of that time to the individual that delineates what an acceptable life balance is. Accordingly, achieving balance is expected to be unique to the individual and to change over the life course.

A study that explores dimensions of meaning among work and leisure domains (Kelly & Kelly, 1994) encourages that, “The balance of...meanings within each domain may begin to provide a scheme for analyzing the components of life that are satisfying and fulfilling” (p.

272). Similarly Daly (1996b) examines the meaning of time for fathers and finds that the dilemma of allocating time at either work or at home with children requires, "...redefining the social meaning and value that is assigned to time" (p. 471) spent in either domain.

At the Individual Level

Work-nonwork conflict is often defined in the literature as a form of inter-role conflict in which work and nonwork demands are mutually incompatible so that meeting demands in one domain makes it difficult to meet demands in the other (Boles, et al., 2001; Burke, 1989; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). Empirically, work-nonwork conflict is often experienced as stress; either episodically or as a general perception of strain (e.g. dissatisfaction, tension, anxiety, and fatigue) about managing multiple roles and their inherent responsibilities (Kossek, et al., 2001; Parker & Hall, 1992; Pleck, et al., 1980; Wiersma, 1994).

Roberts, Hulin, & Rousseau (1978) argue that personal outcomes, such as feeling stressed about work-nonwork conflict, are a function of person, context, and the interaction of the two. Similarly, Parker & Hall (1992) note that "by definition, work-family concerns are intrinsically concerns about complex person situation interactions" (p. 443). But as Kossek et al. (2001) identify, despite their intuitive importance, person-situation interactions are rarely examined in the work-nonwork literature. It is important to keep in mind that an individual's own perception of the situation is what is most likely to influence his or her behavior. As Stupak (2001) states, perceptions are real; they color what we see, how we interpret situations, and how we behave. "So powerful are our perceptions that many psychologists believe that perception is reality" (p. 231).

The potential for an individual to experience work-nonwork conflict seems to depend on a plethora of factors. For example, the quality of an individual's work and nonwork roles

(Barnett & Marshall, 1992; Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Burke, 1989), support from the workplace and spouse (Epstein, 1987; Kossek, et al., 2001; Kossek, et al., 1999; Williams & Alliger, 1994), type of employment (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001), and the congruence of behaviors and values between domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001) are just a few of the many factors that may shape the experience of work-nonwork conflict for any one individual. However, recognition that a combination of factors may impact an individual, how these factors interact, and when they do has yet to be examined in the literature.

Personal Balance

To help solve the challenge of attaining ‘balance’ it is important to recognize the individual’s cognitive and affective stance. Higgins (1989) maintains that meaning or significance is largely personally derived; actions or performances are meaningful to an individual not only because of their specific features, but also due to the salience of the performance to their personal identity. Questions such as, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What’s most important to me?’ are inextricably linked to self-definition. As such, one would expect such questions to be important to consider when delineating the proper balance of time devoted to work and nonwork domains.

Some scholars have recognized that there is the potential for positive emotional spillover, or enrichment, to occur between work and nonwork domains. For example, a feeling of achievement or success in the work domain can often translate into a more positive mood for the individual when he or she returns to the nonwork domain. Thompson & Bunderson (2001) cite Rothbard (1999) in stating, “that work and nonwork do not simply compete but can also interact in a complementary and synergistic way” (p. 23). A variety of contextual factors appear to facilitate work-nonwork enrichment and they include emotional support, work challenge, and task significance (Thompson & Bunderson, 2001).

The Influence of Identity & Life Values

To date, most of the work-nonwork research has given primary consideration to the situation of the individual and not the values the individual holds regarding the work and nonwork domains (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). In their study, Carlson and Kacmar (2000) assert that, “the values that an individual holds about the roles he or she must fulfill in each life domain have significant implications for experiencing conflict” (p. 1032). Further the authors recommend, “the incorporation of values in the work-family conflict literature...because life role values are central to organizing meaning and action for working people. Values motivate action and are the basis from which individuals define their roles” (p. 1035). Carlson & Kacmar conceptualize life role values as being based on what that individual believes to be important to, central to, or a priority in his or her life. Further, they distinguish between values and role involvement. According to Carlson & Kacmar, involvement reflects how engrossed an individual actually is in a domain, not the value he or she assigns that domain. However, Caproni (1997) argues that identifying and living by key life priorities is problematic. Using critical theory, Caproni challenges the assumption that work-nonwork conflict can somehow be mitigated by the careful prioritization of life values. She argues that values do not fall into ‘clean dichotomies’ and that, “people are inherently ambivalent about their goals, feelings and choices” (p. 51). Further, Caproni suggests that attaining balance is an unachievable goal because of the unpredictability of life and our ambivalence toward life role values.

An individual’s affective and cognitive stances cannot be ignored in an attempt to better understand work-nonwork conflict. Indeed, work-nonwork conflict is defined on the basis of individual perception. And although their influence may be more difficult to predict than Thompson & Bunderson (2001) propose, I anticipate that individual values, goals, and identity will strongly impact the results of this study.

Phenomenological Approach to the Problem

A phenomenological approach is primarily an attempt to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those individuals being studied. Bruyn (1966) states that, “phenomenology serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as these individuals see it” (p. 90). In order to better understand the experience of work-nonwork conflict, it is desirable to learn the individual’s perceptions of the various interactions that take place between the individual and the workplace, the individual and their family, and the individual and the self.

Most phenomenological studies have their roots in the philosophical perspectives of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and later philosophical discussions by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Speigelberg, 1982). More recent methodological guides often cite the writings of such scholars as Van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994). The researcher who embraces the tenets of these authors would focus on the meaning of individual experiences and would ask individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences. After bracketing his or her preconceived ideas about the phenomenon, they would seek to understand it through the voices of the informants (Creswell, 1998). Ultimately, a phenomenological study would end with the reader better understanding the essential invariant structure of the experience, recognizing that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists for all informants (Moustakas, 1994).

Like all phenomenological research, the present study seeks to gain a better understanding of work-nonwork conflict by listening to the voices of informants. However, this study begins to diverge from classical phenomenology in that it seeks to identify the issues and interactions that shape the experiences of informants rather than elucidating an essential and invariant structure of the experience. The rationale for this divergence in design is

threefold. First, as identified earlier, the scholarly literature does not yet offer a universal definition of work-nonwork conflict. As such, it would appear that further work is warranted to more accurately characterize the structural conditions that give rise to this experience among individuals. Specifically, this study seeks only to describe *how* the phenomenon was experienced rather than pursuing a description of *what* emotions individuals have experienced. While this may appear to be a subtle distinction it follows the methodological tenets of Moustakas (1994) as he differentiates between a structural (*how*) and structural (*what*) description of the phenomenon during data analysis. Secondly, until such work can be done an essential meaning of work-nonwork conflict offers little practical use for employers, policy makers, and individuals whom are attempting to mitigate this experience. At this point in time on the research horizon, little effect can come without first a richer understanding of the individual conditions and perceptions that create the lived experience of work-nonwork conflict. And while the true essence of work-nonwork conflict may still elude us, this research aims to make some progress toward that end.

Thirdly, the deviation from a classical phenomenological ‘essence’ is based on a philosophical assumption; that reality is subjective and is therefore unique to each individual. Stewart (1994), co-editor of a book on feminist research approaches, recommends that feminist researchers should try to see each woman as unique and avoid the search for a single unified or coherent definition or voice. And while this study does not employ a feminist approach, it does seek to understand the perception of work-nonwork conflict that is unique to each individual.

Assumptions

Creswell (1998, p. 52) recommends bracketing or suspending one’s preconceptions in order to fully understand the experience of the subject and to not impose an a priori

hypothesis on the experience. In order to let the meaning of work-nonwork conflict to show itself as it presents itself in lived experience, we must let go, for a moment at least, some of our assumptions. We must be set free from held notions in order to attune ourselves to hear what the participants themselves tell us. These assumptions, theories, and explanations about work-nonwork conflict may include:

1. The idea that work-nonwork conflict is detrimental. Many media accounts portray work-nonwork conflict as involving neglected children, selfish and materialistic mothers, and time-crazed dual-earner couples. In sharp contrast, many researchers such as Hoffman (1989) and Barnett & Rivers (1996) have found benefits of maternal employment for children, men, and women. This research suggests that work-nonwork conflict can indeed be a positive experience for some people. It is important to bracket this value judgment and to be open to the possibility that work-nonwork conflict can be both positive and negative.

2. The assumption that someone is to blame. Is the boss demanding too much of our time? Is our spouse not 'doing his share?' Or have we, as professional women with families, 'bitten off more than we can chew?' A desire to assign blame presupposes some harm has been done. Holcomb (1998) found that working mothers often experience guilt as a response to, "each day, in large ways and small, [finding one's] choices scrutinized, [one's] motivation under attack, the well being of [one's] children constantly called into question" (p. 22). In many cases there is not one party to blame, work-nonwork conflict has simply become a fact of life for those living in modern society. It is important as a researcher to be aware of this propensity to assign blame, and to try to remain open to a variety of causes and explanations for work-nonwork conflict.

3. Work-nonwork conflict is both chronic and acute. The phenomenon brings to mind a daily struggle; a picture of a women racing through life, with only enough time to

satisfy the basic needs of her family, neglecting her own emotional needs, and caught in a painful ‘catch 22’ where she’s neither able to escape the exchange of time deprivation for financial resources, nor take control of it. Is this really an accurate image of work-nonwork conflict? It is important for the researcher to bracket this depiction found commonly in the popular culture and to be open to different characterizations and depictions regarding what work-nonwork conflict is “really like”.

While work-nonwork conflict is, no doubt, a complex human experience, this study seeks to better understand the perceptions that shape it for mothers working in academia. By stating my own assumptions and predispositions, I hope to more clearly hear and interpret their voices. And while I cannot hope to discover all that can be known about work-nonwork conflict, we may move incrementally forward in our quest for understanding.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Previous researchers have tended to study work-nonwork conflict from an objective stance; cataloging time and counting roles, as though the individuals' emotions, values, and personal perceptions had little impact on framing the experience. But over a decade of quantitative research has demonstrated that a complete understanding of the uniquely human experience known as work-nonwork conflict cannot be achieved via the enumeration of time and effort alone. Rather the emotional, intangible qualities of an experience and the meanings associated with that experience must be taken into account. The proposed study therefore aims to contribute to this understanding by applying a phenomenological approach to explicate the conditions and individual perceptions that shape the experience of work-nonwork conflict among participants. Colaizzi (1973) supported the importance of the phenomenological description when he stated, "Without thereby first disclosing the foundations of a phenomenon, no progress whatsoever can be made concerning it, not even a first faltering step can be taken towards it, by science or by any other kind of cognition" (p. 28). Thus, the primary aim of this study is to uncover the individual perceptions and conditions that form the foundation of work-nonwork conflict.

Participants

The participants of this study were female employees of a liberal arts University in Western Canada. The sample was further restricted to professionals, employed as either tenured or tenure-seeking faculty. The tenure-seeking participants held positions such as tenure-track professors, term appointment instructors who held graduate degrees and were seeking tenure-track positions, and academic assistants. Each employment category had requirements for significant education or specialized skills which would be common for career-

oriented women (Taylor & Spencer, 1988). Anecdotal evidence suggests that tenure-seeking faculty members are under high pressure to perform on the job – vying for limited tenured positions and continuing appointments. Participants were required to have intact families (in order to avoid issues of step-parenting or divorce) including at least one dependent child. Furthermore, limiting the study to young families would (a) provide some uniformity in the nonwork demands that are present between participants, and (b) ensure that those nonwork demands are relatively rigorous compared to other stages of the life cycle¹. Daly's work (1996b) used similar sample criteria to recruit fathers and found both a number of variations in the meaning of family time and a number of potential areas of work-nonwork conflict. As such, it is anticipated that the participants of this study will be situationally predisposed to work-nonwork conflict.

Participant recruitment involved advertising the study via an email solicitation message through a group on campus that serves the interests of female scholars. The group is designed to organize presentations on issues involving women in academia and to showcase various female scholars as speakers. The Chairperson of the group was contacted and asked to transmit the message using the group's email distribution list. The email solicitation included a brief description of the study and invited recipients to contact the researcher if interested in participating in interviews. Upon expressing interest in the study, potential participants were screened during a 10-minute face-to-face conversation to determine eligibility. Participants were asked about their current work-nonwork situation and if they felt had recently

¹ It is important to acknowledge that other groups of women deal with work-nonwork conflicts as well and that the way in which the sample has been chosen does not diminish those conflicts or deny them. Similarly, while the sample represents a narrow version of the definition of family it does not intend to applaud one view of family over others. Some academic women juggle the care of elderly parents and their work; others are single parents. In addition, work-nonwork conflict can be conceptualized in ways other than in terms of family. Some academics also have considerable volunteer or religious obligations that compete for their time and energy. Nevertheless, there are structural imperatives that promote work over all else. The use of a phenomenological approach is an attempt to elucidate the different dynamics for this particular sample.

experienced work-nonwork conflict. Final selection of subjects was based on their suitability (as described earlier) and to ensure that a variety of faculty areas were sampled.

A total of 15 women originally expressed interest in the study, 5 of whom were excluded primarily because of demographic considerations (e.g., divorced or not married, children older than 18). A total of 10 women participated in the study; 2 of them held tenure, 3 held tenure-track positions but had not yet gained tenure, 2 held contract teaching positions, 1 was a permanent academic assistant, and 2 held continuing appointments in administrative roles². Table 1 shows the average demographic profile of the research participants.

Table 1.

Mean Demographic Profile of Research Participants (n=8)

Variable	Mean Value	SD
Age (yrs.)	39	5
Length of time employed by University (yrs.)	6.5	6.1
Number of Children	1.8	1.0
Age of Children (yrs.)	8	5

Procedure

Participants were asked to take part in an interview ranging in length from 1½ to 2 hours. At the time of the interview the participant was given a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A). This letter contained information regarding the purpose of the research, the nature of participation, and asked for the participant’s permission for the interview to be audio

² These two participant’s transcripts were later eliminated from the analysis in an effort to increase the sample’s homogeneity.

recorded. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participants. The interview followed an open-ended, exploratory format which began with the request: Tell me about your work and your family. Ensuing questions were drawn from the participant's comments concerning their obligations at work and at home and how these life spheres may or may not conflict with one another. For example, some of the following questions were: How is your performance judged at work? How would you define success as a mother? Can you describe a time when work and home obligations conflicted? How would you define work-nonwork conflict? How often does work and home conflict for you? The formal interview protocol is provided in Appendix B. The average length of the interviews was 90 minutes. Eight of the interviews were conducted in a private office on campus and two were held in the participant's office. All of the interviews were audio recorded.

Treatment of Data

Given that this project is an attempt to move the study of work-nonwork conflict further toward a qualitative, and specifically a phenomenological tradition of inquiry, a general rather than a detailed approach to analysis was chosen. The biographical approach proposed by Denzin (1989), as cited by Creswell (1998, p. 147), was used as the template for analysis, rather than the specific approaches to phenomenological analysis advanced by Moustakas (1994). The steps of analysis were as follows:

1. The researcher bracketed her own experience of work-nonwork conflict in order to help separate her own biases and preconceptions from the experiences of the participants.
 2. The raw data as recorded were transcribed verbatim for each participant.
 3. Each of the participant's transcripts was read in order to acquire a feeling for them.
- Initial notes were made in the margins.

4. Horizontalization of the data was achieved by identifying significant statements in each of the transcripts that are relevant to the phenomenon (e.g. phrases, ideas, and sentences) and treating each statement as having equal worth.

5. These statements were then grouped into meaning units using ATLAS/ti software. In this difficult step, the meaning unit arrived at must not sever the connection with the original description. The meaning units discover and bring out those meanings of the phenomenon that are hidden in the various contexts of the original transcripts (Colaizzi, 1973).

6. Clusters of meaning units were aggregated from the significant statements. From these meaning units structural descriptions were written to explicate the conditions or perceptions surrounding work-nonwork conflict that shaped the experience for participants.

7. A final validation step was performed by the researcher via a 30-minute debriefing session held with each of the participants (see debriefing protocol in Appendix C). The researcher presented the themes to the participant and asked if the derived structural descriptions closely resembled their original description and intended meaning. Where disparities were identified, the participant and researcher discussed the theme and its structural description until a more accurate interpretation was achieved.

Analysis of Data

The research question was stated as follows: From the perspective of the participant, what shapes their experience of work-nonwork conflict? Taped interviews of the ten participants were transcribed and the significant statements extracted from these transcriptions become the raw data for analysis. As the significant statements were being extracted from the original transcriptions, it became apparent that two of the ten participants' descriptions differed in their emphasis from the rest of the sample. After careful examination of these descriptions and contrasting the employment conditions of these women (i.e. continuing

appointments in administrative roles) to the rest of the sample, it was decided that their transcriptions would be eliminated from the analysis³. The elimination of these two transcriptions from the analysis increased the sample's homogeneity for the work domain. After the extraction of all significant statements from the remaining transcriptions was complete, duplicate statements were eliminated.

Meaning units were formulated from the significant statements. These formulated meaning units are listed in Appendix D. These meaning units were arrived at by reading, rereading, and reflecting upon the significant statements in the transcriptions to capture the original meaning of the participant's statement.

Meaning units were then combined and organized into clusters to help create structural descriptions of the participants' experience. These structural descriptions represent themes, conditions, and perceptions of the experience that emerged from the participant's descriptions. This process of abstraction, developing the structural themes by combining single meaning units, is summarized in Appendix E. These clusters were referred back to the original descriptions in order to validate them.

Ensuring Authenticity

Several strategies have been established to achieve authenticity and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Creswell, 1998). To enhance the integrity of qualitative research, Creswell (1998, p. 203) advises researchers to utilize at least two of these commonly accepted strategies. In this study, four primary strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

³ While all of the participants were classified as faculty, according the University Board of Governors, the particular positions held by these two participants did not require them to perform any teaching or research functions; two of the primary activities of the other participants. As such, the criteria for performance and promotion of these two individuals were significantly different from the rest of the sample. Interview transcripts from these individuals reflected these differences.

Before interviewing participants, I attempted to clarify my biases and perspectives that were likely to influence the interpretation of findings. By stating these early on in the research process, both the researcher and reader can be aware of possible prejudices. As a married, early-career female contemplating a family, I approached this study from a perspective influenced by my own personal situation.

The use of ATLAS/ti software allowed me to create an electronic audit trail of the findings so that it was possible to trace themes back to discrete units of text in the interview transcripts. This procedure allowed me to reexamine meaning units of data to ensure that formulated themes have remained true to the voices of the participants.

In reporting the results, I have made an effort to offer a rich, detailed description of the phenomenon. The use of extensive quotes is intended to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of work-nonwork conflict among the participants. Although specific participants are not identified, these quotes represent a cross-section of interviews.

Finally, debriefing sessions were held with all eight of the participants following the data analysis and served as a means to check the authenticity of the findings and to hone my final interpretations. The participants were asked if the structural descriptions had captured the essence of their original descriptions and to summarize their perception of work-nonwork conflict. Each debriefing interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio recorded. Some key points raised in the debriefing sessions were transcribed so they could be reported verbatim in the results and discussion.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Emergent Themes

Although there was some diversity among participants in terms of their career stage (ranging from 1 to 20 years at the University) and family life-stage (children ranging in age from 6-months to 15-years old) there was significant overlap in their descriptions of work-nonwork conflict. Nine structural descriptions were developed from the raw interview data that convey how various conditions and perceptions shape work-nonwork conflict among the participants. The structural descriptions are often perceptual in nature; they represent the specific ways participants view their work and nonwork worlds and how they see themselves operating within them. These nine structural descriptions were then divided into two overarching themes; institutional and individual, from the context of their influence. Structural descriptions belonging to the institutional theme are those that are organizationally derived. Alternatively, the structural descriptions belonging to the individual theme are more personally derived and often reflect personal motivations. The structural descriptions will be described below using illustrative quotes. The quotes are from a variety of the women interviewed and have been edited to preserve anonymity; pseudonyms have been used and identifying details have been omitted or changed as necessary.

Institutional Themes

Tenure as Freedom

This structural theme expresses how the acquisition of tenure or other professional titles and accolades (e.g. rate of publishing and teaching awards) seems to confer some sort of freedom or job autonomy. As such, the individual feels liberated to pursue personal areas of interest in research, be more outspoken on committees, take more time for self or family when necessary, or relax their work-pace without fear of institutional retribution or career penalty.

Once you have tenure you don't have to worry that if somebody doesn't like you personally it's not going to be a problem...you know you're work stands on its own. And I had a professor at the University [where I got my PhD] who said to me, 'always remember that your CV is your security blanket, so if it's good nobody can really hurt you or disagree with you.'

Earlier in this same interview the participant articulated how gaining tenure allowed her to feel less self-conscious about acknowledging her family in the work domain:

I started to realize that, you know what, it is important to talk about my children at work and it is important to have pictures of them on my desk and up until that point I didn't know anybody who did in our faculty. So it was sort of a conscious decision on my part to really celebrate that I'm a parent and I'm going to say, 'you know what, I can't make this meeting today because I have a sick child,' and I stopped hiding those things...I think that possibly getting tenure helped me to not care as much anymore.

Similarly, another tenured participant described how her earning professional accolades beyond tenure gave her the added confidence to be more discerning in her choice of committee work and to be more outspoken.

Psychologically it's been good; I guess I feel like it's a plateau. You're climbing and climbing and it's quite nice. There's a feeling that I get to pick and choose, I get to work on what I want to work on. If there are issues that I care about I get to choose which ones they are...A while ago there were a few things that happened that I wasn't very happy with and I had a chance to talk to senior administration and they made the mistake of asking me what I thought. And I thought, you know, I have nothing more to lose, so I said, 'things are really crappy...you've got to fix this and this and this,' and they listened to me.

This career-stage of having arrived or having finally been accepted into the institution was anticipated even among participants that had not yet gained tenure. To all participants gaining tenure was proof of their professional merit that coincided with a release of their own job performance anxieties; anxieties that often involved having to neglect work from time to time in favor of urgent nonwork obligations.

Job Autonomy

The structural theme, Job Autonomy, describes how individuals recognized that the nature of their academic profession served to mitigate work-nonwork conflict. The flexibility and personal control they have to schedule when and where they work allows them to more easily meet the demands of the nonwork domain.

Well, that's one of the advantages of living the academic life; you have a lot more flexibility in [the] jobs. We can sort of manage our schedules a fair amount. [My son] was born in April and I didn't work in the summer and then in the fall I worked four days a week. I worked at home a fair bit, I stayed home one day a week with him...you know I can work from home a reasonable amount. The only thing that you are really, really tied down to is your teaching schedule and otherwise you get to slate your meetings and things so you can mostly manage.

Similarly, a participant recognized the uniqueness of the academic work schedule in comparison to other occupations even within the same institution.

So that's a big difference from working in business or that kind of thing. Or nine to five or like one of our department secretaries is a single mother and you know they kind of have to be there and I could just say, 'my kid's sick; I'm working at home and call me if it's an emergency,' and that's a real bonus to say that I can do that.

The fact that participants did not have to answer to an immediate supervisor contributed to a sense of personal sovereignty. Support for this theme can be found in the work of Herman & Gyllstrom (1977) that studied the work-family tensions of university employees. The authors reported more severe work-family tension experienced by staff than by faculty members. Despite working more hours than the staff, faculty members felt they had more control over their work schedule which served to mitigate these tensions. In a similar vein, another participant articulated what happened when this sense of autonomy was lost. For her, work-nonwork conflict was created by her loss of control over her work world.

Well, actually work-nonwork conflict only exists for me when it's imposed. When I'm expected to create boundaries that I don't believe should be there; if somebody in a workplace or an academic environment [expects me] to draw lines....I think that work-nonwork conflict comes from those expectations....I can write a paper just as well when breastfeeding as not, or discuss something with a student on the phone.

The ability to exercise personal choice over matters of work versus nonwork is key to mitigating the experience of conflict.

I don't have a lot of work conflicts because I control my work, I control my family time and where I put it is my decision....When boundaries are imposed that when I feel stress, that's when I experience conflict; when somebody says I must instead of me deciding.

For many participants the fact that their work offered such autonomy was one of the most attractive features of academia. Compared to other professions, many saw that academia offered a great deal of potential for pursuing nonwork aspirations, such as having a family and children, without forfeiting their prior investment in career.

Work-Environment

The structural theme, Work Environment, expresses how individuals recognized the institution as an 'old boys club' characterized by a masculine style of administration. Despite that fact that participants recognized that there were women in senior administrative positions within the institution, they described the work environment as being dominated by top-down decision making, a hierarchical structure, non-collaborative culture, and a work-as-the-priority attitude. Individuals felt the need to either (a) shield themselves from it by earning tenure or other professional merits, or (b) operate within the institutional norms by adopting the work-as-the-priority persona while at work. An example of this was given by the following tenured participant:

I remember sitting in a meeting with [some faulty members] and the Dean and I was the only woman and the [chairperson] wanted us to meet at 7[am] and there was no way I was going to meet at 7 no matter what. And I'm not sure if I got to say that but [the Dean] said I have to drop kids off at the bus at 8:15; we can meet after that. And I just thought, wow, he can say it; I can say it. Now I know in this world it is far more accepted for him to say it than it is for me to say it, right, but if I say it then it's, 'Oh she puts her kids first,' but I'm past that now, I don't care if they say that...But I'm very cognizant of the fact that it is. And so sometimes I think I'll wait and I will let a man say it first. But either way...it will get said.

Later, this same participant articulates her sense of needing to conform to the masculine environment.

I hope what I bring to the faculty is women's way of thinking and working and they are counter to the traditional male way of working. And so I guess in terms of publishing and my CV I still think very much like a man. I really do. I publish this many things, I get this many research grants, you know, because I think that's the way I protect myself and I do feel like I have to protect myself which is very weird, but I do.

Having to 'protect oneself' or conform to institutional expectations was a common sentiment among participants. Being female in academia, many women described feeling like an outsider in a masculine work environment. However, participants that were in the early stages of their career (e.g. pre-tenure) were likely to downplay these feelings of alienation or to confess a naiveté toward them.

Motherhood as a Professional Liability

This structural theme portrays how women often felt the need to disguise or deny motherhood responsibilities while in the work domain to avoid being seen as less serious or committed to their work than their male or non-parent coworkers. Furthermore, they were sensitive to the issue of imposing their family or children upon the workplace.

When my daughter was 3 months old I was spending my nights at an academic conference and...I wasn't putting her [in daycare]. I experienced gender distinction at that time where I'm walking into a conference with my daughter and I was told I would be asked to sit by the door or, 'Can you leave with her if she starts to fuss?' [Later] my husband attended the conference with her [and they said], 'Please don't feel the need to get up and leave,' and, 'Oh, isn't this wonderful.' The expectation was that, as a woman, I would impose my child upon them whereas my husband was the hero. I think that work-family conflict comes from those expectations....There are some people who believe that children have no place at work and that's where conflict occurs.

This structural theme is laden with gender stereotypes of what is acceptable for women versus men in the work domain. A similar theme emerged in a study done by Kofodimos (1993) that examined issues of work-nonwork conflict among top executives and managers in organizations across North America. Kofodimos summarizes that, "female executives and managers feel that their organizations are scrutinizing them particularly closely for signs that they cannot be relied on in senior positions because their personal lives might take precedence over work demands" (p. 26).

Related to this theme, the following participant felt a certain social pressure to not fail in the face of combining both work and nonwork responsibilities. Seeing herself as a role model for other women she did not want to be the exception that proved the (gender stereotype) rule that women can't or shouldn't attempt to maintain both a career and family life.

And I don't know how single parents do it because I sure depend on my husband when those [rough] times come along. But if it's your personal life and your kids, or something at home is going up in flames at the same time as they are at work, which fortunately happens rarely, it's really nasty. It is really nasty. And those are the places where you think okay this is where everyone else is looking at me and saying, 'See, I knew someone with kids couldn't do this job.' And no one has ever said that to me. So I mean it's not that there's someone at work waiting for me to fall down on my face. If anything, they're very supportive in the department. But you still feel pressure not to fall down. I'm representing all those mothers that are trying to do their job. If I fall down I'm the example of, 'See, mothers can't do this.' So there is a certain amount of, I don't know if it's real pressure or imagined pressure to be successful in holding all of the crap together. And not letting people know it's hard.

Another perspective of this theme was presented by expectant or new mothers and their tendency to feel obligated to shore up work efforts so to appear to be sufficiently committed to the work domain. Women who were anticipating taking parental leave at some point in the near future described a need to invest greater efforts in the work domain prior to taking leave.

I'm trying to put my 2-cents in when I think of things...and sort of try to be a little more outspoken that I normally am. I tend to sit back and help out wherever I can but I'm trying to be a bit more outspoken because I think it may help a bit with my career; with getting tenure...and the fact that I'm going to be going on maternity leave sort of makes me feel I should contribute more while I'm here and work harder. That's been a factor as well [in that] I'm trying to sort of, I guess, make my mark on things while I'm here.

Another tenure-track participant also recalled a sense of responsibility or obligation to contribute to the workplace while she was on maternity leave:

The job is important. I went into work actually all through maternity leave. And the why of that was really self-induced. I felt a sense of responsibility...I came in once or twice a week. And I would spend most of the afternoon in the office but I would also work at home a fair amount.

There was no formal requirement by the institution for women to contribute to the workplace while on parental leave, but the fact that these women felt that they could not

neglect the work domain in favor of a newborn speaks to the culture of the organization. Perlow (1998) cites several authors to support the notion that, “organizational culture, built from underlying values and beliefs about what is important, valued, and rewarded within an organization, assumes and carries crucial control functions” (p. 328). Further, Perlow insists that it is this type of control that compels employees to conform to the work norms and that can often influence how they lead their lives both in and out of the workplace.

Individual Themes

Work as an Oasis

The structural theme, *Work as an Oasis*, represents the feeling among participants that the work domain is much more controlled or predictable and that expectations or job requirements are more clearly defined than in the nonwork domain. This often contributed to work being seen as a ‘retreat’ or ‘oasis’ from the sometimes-chaotic nature of the nonwork domain.

Work is almost an oasis for me. It’s very predictable. Home isn’t predictable. And I don’t think it should be. It’s not that I would want my kids to always do exactly the same thing everyday but it’s the nature of things.

Later, the same participant adds:

On a day to day basis I really find work to be my safe haven. Everything’s the way I want it in my office. Nobody moves anything in there because it’s my office. Whereas at home there’s no office, when you put something in your bathroom there’s no guarantee that it will be there ten minutes from now...So it really is nice to come to work and to have that sort of sane time.

Work was also seen as an oasis from the perspective that expectations within this domain were much more clearly defined – and less comprehensive - than compared to the nonwork domain.

Work is a very predictable, formal, structured place to be...I guess it's a really nice haven. I make home sound so terrible, and it isn't. But it's very nice to have that structured presence in your daily life where you know what you're supposed to do. You know when you're supposed to do it. There's a timetable, there's deadlines, there's clear goals....And being at home is not clearly defined. You're counseling, you're babysitting, you're driving, you're everything to everybody all the time. And on top of having the kids you also have a marriage to maintain which is not an easy thing.

A mother with a young child at home described how she relished the privacy and solitude of the work domain;

Being able to close the door on my office, check my e-mail for half an hour and not have anyone say, 'mommy, mommy, mommy!' or 'Honey, do you know where this is?' because my husband is constantly losing things. So if I were a stay-at-home-mom, and [if I were] home on maternity leave I think that's what [I would] miss; that luxury of being totally on my own. And not to answer the phone, and not answer anybody at the door if I choose to...But I think that contributes to my sense of well being. It makes me a much happier person at home.

Invariably, all of the participants recognized that the work domain was very distinct from the nonwork domain in this respect. The work domain offered an opportunity for them to think their own thoughts, reclaim control over their time and space, and shed the awesome responsibility of motherhood – even if only for a temporary period.

The Need for Work

The Need for Work describes the individual's desire to preserve their sense of self or self-worth through maintaining paid employment. A choice to not be a stay-at-home-mom was one based largely on a need to preserve one's intellectual-self (academic knowledge or professional title). Furthermore, many individuals described their desire to work as an opportunity to do something exclusively for their own satisfaction.

I'm doing what I want to be doing and I think that's why [work and nonwork] don't conflict as much as they could. Because I know that I couldn't be at home, I need to be doing what fulfills me and I'm thinking if I'm happy then I can be a great parent and a great spouse. But if I'm not happy, I can't be good to anybody else I don't think.

The desire to do something for oneself was a common sentiment among participants. Similarly, Friedman & Greenhaus (2000) also found that women felt better about their families when they spent more time on themselves, as opposed to exclusively spending time on nurturing others. In fact, for many of the women in this study taking the time for work seemed to serve as a balance to the emotional and physical drain of motherhood.

If I didn't have [my career] I'd have to find something else to fill that void. And if I didn't have it, or some replacement for it, I'd probably start resenting the mother role a little bit. Because I would feel like, 'Oh I'm trapped here doing this and I need to be doing more for me.' Now I have something for me and I also have [my family]. So I have everything I want. So I think it helps me feel like I'm doing something for myself.

Understandably, the women involved in this study had invested considerable time and effort to cultivate their careers. Not surprising, then, is the participant's desire to maintain that career through paid employment.

I also discovered, at one point I did stay home with our kids for a while and I discovered that's not where I should be. I'm not the kind of person who can sit with children and say 'potty' all day long and not have it affect the rest of my life....But I could see, it was like I was turning into a mental midget, 'I have to get out of here!' And I became more short-tempered with the children. I'm just someone who needs that adult contact. I found it made me a worse parent rather than a better parent to be at home with them.

The need to maintain paid employment and a respectable work identity was salient among participants. Regardless of the subtle differences in need, the work domain remained an important sphere of these women's lives.

The Benefits of Family

This structural theme represents the multitude of ways that individuals recognized that having a family or being a mother positively contributed to (a) their ability to do their job, (b) a stronger or more positive sense of self, and/or (b) a more robust outlook on life (e.g. perspective on what's trivial and what's important).

I think that, this is a strange one, but I think that with kids, maybe I'm a little kinder and a little more understanding...When I was starting out after I graduated as an undergrad I got a job as a sales rep and I was just young and wanted to do well in work. And there was another fellow there who had a young child. And we were at this meeting and he was leaving early because he wanted to see his daughter before she went to bed. And at the time, this sounds terrible, but at the time I was thinking, 'How awful. Your career should come first.' Now I hate myself for thinking that...so I have gained that insight. I'm a little disappointed in myself that I didn't have that before. So it's given me a little more understanding of other people and their constraints.

This quote demonstrates the change in life priorities that often accompanies having children; from work-as-the-priority to family-as-the-priority. Later, the same participant adds:

I feel like it's so good for people in that, especially in our privileged society, we have so much, so much more than we need. We have way too much time to be wrapped up in ourselves. After you've finished your education, started your career...then we just have all this time to be wrapped up in ourselves and to worry about these petty concerns. And once you have kids, there's not time to be so wrapped up in yourself or to worry about petty concerns. And so you have to really learn more about the things that are real...And I just think that it's good for me to not have so much time obsessing about myself or, 'Oh this is going bad at work,' or this or that because it's not important anymore. So I just think it's really good for me and for people in general to have to think about somebody else instead of your own needs all the time. [It] makes for a better, more well rounded person.

Through having a family of her own, this participant had gained both an appreciation for others' priorities as well as a more grounded outlook on life. Similarly, the following quote illustrates how family was seen to put workplace problems into perspective.

People fight for really small stakes [at work]; things that don't really matter. And sometimes I get caught up in that too. It's the politics and the pettiness of it and I have to kind of step back or have something happen, you know, like my daughter say, 'Hey, I need a new grad dress,' and that becomes the most important thing in the world. It allows me to take a big step back from my own work.

With this new life perspective on what's truly important comes a genuine understanding for others with children and the challenges that they also face in combining family with work or study.

A student came to me for an extension on her homework and normally, I'm not used to giving extensions. But once I had kids I became much more mellow. So instead of saying, 'Absolutely no way,' I said, 'Well why?' Well it turns out she was a single mother, she had a 4 year-old who was sick and couldn't go to daycare, she had no family or anything and so she couldn't do anything but stay at home with him.

The benefits of having a family are many but for these women the most salient ones were those that made an impact their outlook on life. An example of such a benefit that was given by participants was the tendency to worry less about trivial matters and to be more understanding of others.

Work-Nonwork Integration

Work-nonwork integration describes how the two dominant spheres of life; work and nonwork, are similar. There are often commonalities among the obligations and skills required by each domain. For example, an ability to have patience or offer encouragement is a critical skill for both a teacher and a mother. This theme also speaks to the low boundary separation between the work and nonwork domain of the participant. This was demonstrated in describing behaviors such as bringing children to work or taking work home on weekends.

I do a lot of work at home. And on the flip side, if there's some home stuff I need to do during work hours, or even when I'm at work, I don't feel bad about that at all because I know that also if I'm at home I'm often doing work. And I don't compartmentalize it very much. I mix it all together a lot. It's what needs to be done right then. Or what's most convenient for me to do right then. If I'm working and I suddenly remember I need to make the kids' pediatrician appointment, I'll stop and do it then even though it's work phone and work time. Because if I'm at home and I remember, 'Oh I need to do this review,' and I have some time I'll do it at home. I feel like I can just kind of mix it all together. And my to-do list is always work and personal mixed together. These are just the things I have to do. And they're prioritized for importance, not based on this is work - this is home. If my home things are more important, they're at the top of the list. And that's what needs to be done today.

In this participant's account of 'mixing it all together,' she describes a very permeable boundary between her work and nonwork domains; tackling nonwork obligations while at work and vice versa. The participant feels able to borrow time from one domain for the benefit of the other, given her perception of the task's priority. The freedom to exert such personal discretion in the work domain is closely linked to the earlier theme of Job Autonomy.

Another aspect of this theme, Work-Nonwork Integration, is that of role resemblance whereby the work-role and nonwork-role have skill or task requirements in common. This sentiment was communicated in the following quote:

There isn't a big separation you know, the mother part and the professor part, it's just all kind of interwoven...The teaching part of it is very similar [to being a mother] and this is something that I've struggled with, it's not a big deal, struggle being too strong a word, but something you try to deal with as a teacher and I realize as I do more and more and as I get older that teaching can be a lot like mothering and mothering can be a lot like teaching, yeah, so there's some interconnections there. Yeah, I think my whole style of being a mother is very much influenced by being [an academic].

Further to this, the participant's final comment on her work role (i.e. "being an academic") having influenced her nonwork role as a mother demonstrated an element of positive spillover.

Level of Consciousness

This structural theme describes the personal awareness or self-knowledge of the participant regarding issues of personal needs, priorities, and core values. A level of consciousness was often indicated by the participants' comments on what was most important to them (e.g. family versus work), the conscious decisions they'd made to organize their lives around these things, and how satisfied they felt with their current work-nonwork balance. Among the participants, a level of consciousness was most strongly stated by those in more established stages of both their career and family.

The family is absolutely the most important thing in my life, not my job. It is a job and I know it's a career and all that sort of thing but, when push comes to shove, this is just a job. My family is forever. So that is number one, it is no matter what, my children always come first, so that just goes without saying. And then, the work; well I like what I do. I mean teaching is everything...I don't think I could do what I do if I didn't absolutely love and feel very passionate about what I do. And then, quite often, things that are important to me as a parent are also important to me as a researcher. Our Dean for many years pointed out to me that I'm fortunate that I see that relationship; that I really work on that because I think that some researchers keep them quite separate. This is my work, this is my family and never the twain shall meet....But you know what, that is what makes me good at what I do.

For this participant, work-nonwork conflict was minimized by her self-knowledge of what was most important to her. While recognizing that work was very important to her, she is resolute in the fact that her family remains her top priority. At the same time however, this quotation reveals that the participant perceives that a synergistic relationship exists between these life priorities (i.e. "...that's what makes me good at what I do.") As such, she is better able to wage an internal debate of where best to devote her time and effort when feelings of work-nonwork conflict inevitably occur. This distinction of what was of primary versus secondary importance to the individual was common among academics with pre-teenage children and that were in the later stages of their career. And while all of the participants

described family as being more important than work, those in the early stages of their career seem tentative about how to enact this.

In many ways, this theme is similar to the concept of self-efficacy developed by Bandura (1977), as cited by Brett & Yogev (1989). People who have a sense of self-efficacy are described as being able to, “bounce back from failure; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worry about what can go wrong” (p. 162). Moreover, Brett & Yogev extend this concept to include professionals that perceive that they are managing their lives effectively and that have made deliberate life choices about their career and family.

Thematic Summary

In summary, the voices of these women indicate two interesting points about work-nonwork conflict. First, several forces simultaneously shape the experience of work-nonwork conflict. Both individual and institutional conditions combine and interact to create a unique perception of work-nonwork conflict for each participant. In addition to this, how each individual is able to manage these conditions, through childcare support, job autonomy, or a level of consciousness, for example, further defines their perception.

Second, the themes presented here are closely interrelated; one may serve to exacerbate or mitigate another. For example, feeling an outsider in a masculine work environment would promote a tendency to deny or disguise motherhood obligations while in the workplace. Alternatively, enjoying both the job autonomy of the academic profession and the social immunity of tenure would enable an individual to better manage work-nonwork conflict as it arises, than an individual without tenure.

Debriefing Sessions & Verification of Results

As mentioned in the methodology, debriefing sessions were conducted with each participant following the analysis of the interview transcripts. The protocol used for the

session is detailed in Appendix C. The purpose of the session was twofold. The primary purpose was to seek the participant's input on the authenticity of the structural descriptions that had been developed from the interview transcripts. While the themes may not be the only possible interpretation of the transcripts, the interpretive patterns (see Appendix E) should be visible and comprehensible to other readers. However, the more relevant issue was whether the interpretation was consistent with the aims of the participants themselves. Thompson (1996) conducted a series of follow-up dialogues with participants so that the interpretation of participant transcripts could be verified by the participants themselves. The utility of such a verification step was revealed during an early debriefing session of my research. After presenting the participant with the preliminary structural description of the theme, Work Environment, the participant indicated that I had misconstrued related comments in her interview. The preliminary structural description conveyed a work environment that was dominated by men; women were the minority and were made to feel like outsiders. While the participant confirmed that she indeed saw the university as an 'old boys club,' as she had said in the original interview, she clarified her statement by indicating she meant this to mean that the institution was dominated by a masculine form of leadership and decision-making style, and not that the institution was administered to the exclusion of women. Further, she explained that it was this masculine form of management, contrary to her own feminine tendencies toward collaboration, open communication, and an acknowledgment of priorities other than work that made her feel like an outsider. With this clarification the theme was revised and participants in subsequent debriefing sessions were asked to consider this subtle distinction. Of these participants, all were in agreement with the revised structural description.

The secondary purpose of the debriefing session was to ask the participant to summarize their work-nonwork experiences by placing herself on a two-by-two componential

analysis that characterized work-nonwork conflict based on the frequency and intensity of conflict (see Figure 2). Following the analysis of the data it became apparent that participant's perceptions and descriptions of work-nonwork conflict could be compared on the basis of both the frequency and the intensity of conflict episodes. To support this characterization we returned to the literature.

		Frequency	
		Low	High
Intensity	Low	Cell 1	Cell 2
	High	Cell 3	Cell 4

Figure 2. Componential analysis: Work-nonwork conflict as a function of the frequency and intensity of conflict.

From the existing literature it is possible to identify at least two forms of conflict. First, conflict exists as an episodic phenomenon, such as when one must make the choice between attending a conference or staying home to care for an infant (Wiersma, 1994). Secondly, Thompson & Bunderson (2001) put forth a form of work-nonwork conflict that exists as a generalized perception, “that one’s work and nonwork lives are, to some extent, incompatible” (p. 25). And while an increased frequency in the former may contribute to a sense of the latter, our research required that participants, at a minimum, experienced work-nonwork conflict as an episodic phenomenon. At the same time, it was recognized that individual perceptions about work-nonwork conflict experiences would yield a range of

affective responses. Among the possible affective responses, stress is the most salient across the work-nonwork literature (Kossek, et al., 2001; Parker & Hall, 1992; Wiersma, 1994). As such, it was decided that the debriefing sessions could fulfill a second purpose whereby participants would be asked to reckon the frequency of their conflict episodes and their respective stressfulness, or intensity, in order to verify both the researcher's interpretation of the participant's descriptions and characterization of their work-nonwork conflict.

The two axes of Figure 2 denote the extent to which the participant's work-nonwork conflict experiences were described as frequent and intense. The vertical axis distinguishes between participants who described feelings of work-nonwork conflict as intense or not (Hi to Low). For the purpose of this study, intensity of a work-nonwork conflict experience is defined as the degree of stress felt during or as a result of the event. Intensity can range from a mild nuisance to a traumatic episode. The horizontal axis distinguishes between participants who described feelings of work-nonwork conflict as occurring frequently or not (Hi to Low). Initially, the researcher characterized each participant's perception by carefully interpreting their interview. Then, through the debriefing session, this characterization was verified by the participant's themselves. The characterization of each participants' perceived work-nonwork conflict is summarized in Figure 3.

Characterizing Work-Nonwork Conflict Perceptions

The themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions brought to light some interesting features of work-nonwork conflict. Specifically, across all interviews we began to see a characterization of work-nonwork perceptions emerge based on career and life-stages. Participant perceptions were characterized by the frequency of work-nonwork conflict experiences and by the intensity of those experiences. In the following paragraphs, we will

consider each cell of Figure 3 in turn and explicate the work-nonwork conflict of participants located within each.

		Frequency	
		Low	High
Intensity	Low	<p><i>Cell 1</i></p> <p>*</p>	<p><i>Cell 2</i></p> <p>*</p> <p>*</p>
	High	<p>*</p> <p>*</p> <p>*</p> <p><i>Cell 3</i></p>	<p>*</p> <p><i>Cell 4</i></p>

Figure 3. Participant characterization of work-nonwork conflict.

Cell 1: Low Intensity & Low Frequency

Women who had held tenure for some time and that had teenage children were more apt to describe infrequent and only mildly problematic work-nonwork conflict. For example, one participant had held tenure for more than 5 years, had a spouse with an equally flexible work schedule, and had a single teenage child. In her interview she characterized her current experience of work-nonwork conflict in the following way:

There isn't a lot of conflict in most ways. I think that we've been very fortunate but things do fit together fairly nicely. The only exception to that, the only big conflict is time. That's always a stumbling block, right, time to do both [work and home] well, and that's the only sense I can think of. We've always managed to organize our schedules...and things just kind of mesh really nicely. The biggest thing is finding time for everything but it's less of an issue that it used to be, and now my son is 14 so he's old enough to stay home alone or to be more independent and that kind of thing.

Despite her feeling fortunate in experiencing little conflict, this participant also admits that her situation has not been formed by fate alone:

Things have worked out very well for us with my son I would have to say, but we've only had one child. And to some extent that was a conscious decision and that is the consequence of this whole time issue...I think [my husband and I] both realized with two careers and two kids something would have to go; either quality of home life or quality of looking after our children or someone's career.

Clearly, this participant has made a conscious choice to limit her nonwork demands by only having one child in order to maintain her career and an acceptable amount of work-nonwork strain, or rather, an acceptable role quality in each domain. Understandably, she is relieved to now see that the anticipated consequences of these choices have been realized. From this participant we begin to see that a child's independence, the ability to exercise personal choice, and the job autonomy that tenure brings can all serve to mitigate feelings of work-nonwork conflict.

Cell 2: Low Intensity & High Frequency

The career-stage of a participant in this quadrant is quite similar to that of a participant in cell 1, although her personal situation is distinct enough to shed light on the differences that may exist even among tenured faculty. With a teenager and an 8-year old child, this participant is likely to have more nonwork demands than someone with a single teenaged child. Accordingly, she describes frequent conflicts and yet, because of her career-stage and the autonomy that comes with being a tenured academic she too views these conflicts as only mildly stressful.

There are conflicts. I travel a lot but I travel because I choose to travel...I make all those decisions, I decide or don't decide. And before I go there's always a little, 'Well geez, why am I going,' but then I go and try to enjoy every moment and I phone my kids every night. And they're just so happy to see me when I get back and every trip gets better and better in terms of what they take on....they pull together, they work together, so there are some real positive things about it.

The ability to have control over her travel schedule lessens the intensity of this participant's work-nonwork conflict. Having herself decided whether or not to travel, rather than having arrangements imposed, allows the participant to feel in command of the experience. In addition, she is able to identify 'real positive' outcomes from her being away. Together, these two factors contribute to her sense that work-nonwork conflict occurs frequently, but with little intensity. When contrasting the descriptions of these two women it is interesting to note that the most apparent difference in their situations is the addition of a young child.

Another participant in this cell also has two children, ages 11 and 7, her husband works out of town and they have no relatives to assist with childcare. Despite the obvious challenges, this participant described her work-nonwork conflict as being frequent but only moderately stressful.

I've taught a class now for two semesters that goes from 3 to 6 [pm] and having to do the logistics of getting the kids home on normal days...and get them to their activities that usually started at 5 or 5:15 [pm]. I mean, how are we physically going to do it?...So then I went through this whole grappling with, 'I'm so darn lucky to have a mature 11-year old daughter.' All through last semester she took her little brother, got on the city bus, went through downtown, came to the University on the city bus, she got him to his [swimming] activity at 5:15 and then did her thing...It's really stressful being in the class and thinking, 'Are the kids [at their activity], Are they still waiting for the city bus in front of the school or having to deal with the weirdos [at the bus stop] downtown?'

Being concerned for the safety of their children is no doubt a stressful experience for most mothers. At the same time, this participant's conflict occurs on a weekly basis as a result of her teaching schedule. Nevertheless, this participant perceived her situation as being only moderately stressful, albeit frequent.

Cell 3: High Intensity & Low Frequency

This characterization of work-nonwork conflict was typical of women who had just earned tenure or were highly confident in their ability to do so, who had spouses with flexible jobs or that were able to share in the duties of childcare, who were satisfied with their child's daycare or preschool, and who had at least one child under the age of five. Such conditions contributed to infrequent experiences of work-nonwork conflict given the array of childcare contingencies that they had available to them. However, such participants described relatively intense feelings of work-nonwork conflict when experiences did occur.

R (Researcher): How often do you experience work-nonwork conflict?
Not very much. I experienced it this morning because my son was having a hard time and didn't want to go to preschool and I told him I had a meeting to go to. Well it was breaking my heart because he was for some reason having a hard time. But in truth it doesn't happen very often....it's not on a daily basis or anything.

Among the research participants, intense or 'heartbreaking' feelings of work-nonwork conflict were most often associated with experiences which involved very young children (< 5-years old). Similarly, another participant whose husband was staying at home to care for their 2 year-old, described an infrequent but intense experience:

My husband and I went on a vacation so we dropped [my daughter] off with her grandparents...we were gone for a week and that was fine. But then I came back and I stayed for with them for a couple days and then I went away to a conference for another week and when we all were rejoined here in Lethbridge [my daughter] was quite...well she wouldn't let me out of her sight. Literally would not let me out of her sight; I had to sit on the end of her bed until she fell asleep at night. So she's not thrilled about mommy being a working mom....That's probably the hardest thing at the moment is that she'd like to have me around a little more and, you know, I've got a career; I'm coming up for tenure, so there's all these things pulling me in different directions.

Later, the same participant concluded:

When I left for that conference that was tough, that was really, really hard. I didn't want to go and it was something I had to do for my career....I felt like I was abandoning her, I really did, I knew she didn't want me to leave....I had some tears (*participant broke into tears*).

The level of emotion in this quotation is obvious. The participant was clearly upset with having to leave her child twice within a short span of time. Even recalling these memories months after the event brings to the surface significant feelings of anxiety. However, while the work-nonwork conflict of having to 'abandon' her child or go to an academic conference was indeed stressful, the need for travel was seen as relatively infrequent.

There's some travel... well, not a lot but in about six months from now I'm going to have to be away again for a week and possibly more. And I don't really enjoy it.

The intensity of this experience is contributed to by the fact that she feels 'pulled in different directions' between her commitment to her work and her commitment to her family. The fact that her husband is able to stay at home with their child appears to prevent daily work-nonwork conflicts. As a result, her characterization of work-nonwork conflict is that of intense but infrequent episodes, such as when she is required to travel for work.

Cell 4: High Intensity & High Frequency

Women who had not yet gained tenure or who felt less freedom to create their own work schedule and who had few childcare contingencies described both frequent and intense work-nonwork conflict. A participant placed in this cell had a 4-year old daughter and a husband whose job prevented him from being available to assist with childcare during work hours. With no relatives to assist with childcare, she relies heavily on daycare facilities and the flexibility of her own work schedule to manage work-nonwork conflict. At the time of the interview she had recently secured a contract teaching position. In the following illustrative quote, it is clear that this participant feels conflict is a constant condition of her life. However,

it is her personal strategy in dealing with stress that prevents her from being paralyzed by her work-nonwork situation.

I think my definition of work and family conflict would be being unable to manage. The conflict is always there for me; it's ever present, but it's the management of it. I could feel stressed constantly because of [our situation] but a lot of times I just choose not to feel stress. It's just a conscious decision.

Later, the same participant describes a work-nonwork episode that she characterized as being very intense:

At my little girl's daycare they had a Mother's Day tea for the moms and it started at two [o'clock]. They had a fashion show and everything with the moms and I couldn't participate in the fashion show because I was teaching. I had a class and I couldn't come but I just introduced the course and then I left [the University] because I wanted to be there and it would have been really bad if I didn't go at all because all the other kids and their parents were at the table and they had my place set for me with my name. So I got there and [my daughter] was just with the teachers so if I hadn't gone I would have felt very bad. So in that instance there was nothing that I could do; I have to fulfill my [work] obligation because I have a contract and I didn't want to cancel class because of my family obligations. It was still bad because it's a three hour class and I should have taught it, but I just introduced the class theory and I packed up and left...But I was still late for my daughter's event.

This quotation clearly illustrates the personal negotiation of work and nonwork obligations. In this situation the participant feels as though she is not fulfilling either obligation satisfactorily and yet she feels unable to choose one in favor of the other.

Summary of Participant Perceptions

In general, the intensity of participants' work-nonwork conflict depended largely on the degree of autonomy they felt they possessed within their academic position. Women who held tenured positions described relatively little stress when work-nonwork conflict episodes occurred, while those without tenure-aspiring positions described work-nonwork conflict episodes as being more stressful. It is logical to think that the sense of job autonomy or self-

determination that comes with being an academic, along with the sense of freedom that comes with tenure, would serve to mitigate the intensity of work-nonwork conflict. In fact, scholars have confirmed that autonomy does increase perceived control over work role demands (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984, as cited by Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001) and enables individuals to structure their job in a manner that mitigates work-nonwork conflict (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1986, as cited by Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001). One participant described that as long as she felt in control of her schedule she perceived very little stress; “when boundaries are imposed that’s when I feel stress, that’s when I experience conflict.” Indeed, research confirms that schedule flexibility provides individuals latitude in dealing with the competing demands of work and nonwork, and may be expected to decrease work-nonwork conflict (Pleck et al., 1980). At the same time, the relative job insecurity of pre-tenure or contract employees can create a pressure to perform, to be present at the workplace, and to disguise or deny family obligations while at work. The stress literature suggests that it is indeed an imposed expectation or a lack of personal control over a situation that makes such events stressful and engenders strain (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001).

Highly frequent conflict was associated with a lack of childcare support and/or very young children. With few childcare contingencies (e.g. husband or relatives that are unavailable) the task of resolving work-nonwork conflicts that arise during the traditional work day are delegated to the spouse whose job offered the most flexibility. Even in the situation where both spouses are available to tend to childcare responsibilities, it has often been shown that the wife is more likely to assume family-related obligations (Hochschild, 1989). For new mothers or women with preschool-aged children, the demand for their emotional, physical, and even logistical support may seem constant. At the same time, even women with pre-teenaged children in this study described frequent feelings of conflict if there was little

childcare support from either a spouse or relative to assist with the inevitable transportation and emotional requirements.

In the final analysis, what is classified as intense or frequent within the componential analysis of work-nonwork conflict was highly dependent upon the individual and their interpretation of the situation. For example, I initially interpreted the description of one participant as being both frequent and intense (cell 4). Nonetheless, what is truly relevant is how the individual herself perceives it. She viewed work-nonwork conflict as occurring frequently but having low-to-moderate intensity (cell 2). As stated in the literature review, perception is reality. This is a critical point in interpretation that practitioners and policy makers should not be quick to predict the type of work-nonwork conflict that an individual will experience based solely on their demographic or job characteristics. In fact, what this research makes clear is that work-nonwork conflict, while being shaped by both institutional and individual forces, does not embody one universal form. Moreover, it is likely to change over time due to personal and professional dynamics.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Theorizing Change in the Perception of Work-Nonwork Conflict

Considerable literature explores the concepts of the family and adult life stages (Keith & Schafer, 1991). Stages are viewed as time periods through which both families and individuals pass. Keith & Schafer (1991) define a stage as a period of time that contains distinctive interaction patterns, role demands, and expectations for behavior. The concept of family and adult life stages is important to this study. Having offered a means to characterize work-nonwork conflict (i.e. the componential analysis) and by comparing perceptions across participants, I begin to theorize a progression over time (Figure 4) in both the frequency and intensity of work-nonwork conflict among the participants. Moreover, I theorize that changes in work-nonwork conflict perceptions are related to the events of family and adult life stages.

In her assessment on the state of research on work and family, Voydanoff (1989) acknowledges the importance of changing family structures for work-nonwork conflict. She proposes that both work and family roles consist of ‘career stages’; distinctive patterns of behavior whereby, “individuals coordinate the responsibilities associated with work and family roles over the life course” (p. 7) that are demarcated by unique demands, identities, rewards, and goals. Further Voydanoff indicates that these ‘career stages’ intersect at given points in the life course to create unique realities for the individual. Voydanoff identifies two means by which individuals create workable patterns of activities and relationships for managing work-nonwork conflict; work/family role staging, and work/family role allocation. By drawing from the work of Voydanoff and various other authors, I examine the work-nonwork conflict descriptions revealed by participants and develop the proposed model of changing work-nonwork conflict perceptions.

Reduction in both the frequency and intensity of work-nonwork conflict among participants appeared to coincide with an increase in job autonomy or the acquisition of tenure, and an increase in childcare support. It is important to note that an increase in childcare support may mirror the increase in age of children, as the children themselves can begin to support some of their own needs as they gain personal independence in the pre-teenage years. Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) cite several authors in stating that, “parents of younger children (who are likely to be particularly demanding of their parent’s time) experience more conflict than do parents of older children” (p.80). This progression, or reduction, of conflict can be seen when comparing the work-nonwork perceptions of a participant in cell 1 and a participant in cell 4.

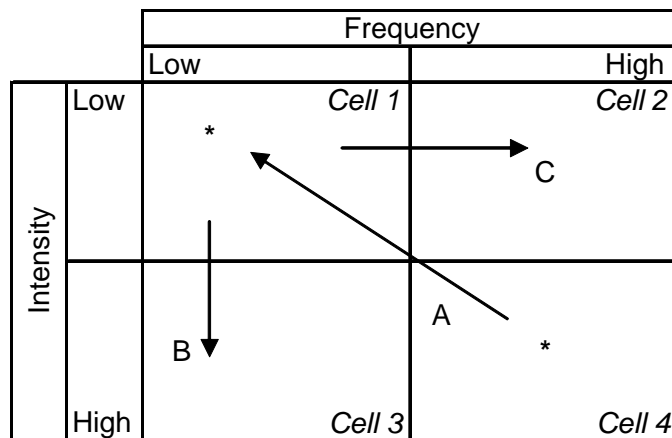


Figure 4. Theorizing change in the perception of work-nonwork conflict.

The participant in cell 1 characterized her work-nonwork conflict as being infrequent and having little stress. With a tenured position, a single teenaged child, and a husband with an equally flexible work schedule, it is little wonder that this participant placed herself within cell 1 of the componential analysis. Both her career- and family-stage were relatively mature. When work-nonwork conflict arose, such as having to unexpectedly arrange to pick her child from a

venue during normal work hours, most often she was able to negotiate the responsibility between either her own or her husband's schedule. In addition, given the age and relative maturity of her child, being a few minutes late for such an obligation would prove to be less worrying (for both child and mother) than if he were of an infant or preschooler.

Alternatively, the participant in cell 4 characterized her work-nonwork conflict as being both frequent and intense. With a recent contract teaching appointment, her affective job autonomy is certainly less than that of a faculty member with several years of tenure. As such, her relative lack of control over her work schedule is expected to engender stress (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001). In addition, she had a preschooler in daycare and neither relatives nor a husband that was available during work hours to assist with childcare responsibilities. With both a young child and fewer childcare contingencies at her disposal (e.g. only daycare) she described frequent work-nonwork conflicts.

By contrasting the situations of these two women I was able to discern that a progression (or reduction) of perceived work-nonwork conflict generally follows (a) an increase in either childcare support or the age of the child/ren, and (b) an increase in job autonomy and security (i.e. tenure) (see A in Figure 4). Of course, it is also possible that regression, or an increase in conflict, may occur over time. The death of a spouse and the associated loss of childcare support or change in job characteristics could serve to alter the perception of work-nonwork conflict. For example, an individual such as a participant in cell 1, who has tenure and a teenaged child might begin to perceive more intense work-nonwork conflict if her job autonomy or sense of control over her work schedule is threatened. A career move from academia to private industry might require her to be increasingly present in the workplace or to justify her work schedule to a supervisor. Such work conditions would prove stressful to an individual that is used to a high degree of freedom and may therefore see

her perception of work-nonwork conflict migrate towards cell 3 (see B in Figure 4). So long as her nonwork situation remains unchanged (i.e. her husband is able to provide childcare support and her child remains relatively independent) she may continue to perceive her work-nonwork conflict to remain infrequent, albeit more stressful. Alternatively, the same individual may continue to have a high degree of control over her work schedule (i.e. maintain her tenured position) but suffer the death of her husband. In this case, she would have also lost a significant source of childcare support upon which she could no longer depend to share the responsibilities of raising their child. While the age and dependency of her child remains stable, the frequency with which she alone must manage the conflicts increases (see C in Figure 4).

When considering the theoretical model, it is important to recognize that not all changes to work-nonwork conflict perception may be permanent. The death of a supportive spouse, for example, is a permanent change and would be expected to have long-term consequences for the surviving spouses' work-nonwork conflict. However, temporary changes to one's situation, such as an illness or injury to the child or caregiver, filling in for an absent coworker, work-related travel for one's spouse, or the holiday closure of daycare facilities would likely increase the individual's perception of work-nonwork conflict in the short-term. Any situational change that either diminishes the individual's support resources, or that increases the role demands on the individual is likely to result in more frequent or intense work-nonwork conflict.

While these scenarios are gross simplifications of highly complex human situations, they serve to illustrate the potential for movement between and even within the cells in the componential analysis. As career and family situations change over the life course, so too do I expect the individual's perception of work-nonwork conflict to change.

Person-Situation Factors

As stated earlier in the literature review, Parker & Hall (1992) associate work-nonwork conflict with concerns about complex person-situation interactions. After careful examination of my findings, I realized that this was true for the women who participated in this study. A variety of personal and situational factors that may influence work-nonwork conflict are type of employment (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001), support from the workplace or spouse (Epstein, 1987; Kossek, et al., 2001), the congruence of behaviors and value between domains (Thompson & Bunderson, 2001), and the quality of an individual's work and nonwork roles (Barnett & Marshall, 1992). Throughout my analysis the two factors that appeared most salient in shaping the perception of work-nonwork conflict among participants were job autonomy and childcare support.

Job Characteristics

Parasuraman & Simmers' (2001) study of self-employed versus organizationally employed individuals found that the type of employment and the inherent temporal and spatial requirements of the job had important outcomes for work and nonwork conflict. Certainly there are some unique features of academia as a profession that distinguish it from many other forms of employment. Participants in this study conveyed, in the themes Freedom as Tenure and Job Autonomy, that the academic workplace offers certain advantages for those women trying to combine career and family.

Tenure-track positions offer the opportunity for advancement (moving from assistant professor, associate professor, to full-professor) and, with the achievement of tenure, job security (Hurlbert & Rosenfeld, 1992). In sharp contrast, non-tenure track positions (e.g. lecturer, adjunct professor, and term appointments) do not offer the same opportunities for advancement, eventual job security, or the privileges of full faculty members (Hurlbert &

Rosenfeld, 1992). These privileges may include access to resources (e.g. grants, administrative support, office space) that enable one to do research and to gain recognition within and beyond the institution. However, regardless of whether the position is tenure-track or not, the academic workday is principally dictated by the scheduling of classes. The employee has flexibility in scheduling other duties and work obligations such as research, committee meetings, and student consultations. Even grading and curriculum development can be scheduled at the discretion of the employee. Moreover, in the university studied, there was an acknowledgment that work need not occur at the office alone.

If I want I can work in the evening and it makes no difference than working in the afternoon, this is the ideal job for achieving that flexibility. With the exception of teaching and meetings there's not set time I have to be here. Walk up and down the hall and half of the doors are closed. Half may be at home working, half perhaps not but it's not the hours [that you put in at the office that counts.] I couldn't do this in any other profession.

While there are benefits to the academic profession, so too are there costs. For women the decision to stay at home with an infant or young child is often a costly one both in terms of lost income and academic progress; echoing the theme, *Motherhood as a Professional Liability*. According to the Faculty Handbook published by the university studied, paid parental leave was provided to tenure-track faculty for the first 17 weeks of leave⁴. Leave extended beyond this period was financially supported only by government benefits⁵. For non-tenure-track or term appointments, paid parental leave was provided for a period of up to 17 weeks or up until the completion of their term appointment, whichever occurred first. In terms of awarding tenure and the probationary period of service, the university provided tenure-track faculty members with the option of prolonging their probationary period by the

⁴ University-paid parental leave consisted of 95% of salary minus any government employment insurance (E.I.) benefits.

⁵ Employment insurance (E.I.) benefits for a period of up to a maximum of 35 weeks.

length of their parental leave. While this option was seen as fair in the sense of providing the employee an opportunity to make up lost academic productivity, it came at the expense of setting them behind in terms of their male/non-parent colleagues' career progress.

Accordingly, the decision to interrupt one's career in order to stay at home and care for children was not taken lightly among participants. In fact, both tenure-track and tenure-aspiring participants had planned the birth of their children so that either the option to take full parental leave⁶ or prolong their probationary period was not exercised. In either case, such premeditation conveys a reluctance to interrupt one's career progress. New knowledge about the rate of decline in fertility among women after the age of 30 (Gosden & Rutherford, 1995) only punctuates the dilemma faced by many female academics; disrupt a promising career to have children, or risk fertility to solidly establish your academic reputation? To be sure, the decision weighs heavily on the minds of early-career female academics, as well as on the minds of many professional working women.

In North America, decisions to promote within academia are based on different weightings of publication, teaching, and service. In the years prior to awarding tenure, academics are expected to cultivate positive indicators of these tasks. However, some Universities are beginning to question issues of faculty member performance. For example, in the university examined in this paper, a study had recently been commissioned by the Faculty Association to examine the work-life tradeoffs that resulted from academic work. One of the study's preliminary conclusions was that doing an adequate job of all three (research, teaching, and service) resulted in over 60 hours of work per week, almost double the national average of 31.6 hours per week (Statistics Canada, 2000), and well beyond the conventional 40 hour work week.

⁶ 1 year or 52 weeks.

Pressure to not interrupt one's career, whether self-induced or socially driven, and to develop a respectable academic performance record are sure to add to the stresses of combining work and family during the early career years. However, as noted earlier, the job security embodied in tenure promises to relieve this pressure in later years. Decisions regarding the timing of both career and children are synonymous to Voydanoff's (1988, 1989) concept of work/family role staging. Work/family role staging may be either simultaneous or sequential, but either form is a strategy to manage the combination of work and nonwork roles. Simultaneous staging is demonstrated by women who maintain concurrent work and family roles over the adult life course. For example, at the time of this study all of the participants were simultaneous work/family role stagers. Alternatively, sequential staging is demonstrated by women who participate in one role to the exclusion of the other for a period of time. Women who interrupt their careers to have children demonstrate this type of work/role staging. As Voydanoff (1989) points out, "the choice between early and late parenthood is a major element of role staging" (p. 7). Similarly, the women described careful consideration regarding the combination of work and nonwork that best met their needs.

An issue that did not emerge in this study, but certainly has the potential to dramatically affect an academic career, is the denial of tenure. None of the women in this study had experienced such a setback in their careers, but certainly those in tenure-track positions expressed fear regarding the consequences of such an event. One could likely assume that such an occurrence would contribute to intense work-nonwork conflict and a dramatic change in a person's perceptions and behaviors.

Childcare Support

The responsibility of raising a child and maintaining a household is commonly thought to be onerous. For a married woman with a supportive husband we expect that the task would

be shared among partners, but for many couples the division of labour is often far from equal. Hochschild (1989) identified that married, employed women devoted roughly 15 hours of labour more per week than their spouses after accounting for housework and childcare activities. Hochschild refers to this as the 'second shift;' a daily routine where most women work one shift at the office and then second at home. However, subsequent authors have criticized Hochschild's estimate as being based on old (1965) data and her interpretation of it as being overly pessimistic (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Still these authors agree women often carry the bulk of the household and childcare workload. As it happened, over half of the participants in this study indicated that they employed domestic cleaning help on a regular basis. In Holcomb's (1998) work to challenge the assumptions about blending work and family, she points out that the average woman manager puts in an estimated 33 hours a week on housework and childcare, compared with eighteen hours a week for men (p. 306). An estimate of the time commitments of dual-career couples by Barnett & Rivers (1996) indicates that between paid work and household chores alone "men and women are working seventy hours a week, or approximately ten hours a day" (p.177). What's interesting is that this estimate does not account for childcare. In the remaining six waking hours of the day children need to be fed, bathed, disciplined, and nurtured. Certainly child daycare is an essential component to many dual-career couples and working mothers' success (Holcomb, 1998). All of the participant's in this study with preschool-aged children indicated that they relied on childcare services⁷ outside of the home on a weekly basis. Indeed, regardless of whether support came from a spouse, a relative, or an outside service the entire sample of female

⁷ Childcare services refer to a day or group care centre, a nursery or preschool business enterprise, or a religious or charitable organization.

academics cited the importance of childcare assistance to combining both work and nonwork obligations.

Well it's hard juggling everything; it's quite stressful I would say. Sometimes you don't realize it at that time because you're in the middle of it and that's just how you live. I remember stretches when things went relatively smoothly; work was going okay and daycare was okay and the house was alright but I remember one year when my daughter was 4 [years old], we had [her in] quite a nice day home....[the lady that ran the day home] was a really nice person; we were happy with her, she had 2 little kids [of her own] and had [our daughter and another girl] come in and anyway, right in the middle of mid term week one day, something blew up in her personal life and she quit with 2 days notice and I remember coming home and just having a good cry. I mean, what do you do? You know, it's in the middle of the busiest part of the year and I can't stay home, [my husband and I] can split mornings of half days or something pulled together but not for very long and it kind of just fell all around me, we went to the same agency and interviewed other [day home] people and found another one but it was 10 days of quite a bit of upheaval and just feeling that things are snowballing.

The following participant described how she and her husband share the duty of supervising their young children before and after work.

[My husband] works 7 [a.m.] to 3:15 most of the time so he's there [for the kids] after school whereas I'm not always [able to be] depending on the time of year. I don't start working usually until just before 9 [a.m.] so I stay [at work] later. So we're very lucky that we can balance this off. One of us can be there [for the kids] in the morning and the other can be there after school.

The coordination of responsibilities between husbands and wives, also referred to as work/family role allocation, has been examined by Voydanoff (1988). The author summarizes work/family role allocation as ranging from traditional, in which husbands work outside of the home and wives perform the family work, to symmetrical in which men and women share both work and family responsibilities. For the women who participated in this study, their work/role allocation situation would trend toward the symmetrical. In most cases, both spouses worked outside of the home and were described as sharing various family

responsibilities. While the allocation of responsibility between partners many not have been equal (i.e. same income level and a fifty-fifty split of childcare obligations) the point is that these couples had shifted the division of labour away from the traditional model in response to the role demands associated with the female's employment.

For professional working mothers, household and childcare responsibilities may still loom like a 'second shift' despite assistance from spouses and childcare services. Nevertheless, when fortified by reliable supports and a few childcare contingency plans many of the women in this study were able to manage the workload. According to Holcomb (1998) the challenge that many couples face in successfully sharing childcare and household responsibilities is to not cling to outdated gender role ideologies. She warns that, "with few modern day role models and no real system for assigning duties in the marriage, many couples wage war over the minutia of daily life" (p. 302). However, couples who do manage to share the responsibilities are reported by Holcomb (1998) to describe their marriage as highly satisfying in spite of work and nonwork conflicts.

The Influence of Identity & Life Values

Based on Thompson & Bunderson's (2001) work, I anticipated that individual goals, values, and identity would emerge as salient themes in the results of this study. While the results did not reveal identity to be a prominent component of participant's descriptions, the findings do not contradict Thompson & Bunderson's hypothesis⁸. The semi-structured interviews that were conducted in this study revealed more about the individual's contextual life conditions than they did about identity and life values. Yet, there is little doubt that identity and life values still have an important influence on an individual's perception of work-

⁸ Thompson & Bunderson (2001) hypothesize work-nonwork conflict to be based on the extent to which individuals occupy their time with activities that they perceive to be inconsistent with their identities and core values.

nonwork conflict; Thompson & Bunderson's hypothesis makes intuitive sense. Particularly for individuals in professional occupations, such as academics and doctors, where there are strong stereotypes for the individual's identity and character. The individual may pursue such a profession based on either a desire to assume the characteristics of the stereotyped identity or because he or she feels a personal congruence to these characteristics. However, my findings lend credence to Caproni's (1997) argument that predicting work-nonwork conflict may not be so easy. Indeed, my empirical findings support the notion that people's perceptions are often unpredictable and that their values are dynamic over the life course. For example, I had initially interpreted the characterization of work-nonwork conflict of one participant as being frequent and intense (cell 4). It was only through the debriefing session that I came to appreciate that she perceived her work-nonwork conflict to be frequent, but of low intensity (cell 2). Furthermore, many of the women in this study who held tenure indicated that their perception of work-nonwork conflict had changed over the years. As tenure was earned and their children became more independent with age their perceptions of work-nonwork conflict were that it becomes less frequent and less stressful. During the debriefing sessions it was not uncommon for a tenured participant to reminisce about how much more difficult it had been in the early stages of their career to combine work and family.

Positive Spillover

Barnett & Rivers (1996) identified benefits of maternal employment for children, men, and women. In their study, involving 300 full-time employed dual-career couples and a comprehensive review of past literature, the researchers conclude that maternal employment can be a source of independent identity and increased self-esteem for women, resulting in lower rates of depression. The children of such women also benefited from a greater sense of

independence, had fewer behavioral problems, and were generally more socially resilient than those of mothers not employed outside of the home.

Similarly, participants in this study identified three areas of positive spillover that resulted from participation in their career. First, participants indicated that they felt that participation in their career had the benefit of providing their children a healthy role model.

I think it's also very important that my daughter sees that it's okay to work as a woman; it's okay to make money as a woman, and it's important that she sees that at a very young age. So when she grows up she doesn't think that someone should take care of her [and that] she has to stay home. [I want her to know that] there is nothing wrong with families where one [person] stays at home and takes care of the kids [but that even with a job it is possible] because my job is very flexible, I can do that and I think it's very important to just make her aware that it's okay to do that as a woman. I believe that if my Mom had stayed at home that it would have [limited] my outlook on what women are capable of doing, but she never did; she dropped me off at daycare when I was less than two years old and there's nothing wrong with that.

By aspiring to combine both work and nonwork obligations and maintaining a dual career marriage, participants saw their children to be less sensitive to traditional gender roles and to discriminate less against maternal employment.

I think we're fortunate in the time period that we're raising our kids because I know if my mom had been trying to work, all of the people we knew at that time, their moms stayed home. Whereas my kids and a good number of the other kids, they have moms that work. There's a few that stay home but, it's probably a fifty-fifty split. So there's not as much pressure to have a normal family. The kids don't have this idea that a family should be one way or the other. And they don't seem to have preconceived ideas about what mom should be doing, which is nice.

Another participant criticized the traditional male breadwinner family because she felt that it perpetuated notions of gender inequality among children:

I also think that [having a stay-at-home mom] creates in kids a feeling that this person isn't as important as that person because he's going out and working and we all depend on him.

In her review of literature from the 1980's, Hoffman (1989) found this also to be true; children of employed mothers have greater independence and more flexible attitudes about gender than those of unemployed mothers.

A second area of positive spillover that was identified was the notion of independence among children of female academics. Despite the work-nonwork conflicts that being employed full-time created, particularly with childcare, participants were often able to identify that such challenges fostered a sense of self-reliance in their child/ren. The sort of 'tough love' experienced by children of dual career families; that mom or dad can't always come to a child's rescue, was seen to have a silver lining.

R: What is it about the notion of the stay-at-home-mom that bothers you? Just that that's your purpose is to serve them. Yikes. I don't think that they get what they need out of growing up when that happens. I think they need to develop self-reliance and independence and, I'm not saying that they have to be left on their own - obviously I don't do that - but they need to know that there are some problems that they know how to solve. And I don't think that a lot of professional women give kids those opportunities because, and I'm to blame, you know we put kids in everything, in lessons, you know, they've got to learn how to do this and we schedule their lives and then they have a problem and we run to the school with their lunch and we do that because we can. I don't know about your mom but my mom couldn't, she just had 5 kids and some of that was good that you had to rely on yourself to solve some of your own problems.

Lastly, participants identified that experiencing work-nonwork conflict on a continuing basis forced them to carefully consider and assign life priorities. As Thompson & Bunderson (2001) assert, "It is only when we are forced to make difficult choices that we have the opportunity to define ourselves and thus to develop an identity that can be affirmed" (p. 26). Moreover, the nature of the participants' occupation (i.e. knowledge-based, being a cognitive labourer) was seen to help foster a level of consciousness about work-nonwork conflict experiences.

I believe that things come down to choice and [when] I need to make decisions I focus on what the ultimate priorities are. I remember starting to write my Ph.D. and the intensity of it was overwhelming; everybody in my co-op would be up until 2 or 3 in the morning and studying and being in classes by 9 [a.m.]. I was writing and studying family and realizing I'm walking around with a big 'H' on my forehead, you know, hypocrite, and I just decided not to do that anymore. So it [became] a 9 to 5 job for me; at 5 o'clock the books went away and I would be a mom and I discovered very quickly that it made no difference in terms of grades. I still had my 'A' average because I worked when I was working and I didn't goof off and I did what needed to be done. So it shouldn't be about hours you put in - it should be what you do in those hours.

The fact that these women were able to identify benefits of combining work and nonwork obligations, despite the challenges, is an important one. It is empirically supported by Barnett & Rivers (1996), as well as other researchers that have challenged the common assumption that maternal employment and work-nonwork conflict have only negative outcomes for the family (e.g. Hoffman, 1989; Holcomb, 1998).

Quantitative & Qualitative Perceptions of Work-Nonwork Conflict

The research presented here has illuminated a subtle but important distinction between a quantitative and qualitative approach to work-nonwork conflict. In much of the quantitative research on work-nonwork conflict, the issue of time allocation appears to be most salient in creating conflict between these two spheres of life. For example, excessive work time was identified as the basis for work-family conflict by Pleck et al. (1980) in their review of a national employment survey. However, when my empirical findings are contrasted with these quantitative conclusions, this same issue is not as evocative. While participants of this study recognized that time was a scarce resource and often contributed to the conflict, they rarely saw time management as a remedy for the conflict. In fact, only two participants in the sample actually mentioned their ability to manage their time in relation to their competing work and nonwork obligations. In doing so, these participants both explained that having a family

required them to work more efficiently while in the work domain. Accordingly, they felt that they had been able to successfully focus their work efforts to complete the job in the work hours that they allotted themselves.

While issues of time management did emerge in the interviews, more salient in shaping work-nonwork conflict for these women were subjective topics such as job autonomy, a need for work, and a level of consciousness. Their perceived work-nonwork conflict was often mitigated in the structural descriptions of Tenure as Freedom, Job Autonomy, Work as an Oasis, the Need for Work, the Benefits of Family, Work-Nonwork Integration, and Level of Consciousness. Conversely, their perceived work-nonwork conflict was exacerbated in the structural description of Work-Environment, Motherhood as a Professional Liability.

These empirical findings support much of what Daly (1996a) argues in that research that emphasizes the use of time management to fit in all of our daily work and nonwork obligations does little to actually mitigate the conflicts. Based on a paradigm that involves counting and cataloguing time, Daly insists that such literature “does little to change the intoxicating effects of a fast paced culture; it simply serves as a tool for living with the malaise (p. 210). As an alternative to this approach, Daly proposes a new paradigm of time that begins, “with the idea that decisions about time are decisions about values” (p. 211).

The personal and deliberate choice of where best to spend our time epitomizes the structural description, Level of Consciousness, that emerged from interviews. In support of this, Friedman & Greenhaus (2000) conclude that:

How we spend our time matters, but not so much as the psychological relationship between and among different life roles. We find that the mental struggle each of us goes through to interweave our different life roles matters far more than how time is spent. If we can in some way master that mental struggle, we are on the path to success (p. 68).

The level of consciousness among the women in this study may have been somewhat unusual given their chosen profession. The achievement of an advanced degree, which is required for a career in academia, is a major undertaking and one that is often taken on later in life. Some people are attracted to academia by the lifestyle, and make conscious choices to delay having children or carefully plan having children to coincide with milestones in an academic career (e.g. complete Ph.D., or earn tenure). This type of intentionality or level of consciousness is reflected on in the following quote:

I remember being back when I was first a grad student and I [got into the whole] self-help thing; you know you should have a 5 year plan and....I thought well that sounds great. At that point in my life I had just started working at the University. So I thought okay a 5-year plan: in 5 years I will have a Ph.D., a tenure-track job, and a child and I managed it! Everything came together; I finished my degree and I got pregnant shortly after and my job got converted to tenure-track and so I did it...It was a lot. Yeah, well in some ways [it was] but in some ways not really because I'd been here for a while and we'd already been married for [nearly ten] years.

While this participant's '5-year plan,' which consisted of attaining her Ph.D., a tenure-track position, and having a child is ambitious, is not uncommon among female academics. Indeed, to achieve both academic and family success requires careful planning and execution. But if we look closely enough at the work-nonwork conflict descriptions of these women, and perhaps even our own lives, we see that choices of how to use time were ultimately based on a recognition of values, desires, and needs.

Conclusion

Drawing from the participants' descriptions as well as previous research, I have theorized change in the perception of work-nonwork conflict. Often driving this change are complex person-situation interactions, such as how one responds to the obligations of their employment, and the way in which domestic responsibilities are shared between spouses. And

while the influences of personal identity, goals, and values on work-nonwork conflict perceptions were unclear, the findings did highlight areas of positive spillover between work and nonwork domains. The findings also punctuate the value of a qualitative approach to exploring work-nonwork conflict. Participants' level of consciousness seemed more salient in shaping their perception of work-nonwork conflict than did their use of time.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS & SUMMARY

Implications for the Institution

Although it is clear from my findings that female academics have been resilient and flexible in carving out a professional and family lifestyle that works, their success also often appeared to be dependent on individual and institutional factors. In assisting female academics with families to manage work and nonwork obligations, it is important to conceptualize their personal agency within a context of restraints, such as available childcare support and organizational expectations. If institutions cling to old ways of thinking that work is the only priority in employees' lives, they risk discouraging female academics who have or desire to have families. Institutions that are supportive of academic families should also not make the mistake of assuming that work-nonwork conflict is the same experience for every employee. One-size-fits-all 'family friendly' policies may appear supportive on the surface and yet may fail to be utilized due to their restrictive nature. Indeed, institutions need to be as flexible as their employees when it comes to managing competing demands. By fostering a collegial work environment, providing opportunities for female academics to develop support networks, and encouraging early-career women, institutions can help to mitigate work-nonwork conflicts. What is more, they will be creating the kind of environment that future female academics will be attracted to.

Implications for the Individual

Female academics are not alone. While they may feel isolated by institutional barriers and limited time, they are present and they are succeeding in the workplace. By building alliances with each other, such as the contact group that was used to recruit participants in this study, mothers in academia can develop support. The question of, 'what's most important;

work or family?’ is an individual one, and yet discussion surrounding this issue would serve to illuminate the perceptual realities of work-nonwork conflict.

For the individual, the results of this study are promising. My findings suggest that the struggle to combine work and nonwork diminishes over the course of a female academic’s career. Assuming the tenure-aspiring years of the career go well, participants indeed find respite in tenure. While the nature of nonwork obligations do change, they contribute to less frequent work-nonwork conflicts over time. Nevertheless, what the results do not clearly reveal is the long-term impact that these first few years have on the individual. Living under the threat of failing to gain tenure as well as the stresses of maintaining healthy marital and parental relationships are bound to take their toll. Such a lifestyle, even if only for a few years, is likely to have implications for the woman’s health, relationships, self-concept, and career performance. The optimism of my findings does not diminish the personal costs of combining work and nonwork obligations.

Implications for Future Research

The study sought to explore the qualitative aspects of work-nonwork conflict, through a phenomenological approach, in an effort to contribute to a re-conceptualization of work-nonwork conflict. The phenomenological approach utilized in this study has served to extend the work of scholars such as Thompson & Bunderson (2001) and Daly (1996b) by emphasizing the perceptual features of this multi-dimensional construct. Moreover, this study demonstrates that there is much to be discovered about the human experience of work-nonwork conflict. The inclusion of women at various stages in their careers and in the development of their families has helped to highlight the dynamic nature of work-nonwork conflict. The recognition that the frequency and intensity of conflict changes over time, and the identification of some factors that contribute to or mitigate the level of conflict are both

exciting new directions that have been developed through this research. Through my results it is apparent that the nature of the academic profession and the process of acquiring tenure contributed to the frequency and intensity of conflict over time. The individual's level of consciousness and her childcare support system were also salient influences on the changes in level of experienced conflict over time.

These findings have implications for further study. This study concentrated on the perceptions of female academics to the exclusion of males. It is not known if the structural themes and characterization of work-nonwork conflict would hold for men in the same occupational group. While I expect that men's perceptions would provide useful insights into work-nonwork conflict in academia, I anticipate that there would be serious differences in the perception of work-nonwork conflict among men based on gender role ideology. Women's work and nonwork role experiences have indeed been found to differ from those of men (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001). Similarly, Friedman & Greenhaus (2000) state that, "expectations for behavior and commitments in men's and women's roles are neither equal nor the same" (p. 11). This study also focused exclusively on intact families. Again, I expect that other family structures, such as divorced or separated, multi-generational, or blended families would reveal much different views of work-nonwork conflict. As such we encourage future research to explore the perceptual experiences of men's work-nonwork conflict, as well as other family structures, so to illuminate these important differences.

In previous research on boundary controls, Perlow (1998) included interviews with spouses of the participants in the study. Perlow theorized that spousal support, or lack thereof, for the subjects' career ambitions was a key factor in the development of work behaviors and career strategies. While the examination of spousal support through interviews with spouses was beyond the scope of this study, several participants did make reference to

their level of spousal support as being an important factor in their career decisions and perceived work-nonwork conflicts. In a marriage relationship there is typically some sort of negotiated agreement or implicit assumption regarding values and expectations around work and family. Future research should explore these dynamics further and more closely analyze the role that expectations and spousal support play in shaping perceptions of work-nonwork conflict.

This study focused on very specific occupational group, tenured and tenure-seeking female academics. The present model is, therefore, limited in its descriptive power. It is not known how generalizable it is as a description of other professional occupational groups, with similarly high work demands, or even other universities.

This study conceptualized work-nonwork conflict as an integrated concept that consists of demands from either domain interfering with the other, rather than differentiating between the directional work-to-nonwork and nonwork-to-work conflict. Scholars have argued that the direction of interference has important implications for the individual (Boles, et al., 2001; Netermeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996; Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh, & Riley, 1995). As such, we would encourage future researcher to extend our work by applying the frequency and intensity characterization to participants' experiences of these directional conflicts. By doing so, it is anticipated that even greater knowledge could be gained about the conditions and perceptions that shape an individual's experience of this phenomenon.

As mentioned previously, while fear of not gaining tenure seemed to be a major motivator, none of the participants in this study had actually experienced the denial of tenure. Further research with this occupational group could benefit from an exploration of the impact that denial of tenure has on an academic career and the associated work-nonwork conflict.

Exit interviews conducted with individuals that have failed to gain tenure and that leave the institution would likely enrich our understanding of those that have been successful.

Finally, to extend these findings we would encourage future research to use a longitudinal approach to more fully explicate the change in perception of work-nonwork conflict that was offered here. The results presented suggest that work-nonwork conflict diminishes over time as a career progresses and children get older. However, the conclusions drawn in this regard are based on retrospective reflections of participants in more advanced stages of their careers, and on cross-sectional comparisons between participants at different states in their careers. A longitudinal approach could allow for a within subjects design and provide the opportunity to look at the changes that occur in individual experiences over time.

Summary

Findings of this phenomenological study add credence to the limited research on the perceptual nature of work-nonwork conflict. It is not so much how we partition our time among tasks, but how we view those tasks in the greater scheme of our lives that mitigates the personal strain of competing demands. The personal accounts of the participants interviewed have contributed immensely to my own understanding and appreciation of the both the pains and the benefits associated with work-nonwork conflict. While I may not yet know ‘the whole story’ of work-nonwork conflict, this research has inspired me to being creating my own.

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APPENDIX A. LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

April 30, 2003

Dear Respondent,

My name is Heather Petherick and I am a student in the Faculty of Management at the University of Lethbridge.

I am currently engaged in the Masters of Science (Management) program. One of the major requirements for this program is a research project component. The purpose of my research project is to explore the impact of personal identity and values on the experience of worn-nonwork conflict.

The study will involve two stages. Firstly, an in-depth interview whereby I will pose to you questions regarding your experiences of when your work and nonwork roles have conflicted with one another. This interview will take between one and two hours. The questions will be aimed at uncovering your personal values and beliefs about these roles and how they shape your experience of worn-nonwork conflict.

Secondly, I will conduct a debriefing exercise with you some weeks later at your office following the transcription and interpretation of your interview responses. This debriefing exercise will take approximately one hour. During the debriefing exercise I will ask your opinions and perceptions relating to the observations which I've made during the interpretation process. The purpose of this second stage is to get feedback from you regarding the accuracy of my interpretation of your interview responses.

The information gathered in this study will be held in the highest confidence. The research findings will be used only for academic purposes. If you wish to obtain a summary report of the findings of this research, please indicate this on the returned questionnaire. The research will be completed before September 1, 2003.

Your participation in this research study is greatly desired and it is central to its success, but completely voluntary. This research is being conducted in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the University of Lethbridge policies for ethical research.

I sincerely hope that you will participate in this study, but if for any reason you decide to withdraw, you are free to do so. You may also choose not to answer some of the questions without consequence. If you have questions about the study, please call me at the Faculty of Management, University of Lethbridge [Phone: (403) 382-7143] or e-mail me [heather.petherick@uleth.ca]. My supervisor for this project is Prof. Bernard Williams, of the Faculty of Management, who may be reached by telephone (403) 329-2068. Questions of a more general nature may be addressed to the Office of Research Services, University of Lethbridge [Phone: (403) 329-2747].

I wish to express my sincere gratitude for your much-awaited cooperation.

Thank you very much.

Yours faithfully,

.....
Heather Petherick
Master of Science (Management) Candidate
Faculty of Management
University of Lethbridge

.....Detach and Return Signed.....

I hereby consent to participate in the study entitled "Work-nonwork conflict among faculty: A phenomenological study of meaning" as described in the letter dated April 30, 2003.

Yes No.....

I hereby grant permission for my interview to be audio-taped.

Yes No.....

.....
Printed Name and Signature

.....
Date

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Work-Nonwork Conflict Among female scholars: A Phenomenological Study of Meaning

I want to assure you that your responses to the questions I am about to ask will be kept in strict confidence that and that I will not reveal to anyone excerpts from this interview that are identifiable to you. I want to assure you that I will not be judging any of your responses; frankly there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. I only hope that you will be able to provide me with honest, candid answers.

Before we get started, I need you to understand that throughout the questions I will be making a broad distinction between work and nonwork domains. 'Work' refers to all those activities that are involved as part of your employment at the University and your career as an academic and teacher. 'Nonwork' refers to all the other things in your life; including family, leisure, volunteering, religious activities, and etceteras.

Okay, are you ready to get started?

1. Tell me about your family. Tell me about your job.
2. Are you proud of anything that you do at home?
3. Are you proud of anything that you do at work?
4. Can you describe an instance where you experienced work-nonwork conflict?
5. How did you feel when you were forced to choose between family and work obligations?
6. How often does this happen for you? How often do you experience work-nonwork conflict?
7. Do you see any common meanings or shared values among your work and nonwork roles?
8. Can you think of any way that your nonwork roles contribute positively to your work?
9. How are your work and nonwork roles the same? Different?

I will be contacting you in approximately one month's time to schedule a debriefing session with you – the purpose of which is so that I can reveal to you my initial findings and to verify that I've correctly interpreted your responses.

Thank-you.

APPENDIX C. DEBRIEFING PROTOCOL

Step 1. **Verifying Structural Descriptions**

The researcher reads the structural description of each theme aloud to the participant. Following each structural description, the participant is asked to indicate whether or not the description echoes their own personal experience and perspective. Where disagreement occurs, the participant is asked to explain or clarify their objections.

Step 2. **Characterizing the Participant's Experience**

The researcher presents the participant with a blank copy of the componential analysis (see Figure 2). The researcher explains that 'frequency' is meant to communicate how often the participant experiences work-nonwork conflict, and that 'intensity' is meant to communicate how stressful those collective experiences are. The participant is then asked to indicate on the figure where they would place themselves based on their current work-nonwork experiences.

APPENDIX D. LIST OF MEANING UNITS

(Listed in alphabetical order)

Abandoning Child	Priority-family
Autonomy	Professional Merit
Benefits of Motherhood	Relationships
Career Progression	Resilience
Compensate for Having Family	Role Model
Control	Role Satisfaction
Daycare	Routine
Exercising Choice	Social Support
Family as a Liability	Societal Judgment
Gender Stereotype	Spousal Support
Guilt/Self-Doubt	Stress on Children
Identity	Teaching
Imposter Syndrome	Tenure/Credential
Job Security	Time for Family
Level of consciousness	Time for Self
Living by Values	Travel
Need for Work	Unexpected-Academic
New Outlook	Unexpected-Children
Nontraditional	Unpaid Work
Obligation to Work	Work-Family Separation
Opposing Obligations	Work-Family Integration
Passion for Job	Work-Nonwork Conflict Event
Positive Spillover	Work as an Oasis
Primary Breadwinner	Work Environment

APPENDIX E. PROCESS OF ABSTRACTION

Table 2.

Process of abstraction: Developing structural themes from significant statements

Significant Statement	Meaning Unit	Structural Theme
Once you have tenure you don't have to worry that if somebody doesn't like you personally.	Tenure/Credential	
Given the flexibility of my job, I can either bring her to work with me or spend the afternoon at home with her.	Autonomy	
My position became a continuing appointment which makes a big difference in terms of job security.	Job Security	
Publishing is because it's your mark of worth in academia, it says to everyone you are worthy or you have contributed.	Professional Merit	Tenure As Freedom
Given the flexibility of my job, I can either bring her to work with me or spend the afternoon at home with her.	Autonomy	
I don't have a lot of work conflicts because I control my work, I control my family time and where I put it is my decision.	Control	
I believe that things come down to choice and as I need to make decisions I need to focus on what the ultimate priorities are.	Exercising Choice	Job Autonomy
I bought into the idea of academia and what it was and it was a very male-oriented and traditional.	Work Environment	
I hope that women don't judge me negatively because I work and have a family because I certainly don't judge them negatively.	Societal Judgment	
I experienced gender distinction when my husband and I went to a conference with our 3-month old; the expectation was that as a woman that I would impose my child upon them, whereas my husband was the hero.	Gender Stereotype	Work Environment

Significant Statement	Meaning Unit	Structural Theme
I don't have a lot of work conflicts because I control my work, I control my family time and where I put it is my decision.	Control	
Having my job helps me feel like I'm doing something for myself. Then I don't wind up resenting the role of mother and all the responsibility that it brings.	Need for Work	
Work is almost an oasis for me, It's very predictable. Home isn't predictable.	Work As An Oasis	
Being a mom is very emotional for me. And I think that's why I like coming to work. Work isn't generally emotional.	Work-Family Separation	Work As An Oasis
Having my job helps me feel like I'm doing something for myself. Then I don't wind up resenting the role of mother and all the responsibility that it brings.	Need for Work	
I came back to work early from maternity leave. I missed very much the social interaction I think and being with adults.	Social Support	Need for Work
I think with kids of my own that I'm a little kinder and a little more understanding with my students.	Benefits of Motherhood	
There is this sort of smugness that goes with being a working mom. I have a life. I have everything. I have adoring children.	Role Satisfaction	
I think becoming a parent, I think that was probably the most transformative experience of my life and recognizing the world wasn't just about me and what I wanted to do.	New Outlook	Benefits of Family

Significant Statement	Meaning Unit	Structural Theme
I don't think I could do what I do if I didn't absolutely love and feel very passionate about what I do.	Passion For Job	
I often wonder how many people having difficulty balancing things are thinking more about the negative than the positive. Not that they don't have challenges, not that they're not awful, but if you think about what you can do, you can do it.	Resilience	
Even now working, in terms of identity, I would say my prime identity, the backbone of my life is motherhood and I integrate other things into that instead of the other way around.	Identity	Level of Consciousness
You've been a student, you know what I'm talking about. There's that stress and some students take it very well and some just blow up. And you have to learn to not take it too personally which is the same in parenting; you have to know not to take it too personally.	Positive Spillover	
My son always grew up with exam papers around and that kind of thing; I was always marking on weekends at home, you know, he'd sit at one end of the table and draw pictures and I'd be marking at the other end.	Work-Family Integration	Low Boundary Separation
The fact that I'm going to be going on maternity leave sort of makes me feel I should contribute more while I'm here and work harder.	Obligation To Work	
From a career point of view it seems unfair to me that I can't have a family and yet get tenure as quickly as men simply because I physically have to give birth and take time off. I have the brains to do this job and yet I have to fall behind simply because of physiology.	Family As A Liability	
Initially I used to give excuses and I was very defensive about my daughter being in daycare. I was always trying to justify but now I don't owe anybody anything. You can just like me as a bad mom; leaving my kid in daycare and working.	Guilt/Self Doubt	
Compared to my colleagues who have 2 or 3 articles coming out, I only have one. But they don't have a family and I do.	Professional Merit	Motherhood As a Professional Liability