The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication

Work–Life Conflict

[p. 377 ↓]

Chapter 14: Work–Life Conflict

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The intersections between individuals' working and personal lives—and the potential for conflicts between them—are of interest to scholars in multiple disciplines (including communication studies, sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior) as "increasing proportions of dual-earner couples and single-parents in the workforce, changes in gender-role norms, and shifts in values toward greater life balance have made work-(family) life issues salient" (Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006, p. 61). *Work–life conflict* (WLC) encompasses the impact of work characteristics on the quality/characteristics of (family/personal) "life" and the impact of (family/personal) "life" characteristics on the quality/characteristics of work.

In the 7 years since our first chapter, the WLC literature has proliferated and continues to rapidly expand—more than 250 related articles have been published when considering the interdisciplinary literature on WLC and the relevant scholarship in communication studies. While we consulted all these sources in writing this chapter, we include the sources most related to WLC and communication, because as Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, and Buzzanell (2003) argue, interdisciplinary WL scholarship typically has more of a focus on predicting *outcomes,* while communication WL scholarship foregrounds *processes* through which WL interrelationships are negotiated using a discursive, meaning-centered perspective.

Our purpose in this chapter explicating WLC is therefore to (a) provide a summary of the communication-based and communication-related interdisciplinary research on WLC across several "levels" of analysis, (b) identify potential transformations of WL problems, and (c) offer future research directions regarding WLC. In summarizing WLC-related literature, we first explicate the (micro) construct of WLC and then utilize the following levels of analysis as related to WL as our organizational pattern:

SAGE knowledge

macrostructures, organizational policies, relational practices, and individual enactments (see Figure 14.1).

Figure 14.1 "Levels" of Analysis in Work–Life (WL) Research

> *Macro/cross-cultural ideologies and structures*
> Explorations of WL interrelationships in the United States and other countries in relation to governmental policy and cultural and gendered norms
> ↓↑
> *Organizational policies*
> Explorations of organizational policies and cultural practices related to WL
> ↓↑
> *Relational practices*
> Explorations of how supervisors, coworkers, family, and friends influence WL conflict
> ↓↑
> *Micro/individual enactments*
> Explorations of how individuals navigate WL issues and ways to manage such conflict

In so doing, it is important to emphasize (as noted by the arrows) that we see these "levels" of analysis as interrelated; we assume that microlevel interactions and macrolevel structures are mutually constitutive (Giddens, 1984). As a concrete example, as citizens **[p. 378 ↓]** of the United States, the cultural norm of individualism within which all three of us have grown up will probably affect how we approach our own WLCs; we will likely try to solve "our" problems in isolation when work and personal/family life come into conflict rather than trying to build coalitions with others to collectively solve our problems. Thus, this ordering could have started with the individual level and worked to the macrolevel—these levels of experience inform each other (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Defining and Exploring Work–Life Conflict

The perspective of WLC, typically attributed to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), is "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family[life] domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (p. 77), including the extent to which experiences in the work(life) role result in diminished performance in the life(work) role (Greenhaus et al., 2006). Contemporary models take a bidirectional approach (see also Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011), where "life" interference with work (L → WC) occurs when life role responsibilities hinder performance at work (e.g., child's

illness prevents attendance at work) and work interference with "life" (W $\rightarrow$ LC) occurs when work activities impede performance of life responsibilities (e.g., long hours in paid work prevent performing duties at home). Four different forms of conflict can arise from the conflicting role demands (see Table 14.1 and Greenhaus et al., 2006).

Type	Related to …	Example
Time-based conflict	Competition for time from multiple role demands	Picking kids up late from child care because of work meeting running late
Energy-based conflict	Amount of physical vigor to devote to work and life	Coming home from work too tired to play with kids
Strain-based conflict	Role stressors in one domain inducing physical/psychological strain that hampers fulfilling role expectations in other domains	Coming home from work cranky and losing temper
Behavior-based conflict	When behavior patterns appropriate to each domain are incompatible, yet individuals do not make adjustments across domains	Coming home and acting like "the boss" to one's partner

Several recent quantitative meta-analytic studies and qualitative thematic literature reviews examine work–family conflict and/or WLC (i.e., Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Golden, Kirby, & Jorgenson, 2006; Greenhaus et al., 2006; Medved, 2010; Michel et al., 2011). These sources outline many specific articles feeding into our knowledge of the construct of WLC. In explicating predictors of WLC, we strongly draw from Michel et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of 142 studies as it was "developed from multiple work–family linkages, incorporates core work, family, and personality antecedents, and examines demographic **[p. 379 ↓]** variables as moderators.… [It] integrates and applies many [foundational] works … into a coherent framework" (p. 712). After outlining the predictors of L $\rightarrow$ WC and W $\rightarrow$ LC, we

SAGE knowledge

summarize some consequences of WLC and conclude with "work–life synergy" as an alternate conception.

Predictors of Work to Life and Life to Work Conflict

In conceptualizing predictors of W $_\rightarrow$ LC and L $_\rightarrow$ WC, Michel et al. (2011) had the following results: Across both realms, demographic variables, including marital status, parental status, personality, and gender, are significant and meaningful moderators of many WLC relationships. Table 14.2 (on p. 380) provides the details of this study.

Table 14.2 Predictors of W # LC and L # WC (see Michel et al., 2011, for details)

Variable	How It Affects W → LC[a]	How It Affects L → WC[a]
Work role stressors		
"Global" job stressors	Increases[a]	Increases
Work role overload	Increases[a]	Increases
Work role conflict	Increases[a]	Increases
Work time demands	Increases	
Work role ambiguity	Increases	Increases
Work role involvement		
Job involvement	Increases	
Work interest/centrality	Increases	
Social support in work role		
Organizational support	Decreases[a]	Decreases
Supervisor support	Decreases	Decreases
Coworker support	Decreases	Decreases
Work characteristics		
Task variety	Increases	
Job autonomy	Decreases	
"Family friendliness"	Decreases	
Role stressors in the family/life domain		
Global family stressors	Increases[a]	Increases[a]
Family role conflict	Increases[a]	Increases[a]
Family role overload	Increases	Increases[a]
Family role ambiguity	Increases	Increases
Family interest/centrality	Decreases	
Family time demands		Increases
Parental demands		Increases
Number of dependents		Increases
Social support in the family/life domain		
Family support	Decreases	Decreases
Spousal support	Decreases	Decreases
Family climate	Decreases[a]	Decreases

[a] Indicates moderate to larger effects (ρ ≥ .30).

As a quick summary of W $\rightarrow$ LC, as *work role stressors* increase, W $\rightarrow$ LC also increases; likewise, as *work role involvement* increases, W $\rightarrow$ LC also increases. Conversely, as *social support in the work role* increases, W $\rightarrow$ LC decreases. In the realm of *work characteristics,* task variety increases W $\rightarrow$ LC, but job autonomy and "family friendly organization" decrease W $\rightarrow$ LC. *Stressors on the (family) life side* were also found to affect W $\rightarrow$ LC, indicating that family members who are more socially supportive and provide a more understanding family culture reduce negative crossover effects (Michel et al., 2011).

To summarize L $\rightarrow$ WC, as *role stressors in the (family)life domain* increase, L $\rightarrow$ WC also increases. As social support in the *(family) life domain* increases, L $\rightarrow$ WC decreases. "Family climate" has also been studied as a predictor of L $\rightarrow$ WC: As it increases, L $\rightarrow$ WC decreases. *Stressors on the work side* were also found to increase L $\rightarrow$ WC. Furthermore, *work social support* was a predictor of L $\rightarrow$ WC; "these findings seem logical as organizations and coworkers who are supportive, and particularly 'family supportive,' probably engender less [L $\rightarrow$ WC] as they are more understanding and tolerant of an employee's family life within the work domain" (Michel et al., 2011, p. 706).

Consequences of Work–Life Conflict

In their meta-analysis, Kossek and Ozeki (1998) found that regardless of type of measure used, a consistent negative relationship exists between WLC and (reduced) life and **[p. 380 ↓]** job satisfaction. Ford et al. (2007) found that 7% of the variance in (family)life satisfaction was related to variables in the work domain and that 7% of the variance in work satisfaction was related to variables in the (family)life domain. While this may initially be seen as a small effect, it is indeed important given all the variables related to work and life satisfaction. Consequences for individual mental health resulting from WLC include anxiety, life stress, psychological strain, increased health risks for employed parents, poorer performance of the parenting role, psychological burnout, and lower mental health to include clinical depression (for summary review, see Greenhaus et al., 2006). Regarding physical health, Greenhaus et al. (2006) further note that a large number of studies investigate general reports of **[p. 381 ↓]** physical health symptoms. Researchers also examine the relationship between WLC and behaviors

SAGE knowledge

that increase health problems, such as substance dependence in multiple forms (e.g., drugs, prescription medications, alcohol, smoking), as well as decreased physical activity and poor (fatty) food choices (see Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Greenhaus et al., 2006).

Although we have talked about the causes and consequences of WLC separately, research indicates that these processes are more complex; the causes and consequences are interconnected in a dualistic relationship. Furthermore, as Kelly et al. (2008) note, "While the field has devoted most of its attention to the strains that often arise from managing both work and family[life] roles, recently there has been more attention to the benefits of combining work and family responsibilities" (p. 311).

Work–Life Synergy/Facilitation

A promising direction for research—and indeed for transforming WL problems—is to consider how "accumulating" multiple roles (e.g., employment and personal) can be beneficial, with the potential for positive spillover of emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. This has been framed as WL "synergy" (Beutell, 2010), as well as WL facilitation (Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004) and WL enrichment (McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010). Wayne et al. (2004) propose that sources of WL synergy/facilitation might include instances when (a) involvement in one role leads to privileges, security from role failure, and/or personality enrichment, which then lead to improved functioning in the other domain; (b) the activities in one role energize employees for the other role; and (c) the social support individuals receive or the skills and attitudes they acquire in one role are useful in the other (also see Barnett & Hyde, 2001). They assert that like WLC, WL synergy/facilitation is a bidirectional construct comprising $W \rightarrow L$ synergy, where one's involvement in work provides skills, behaviors, or positive mood that positively influences the family/personal life, and $L \rightarrow W$ synergy, where when one's involvement in family/personal life results in positive mood, support, or a sense of accomplishment that helps him or her cope better, work harder, or feel more confident or reenergized for one's role at work (Wayne et al., 2004, p. 111). Their findings suggest that WLC is negatively related to WL outcomes, whereas WL synergy is positively related to the same outcomes.

WL scholars argue that the amount of importance one places on a role affects the potential for synergy or conflict; in this capacity, the recent call to interrogate the meaning of work (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008) seems promising. For example, is WL synergy more likely when individuals feel they have meaningful work? However, current scholarship in this area is primarily agenda setting; more studies linking this with lived experiences are needed (for exceptions, see Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Wieland, 2011). Overall, awareness of WL synergy changes the theoretical discussion by suggesting a need to facilitate WL synergy, as well as to minimize WLC to obtain positive outcomes. This awareness transforms the ways individuals think about WL problems by allowing a frame of the positive aspects of combining employment and personal roles. Yet even in offering this construct, as communication scholars we see a need to continue moving beyond antecedents and consequences of WLC (or WL synergy). Rather than asking what makes WLC likely and what are the outcomes, we assert a need to *assume* that WLC exists and then try to understand the nuanced ways it is negotiated through communication. In moving toward such a communicative approach, we now focus on the multiple contextual "backdrops" within which individuals experience WLC.

[p. 382 ↓]

Macrosocietal Contexts for Work–Life Conflict

> *Office Gossip I: Did you hear? I guess Colleen asked about working from home once her maternity leave is over in two weeks … and if she can't do that, she wants to work part-time. Apparently she is loving motherhood and just can't fathom leaving Riley in childcare all day … but it's not CompanyX's problem she decided to have a kid! I'm not surprised though. Once she has a second she'll probably quit altogether and in the meantime she gets the benefit of working from home.… If I was a woman I'd take that deal any day.*

At the macrosocietal level, we discuss two categories of systems that shape WL norms and practices as a backdrop for thinking about organizational, relational, and individual responses to WLC: (1) economic and political and (2) historical and cultural. After discussing how U.S. WL scholars have studied such systems, we also consider scholarship that focuses on WLC in other national contexts.

Economic and Political Contexts

Drago (2007) argues that it is important to contextualize WLC economically because WL experiences are shaped by issues such as (a) what forms of labor are compensated, (b) the wage gap between mothers and others, and (c) how nonpaid household labor is divided. And while U.S. political rhetoric voices support for family values, economic structures do not reflect an ethic of care (Folbre, 2001). Indeed, Bianchi and Milkie (2010) assert a need to attend to materiality in paying attention to *underwork:* "How [do] families function during bad economic times and how [do] unemployment and poor economic circumstances erode WL balance.… Many families are experiencing job loss, eroded pension wealth, housing foreclosure, and affordability issues that may have long-term implications" (p. 719).

Yet economic and political contexts have been largely ignored outside of comparative research (Den Dulk, 2001). In other nations, the economic and political context is more central because of ways in which other governments (e.g., all European Union nations) have intervened in shaping their citizens' quality of working life by legislating paid parental leave (Kelly, 2006). Thus, the minimalist free market approach to policy in the United States is distinctive compared with other industrialized countries (Kossek & Distelberg, 2009), but this does not mean that economic and political contexts are of less consequence. On the contrary, the U.S. government position related to issues such as parental leave and child care has made such public policy issues the purview of corporations (Googins, 1997), resulting in WL policies and discourses that reflect a corporate ideology that privileges organizational values (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008).

Gross (2001) argues that U.S. scholars should broaden their understanding of the ways policy issues directly affect issues and experiences of WLC and remember that "having a job and being able to afford a family in the first place is a fundamental work/family[life]

issue" (p. 191). While parental leave legislation dominates when scholars situate WLC politically, the legislation of a variety of issues such as working hours, wages, and health care certainly affect WL possibilities. The WL literature often presumes ideals of "choice" and "balance" that in reality are tied to positions of economic or political privilege (Simpson & Kirby, 2006; Wieland, 2006). Connecting WLC research to multiple policy issues is crucial not only for understanding how the political context shapes WL choices but also for considering ways to inform WL legislation.

Historical and Cultural Contexts

Much attention is devoted to the broader historical and cultural context within which WLC is experienced, focusing on three primary **[p. 383 ↓]** areas: (1) the rise of communication technologies, (2) the construction and performance of gender, and (3) the shifting nature of work. First, scholars focus on the effects of new communication technologies on WLC. Kirby et al. (2003) argue that technologies can be both exploitative and empowering—exploitative in "intruding" across "boundaries" of home and work and yet empowering in allowing workers to exercise increased control over where and when they do their work. Mobile technologies, such as laptops (Ladner, 2008), mobile phones (Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008), and personal digital assistants (Golden & Geisler, 2007) are of interest due to their potential to alter WL boundaries. Thus, scholars often consider how mobile technologies facilitate alternative working arrangements such as telework and explore whether such work arrangements facilitate more or less WLC, with mixed conclusions. Some argue that telework helps mitigate WLC; for example, Fonner and Roloff (2010) explain how individuals who telework more than 50% of the time actually have higher job satisfaction than those on-site and attribute this to additional flexibility and having a break from the everyday politics of the workplace.

Others suggest that telework increases WLC. For example, Tremblay, Paquet, and Najern (2006) argue that teleworking increases workloads and employer expectations on worker time. Women face unique challenges in teleworking; many find that when working from home, they do even more unpaid domestic work than they previously did (Holloway, 2007). Scholars do agree that mobile technologies and alternative working arrangements need to be understood as socially constructed by individuals situated in

particular families, organizations, and cultures (Golden & Geisler, 2007; Ladner, 2008). Cultural values and norms, such as the importance of both face time and collegiality at work (e.g., Drago, 2007; Hÿlmo & Buzzanell, 2003), as well as how available one should be outside of normal working hours (Ladner, 2008), have the greatest influence on how technologies are constructed and adopted as well as their impact on WLC.

Second, communication scholars have focused on gender as a major historical and cultural context/macrodiscourse shaping experiences of WLC (Kirby et al., 2003). Gendered expectations surrounding WL are tied to the historical distinction between public and private formed during early industrialization when job site and household fractured into separate spheres and a two-sphere ideology emerged with men in the public (work/occupational) sphere and women in the private (home/family/domestic) sphere. As a result, work life and personal (family) life are often understood as constituting separate, nonoverlapping worlds in a "myth of separate spheres" (Kanter, 1977). Today, this "separation" between work and home is being renegotiated because of the ways (socially constructed) "boundaries" (see Kirby et al., 2003) are being blurred through practices such as telework. However, the historical influence of the public–private distinction remains influential.

Indeed, WLC and the need to "juggle" career and life demands is often narrowly considered as a "woman's issue" (Drago, 2007), which in turn focuses on the "difference question" and establishing equal opportunities for men and women rather than challenging the ways we "do gender" in relation to WL (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Research focuses on the gendered implications of WLC and considers how individuals navigate the cultural expectations of "ideal workers" in conjunction with their other roles (Drago, 2007; Williams, 2000). Scholars agree that working mothers especially experience a tension between society's expectations for them as workers and caregivers—aversive sexism still exists (Meisenbach, 2010a; Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Research shows that female **[p. 384 ↓]** breadwinners (Medved, 2010) and managerial mothers (Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Liu, Bowers, & Conn, 2005) manage this tension by reframing ideals for motherhood in ways that justify and celebrate their own choices and experiences. Stay-at-home fathers similarly experience identity struggles associated with violating gender expectations (Petroski & Edley, 2006). While gender expectations related to WL roles are still segmented, there is some evidence that cultural norms are beginning to shift; research suggests that contemporary fathers are expected to

be more active parents and are expanding the meaning of fatherhood (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009; Golden, 2007).

Finally, research focuses on how large-scale discourses such as meanings of work are shifting in light of changes such as globalization, the flattening of organizational hierarchies, increasing work hours, the boundary-less career, and the changing social contract between employers and employees (see also Cheney et al., 2008; Major & Germamo, 2006). Several macrodiscourses, including work (Cheney et al., 2008), career (Wieland, 2006; Wieland, Bauer, & Deetz, 2009), success (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004), and professionalism (Drago, 2007; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007), further elucidate how dominant views of the WL relationship were constructed as well as the consequences of particular constructions. We are socialized into these discourses through various systems such as families (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006; Paugh, 2005) and the media (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Sotirin, Buzzanell, & Turner, 2007). An explicit (communicative) focus on macrodiscourses can deepen our understandings of how historical and cultural contexts shape WLC.

International Contexts

Considering a variety of national contexts provides a greater awareness of how historical, cultural, economic, and political systems shape WLC. Furthermore, studying multiple national contexts can provide a deeper understanding of how navigating WLC at individual, relational, and organizational levels can (re)shape these broader systemic contexts. Those studying WLC in national contexts other than in the United States pay particular attention to Scandinavia, especially Sweden. Sweden has focused on providing legislation aimed at enabling gender equality, a good working life, and care for children through its parental leave and day care policies (Haas & Hwang, 2000). As of 2011, Swedish parents receive 77.6% of their salaries for 390 days of parental leave. To incent couples to more equally share parental leave, 60 days are reserved for both mother and father and cannot be transferred (Haas, Chronholm, Duvander, & Hwang, 2009). In communication studies, Wieland's (2010, 2011) ethnographic research explicates how Swedish cultural discourses intersect with organizational discourses in shaping WLC experiences; when tension emerged between discourses of

employee well-being and employee/organizational productivity, participants drew on the Swedish value of *lagom* (moderation) to productively navigate these discourses.

Of course, other nations are studied as well, and by considering WLC in these contexts, scholars have acknowledged the importance of taking a macrosocietal perspective (several edited books address numerous countries; see also Blyton, Blunsdon, Reed, & Dastmalchian, 2006; Haas, Hwang, & Russell, 2000; Poelmans, 2005). This broader systemic perspective includes factors related to the economy (e.g., income), policy (e.g., welfare and health), history (e.g., immigration), and culture (e.g., values and attitudes). In a comparative study of 20 countries in the Anglo world, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, Spector et al. (2007) conclude **[p. 385 ↓]** that cultural differences in terms of individualism and collectivism directly affect how people experience WLC. As an example of this, Lucas, Liu, and Buzzanell (2006) compare "no-limits" career discourses in the individualistic United States and in the collectivistic China. While demonstrating how (a) the U.S. career discourses related to meritocracy, hierarchy, and materiality and (b) the Chinese career discourses related to equality, devotion, and recognition, they ultimately conclude that discourses in *both* countries perpetuate an excessive view that presumes one can never work long or hard enough (which can result in WLC).

In thinking about the transformation of WL problems at the macrosocietal level, WLC should explore (and challenge) cultural ideologies related to work, gender, time, and so on since cultural differences clearly affect the relationship between the causes and consequences of WLC. Wieland (2011) notes that the discourse of excess—"one can never do enough"—is especially influential in shaping the ways in which U.S. Americans work and live; it results in an excessive model of career that has destructive consequences for individuals, organizations, and societies (Wieland et al., 2009). While shifting cultural values is a daunting task, making small changes in the ways we speak about work and life can alter our WL constructions (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Given this contextualization of WLC within macrosocietal structures, we turn now to how organizations intersect with WL possibilities.

Organizational Responses to Work–Life Conflict

> *Office Gossip II: Guess what? Supposedly there's talk of us finally getting flexible scheduling! I heard the policy is drafted so that as long as we work five core hours, we can come in earlier or later around those hours as long as we work 40 hours a week. I hope it's not just a rumor —I would love to do hot yoga in the mornings before I come in, but right now I don't have time to get that sweaty and then shower before work. I can't imagine how much more balanced I would feel if I could!*

At the organizational level, the focus turns to issues that affect the workplace, including (a) an explanation of what WL benefits, policies, and programs are available and what their outcomes have been and (b) the role of organizational culture and climate related to WL as connected to WL benefit utilization.

Work–Life Benefits, Policies, and Programs

As illustrated, U.S. employers generally have far more latitude to determine work and family policy with few requirements to even offer policy support (Kossek & Distelberg, 2009). Still, many organizations have made "deliberate organizational changes—in policies, practices, or the target culture—to reduce WLC and/or support employees' lives outside of work" (Kelly et al., 2008, p. 310). While this change may in part be altruistic, WL issues are also expected to affect the "bottom line" in terms of talent management, human capital outcomes, financial performance, and operational and business outcomes (Richman, Johnson, & Noble, 2011). Since employers offer WL benefits on a voluntary basis, access and availability are uneven; more benefits are received by higher-income workers, employees of medium and large rather than small firms, white-collar (vs. blue-collar) workers, and full-time (vs. part-time) workers (Catalyst, 2011; Kossek & Distelberg, 2009; Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2011). We discuss the range of potential WL benefits per the Society for Human Resource Management's (2011) grouping in their benefits report: (a) leave

benefits, (b) "family-friendly" benefits, and (c) flexible working **[p. 386 ↓]** benefits. Yet we recognize (and examine) the difference between policies existing and policies being usable (see Kirby & Krone, 2002). See Table 14.3 for a summary of these policies.

Work-Life Benefits Category	Access	Sample Benefits
Leave benefits	84% FT/41% PT	Paid family leave, paid parental leave, paid time off for volunteering or to serve on the board of a community group, sabbatical programs, and donation programs for paid time off and/or sick leave
"Family-friendly" benefits	59% FT/36% PT	Dependent care flexible spending accounts, bringing a child to work in an emergency, an on-site lactation/mother's room, elder care benefits, domestic partner benefits, child care centers, referrals and backup care, and adoption assistance
Flexible working benefits	76% FT/46% PT	Part-time work, flextime (allows employees to select their work hours within limits established by the employer), telecommuting, flexible breaks/meals, and compressed workweek

SOURCE: Society for Human Resource Management (2011).

NOTE: *N* = 600 companies surveyed; FT = full time; PT = part time.

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In general, patterns of leave taking are marked by gender, racial, and class differences (Rudd, 2004). The only standardization for leave policies in the United States is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a governmental mandate for job-protected family leave. Job-protected family leave is especially important in the United States, where a significant part of health and welfare benefits are provided through employment relationships (Rudd, 2004). Maternity leave is the most studied benefit; Buzzanell and colleagues (see also Buzzanell & Liu, 2005, 2007; Meisenbach, Remke, Buzzanell, & Liu, 2008) extensively studied women's attempts at maternity leave negotiations, examining how women talk about, enact, and respond to workplace pregnancy and maternity leave processes. One key takeaway from this research is that maternity leaves are an occasion for the (re)production of gender, especially in defining women as less than ideal workers. A second takeaway is that although standardization is implied, "companies enacted maternity leaves as burdens and nonroutine events" (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005, p. 11). These takeaways imply increased WLC.

When considering "family-friendly" benefits, some companies have set a new standard by offering a menu of flexible work arrangements and a variety of "personal" rather than specifically parental benefits, recognizing that these benefits in particular may cause resentment **[p. 387 ↓]** among those who have no need for them (e.g., Burkett, 2000; see also the Relational Impacts on Work–Life Conflict section). Finally, regarding flexible work, according to the SHRM 2010 Job Satisfaction survey (SHRM, 2010), 46% of employees cited flexibility to balance WL issues as "very important" to job satisfaction, and flexibility is associated with lower levels of WLC. Experimental trials of several flexible-working benefits have been conducted and have resulted in lowered WLC (e.g., Moen, Kelly, & Chermack, 2009). However, measuring flexibility as *formally* offered by the employer is often insufficient as an indicator of flexibility available to the employee. On the (less) flexible side, many employers limit flexibility to a small portion of the workforce or workday (Galinsky, Bond, Sakai, Kim, & Giuntoli, 2008). Conversely, supervisors can also permit more flexibility than is formally allowed.

Outcomes of Work–Life Benefits, Policies, and Programs. In their review of more than 150 peer-reviewed studies, Kelly et al. (2008) note the difficulty in reporting the success of WL policies because some studies evaluate the impact of *having* WL policies available to employees (more common), while other studies evaluate the impact of employees' *use* of these policies (see their review for extended references).

SAGE knowledge

Yet employers consistently cite improvement in worker morale and job satisfaction after introducing WL benefits or programs (Richman et al., 2011). In particular, WL benefits are cited as increasing organizational commitment (Eaton, 2003), increasing "organizational attractiveness" for applicants (Richman et al., 2011), increasing job satisfaction (McNall, Masuda & Nicklin, 2010), and reducing turnover intention (McNall et al., 2010).

Kossek, Lewis, and Hammer (2010) further note mixed consequences of WL initiatives for individuals and organizations—while they may enable employees to manage work and caregiving, they can perpetuate stereotypes of ideal workers and increase work intensification because employees work harder out of gratefulness for the flexibility they have been granted (see also Drago, 2007). Finally, in their meta-analytic examination of aspects of "family-friendly" workplaces in reducing WLC, Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesveran (2005) utilized 38 studies (total $N = 13,605$) and found that they "may provide less assistance to workers in managing WLC than one may hope, as none explained more than seven percent of the variance in WLC" (p. 555). Yet of the dimensions studied, they found that a "family-friendly" work culture seemed most influential in reducing WLC.

Workplace Cultures/Climates Reflecting Concern for Employees' Lives outside of Work

A growing literature illustrates that it is not formal WL benefits and policies in isolation that make a difference in reducing WLC but rather the daily practices that surround their use and whether there is a culture/climate that supports WL policies (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Eaton, 2003; O'Driscoll et al., 2003; Premeaux, Adkins, & Mossholder, 2007). Thus, while benefits might exist on paper, employees may not feel that they can use them to alleviate WLC based on how the policies are talked about by supervisors, the climate of the workgroup, and/or perceived career repercussions (see Eaton, 2003; Kirby, 2000; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Schutte & Eaton, 2004). For example, in their study of

2,810 employees, Bond, Galinsky, and Hill (2004) note that 39% of respondents agree that there is job jeopardy for working flexibly.

WL culture refers to "the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees' work and (family) **[p. 388 ↓]** [personal] lives" (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999, p. 394). Allen (2001) also introduces family supportive organization perceptions, as "global perceptions that employees form regarding the extent to which the organization is family[life] supportive" (p. 414). Eaton (2003) offers the construct of perceived usability to explore the extent to which employees feel free to utilize their "available" formal and informal WL policies. These concepts are important because employees who perceive a supportive WL culture/climate (a) are more likely to use WL benefits (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Kossek, Noe, & Colquitt, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999) and (b) have lower levels of WLC (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Kossek et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Voydanoff, 2005).

In their foundational work, Thompson et al. (1999) lay out three considerations regarding WL culture. The first is organizational time demands, or the extent to which there are expectations for rigid schedules, for long hours of work, and for prioritizing work over family. Another dimension of culture is perceived career consequences, or the degree to which employees perceive positive or negative career consequences for using WL benefits. The third aspect of managerial support alludes to the extent to which individual managers are sensitive to and accommodating of employees' family needs, not only in terms of policy use but also in more informal accommodations (see the Relational Impacts on Work–Life Conflict section; Premeaux et al., 2007).

Thus, organizations can transform WL problems by becoming "life friendly" (see Pitt-Catsouphes, 2002). This begins with providing benefits, policies, and programs that promote employees' quality of life, recognizing that flexibility and giving employees some control over work scheduling seems to most reduce WLC (see Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010). But it also involves cultivating a culture/climate in which employees perceive that (a) their nonwork life is respected, (b) they are not required to prioritize work above family/personal life or manage unrealistic schedules to achieve desired career consequences, (c) there will be no negative career consequences associated with using WL benefits, and (d) their managers and coworkers will listen to and support

them in striving to reduce WLC (Andreassi & Thomson, 2004; Kossek et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 1999). To enact such cultures, supervisors may need to be trained to be more supportive of WL issues (see the Relational Impacts on Work–Life Conflict section) and should then in turn be rewarded by the organization for supporting WL issues; Galinsky et al. (2008) found that only 20% of 1,100 employers said it was "very true" that management rewards those supervisors who support effective flexible work arrangements. Finally, workplace relationships should be developed that are respectful of employees' WL responsibilities.

Relational Impacts on Work–Life Conflict

> *Office Gossip III: Can you believe it? Mary is home with a sick kid AGAIN. Seriously, can't she find someone else to help her out? When she is gone the rest of us have to do her work and I am so tired of covering for the breeders around here. I think she abuses CompanyX's policy that separates sick leave for dependents from personal sick leave and uses every last day.… I wish I could play hooky like that. When she's back we should give her the third degree … see if her kid was really even sick.*

Clark (2002) asserts that talking with family about work and talking with coworkers/supervisors about (family)life affects both the work and life domains, leading to greater work satisfaction, higher work functioning, **[p. 389 ↓]** higher satisfaction with home and family activities, and resulting in more functional families. In this section, we first highlight the impact of work relationships on WLC by focusing on supervisors and coworkers and then discuss ways in which spousal and other familial relationships are connected to WLC.

Workplace Relationships

Supportive relationships in the workplace are critical social resources in dealing with WL issues (Krouse & Afifi, 2007; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesveran, 2005). We discuss how relationships with supervisors and coworkers can both facilitate and buffer WLC.

Supervisory Relationships. Research indicates that supervisors are a major determinant in subordinates' ability to balance work and life roles (e.g., Allen, 2001; Kirby, 2000). Workers with "life"-supportive supervisors (a) make greater use of flexible hours and family leave (Breaugh & Frye, 2008), (b) have increased job satisfaction and decreased WLC (Breaugh & Frye, 2008; O'Driscoll et al., 2003), and (c) have increased career and overall life satisfaction (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). Supervisors who are aware of their workers' "life" situations and are flexible in accommodating these issues are one of the most powerful predictors of employee well-being and diminished WLC (Lauzun, Morganson, Major, & Green, 2010). Breaugh and Frye (2008) assert that informal actions of supervisors have greater influence on employee WLC than formal practices, and research has demonstrated that WL policies are ineffective if employees perceive that supervisors do not support them (Lauzun et al., 2010). Kirby (2000) notes that supervisors can (intentionally or not) send mixed messages about work and life and WL policy use (e.g., emphasizing deadlines but then encouraging time with family) that create employee uncertainty. Perhaps based on such uncertainty, Hoffman and Cowan (2010) illustrate how employees have multiple "rules" governing requests for WL accommodations, including (a) what types of requests to make (e.g., family requests are easiest to make) and (b) how to ask for accommodations (e.g., emphasize organizational interests).

In light of their impact on WLC, several scholars suggest training programs for supervisors (e.g., Buzzanell & Liu, 2007). While Ryan and Kossek (2008) identify "supervisor support for policy use" and "the degree of negotiation with supervisors before one can use the policies" as attributes of an inclusive organizational culture, in a survey of 1,100 employers, Galinsky et al. (2008) note that (only) 50% train supervisors to respond to employees' WL needs. In their white paper outlining ways by which supervisors can be more supportive of WL issues, Rivera and Tracy (2009) offer six concrete suggestions: (1) make changes (themselves) at home, (2) lead by example (role modeling), (3) do not let parental leave turn into an "off-ramp" from paid work, (4) put policy onto paper, (5) create a strong culture of WL harmony, and (6) have the courage to embrace new ideas.

Coworker Relationships. When organizational norms surrounding WL issues are unclear, individuals often go to colleagues to negotiate boundaries (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Talking with coworkers about family and personal life leads to greater work satisfaction

and higher work functioning as well as higher satisfaction with family activities (Clark, 2002). Social support at work is negatively correlated with anxiety and depression (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), and a positive correlation exists between team collaboration and the ability to balance work and life (Bhave, Kramer, & Glomb, 2010). Research shows that emotional support from coworkers affects overall emotional exhaustion. Venting with coworkers is seen as a catharsis, and employees seek affirmation, assurance, advice, and instrumental support **[p. 390 ↓]** from coworkers (Krouse & Afifi, 2007). The mentoring relationship (which could be supervisory but often is a colleague) is also central to buffering WLC (Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001). Furthermore, having a close friend at work can help an employee deal with work issues at work and not have to revisit the "work world" at home (McBride & Bergen, 2011).

Yet while coworkers can positively affect WLC and offer support, they can also discourage each other from taking advantage of WL policies. Coworkers may fear having to take on more work as a result of individuals taking advantage of policies such as family leave and consequently might feel resentment and communicate negatively about WL policies and how they create an unfair burden (Kirby & Krone, 2002). There are emerging issues of equity where individuals without families feel burdened by policies because of the increased workloads they are facing (e.g., Burkett, 2000; Hayden, 2010). Kirby and Krone (2002) explain how employees frequently communicated a perception that WL policies granted preferential treatment based on whether the employee (a) had children or not, (b) was male or female, and (c) had a part-time or full-time status. The single employees then "talked about 'banding together' to share their perceptions of inequity, which translated to feelings of resentment" (p. 63), and this fostered an environment where coworkers created an (unwritten) rule of determining "use versus abuse" of WL benefits that contributed to a system of peer pressure where many individuals felt pressured not to utilize their available benefits.

There are gendered implications to these processes. For men, taking advantage of WL policies to reduce WLC challenges traditional notions of masculinity and work commitment (Drago, 2007). And while women may desire to communicate with coworkers about WLC, they will often "edit out" family involvements in conversations so as not to invite questions of commitment and professionalism (Jorgenson, 2000). In sum, workplace relationships with supervisors and coworkers can buffer and contribute to WLC.

Family Relationships

Much like workplace relationships, the interpersonal relationships within families and social support networks affect and are affected by WLC. We discuss the interplay between work and the family as a unit in WLC. We also discuss WLC impacts on the spousal relationship and the division of household labor and how children are affected.

Family Units. While families are made up of a nexus of various relationships, the family unit itself can be studied as a relational entity linked to both W $_\rightarrow$ LC and L $_\rightarrow$ WC. Research illustrates that work hours and stress at work can affect the family unit's cohesiveness, functionality, and integration (e.g., Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Clark, 2002; Voydanoff, 2004). For example, mothers' shorter paid work hours and fathers' lower participation in professional organizations are positively related to activities with adolescents, which in turn are positively related with family integration (Voydanoff, 2004). Boyar et al. (2003) note that WLC affects the family unit because employees "adjust their home lives rather than their work lives since the immediate effect is less damaging to one's livelihood" (p. 185).

Additional research examines how "life" issues can both contribute to and buffer WLC (or its outcomes) in the workplace (e.g., Clark, 2002). While Kossek et al. (2001) find family climates that are open and conducive to sharing concerns are directly related to well-being, work performance, and WLC, they also note that if either family *or* work climate is not open to sharing WL concerns, **[p. 391 ↓]** general well-being and work performance of the caregiver is damaged. Some organizations acknowledge this need for "openness" and recognize families as a legitimate influence on employees' organizational involvement—they consider families as organizational members and see homes and families as an extension of the workplace (Golden, 2009).

Relational Partners. Research on how relational partners affect WLC often focuses on how workplace issues affect these relationships or how the relationship buffers WLC. Most notably, WLC negatively affects marital satisfaction (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001) and partners' commitment (Day & Chamberlain, 2006). Bergen, Kirby, and McBride (2007) examine commuter marriages and illustrate how social networks can further these negative impacts by questioning the couples' choices and

(re)introducing a need for the couple to negotiate WL. Furthermore, when wives choose to commute because of work, they expend great energy, constructing a narrative to make their relationship fit within the master narrative of marriage (Bergen, 2011). Conversely, partner support can also buffer WLC (Westman & Etzion, 2005); the positive management of WLC of one partner can have positive implications for the other (Cinamon, Weisel, & Tzuk, 2007).

Partners can also help each other communicatively reconstruct the seemingly competing roles of worker and parent/spouse/partner. When studying worker's decisions when faced with conflicting demands of a workplace and family event, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) found that pressure to engage in one domain's activity by either the partner or supervisor had the greatest impact on the decision made. In light of societal changes, Golden (2002) explores how worker parents interpersonally "co-arrange" their working and personal lives (see also Gol den, 2001). Related to partners' negotiation of work and life, emerging communication research focuses on the division of domestic labor (Alberts, Tracy, & Trethewey, 2011; Medved, 2007, 2009b). Alberts et al. (2011) propose an integrative theory of division of labor that takes into account (a) response thresholds to household labor, (b) differences in perceptions of obligation versus gift, and (c) how responsibility can become a solidified pattern of domestic labor. These negotiations of domestic labor between partners in the private sector have also led to the commodification of family labor with new services provided by public entities (Medved, 2007).

Dependent Relationships. WLC affects the parent–child relationship and how much knowledge of their children's experiences the working parents have. For example, Crouter et al. (2001) note that a combination of long hours and high work overload is consistently associated with less positive father–adolescent relationships among adolescent sons and daughters. As noted, mother's shorter work hours and father's lower participation in community-based organizations (rather than paid work) are positively related to increased activities with their adolescents (Voydanoff, 2004). WLC also influences how mothers and fathers think about themselves as parents as it is negatively correlated with parental self-efficacy (Cinamon et al., 2007). Other research explores the impacts of elder care on WLC: As just one example, an employee's decision to care for an elderly family member in her or his own home seems to be detrimental to overall performance and well-being (Kossek et al., 2001).

Conversely, WLC is associated with increased parental commitment (Day & Chamberlain, 2006). And researchers note that, like spouses, children can act as a buffer to WLC (e.g., Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). Among fathers, blurring the boundaries of work and child rearing actually aided in the development of a masculine concept of caregiving that acknowledges emotion (Golden, **[p. 392 ↓]** 2007). Finally, parental WLC can also affect how children are socialized into WL issues (Langellier & Peterson, 2006) and divisions of domestic labor (Alberts et al., 2011): Paugh (2005) analyzed actual dinnertime conversation among 16 working-class families to "illuminate how children are apprenticed into discourse and ideologies of work" (p. 55). This socialization of children, however, is not necessarily equitable, and men and women may receive significantly different messages about career paths and when/if it is appropriate to exit the paid labor force (Medved et al., 2006). In thinking about the transformation of WL problems at the relational level, individuals should be mindful that communicative exchanges with spouses, friends, managers, and coworkers can both create and relieve WLC. Certain types of communication, such as a coworker expressing feelings of guilt that his child is home alone sick, may increase an individual's own feelings of WLC. Especially in the workplace, human resource professionals who desire to facilitate WL "balance" for employees should educate coworkers and supervisors on their power to contribute to or buffer the WLC of others (including by implying that single people do not have "lives" that they need to accomplish outside of work). Being mindful of our communicative choices in relationships about WL leads to our final realm of discussion: how on a daily basis individuals must make choices about how they "do" work and life (and as a result, WLC).

Enactments of Work, "Life," and Work–Life Conflict

Office Gossip IV: So in my last meeting they were considering providing all of us with smartphones through the Company X budget and paying our monthly bill and giving us like $50 in apps … but I gotta say, I'm not sure how I feel about it. Don't get me wrong—the technology is

SAGE knowledge

> *exciting. But if Sarah sends me an e-mail at 9:30 at night, am I expected to answer it because she is my boss and it is my work phone? What time does work officially stop? I like to separate work and home, and this seems like a slippery slope.*

In terms of practice and future research, we focus on the "doing" (accomplishment, management, navigation) of work and life in mundane daily practices (Medved, 2004) and how that facilitates or buffers WLC. In the everyday accomplishment of work and life, we see the continual, dynamic, and communicative nature of the WL relationship: "The process is not always smooth, linear, nor necessarily purposive; however it is surely one of ongoing action, interaction and sensemaking" (Medved, 2004, p. 142). We discuss here three processes through which individuals accomplish work and life (and that can potentially transform WL problems): (1) constructing boundaries, (2) constructing identities/selves, and (3) seeking out practices of power. Research on these processes comes primarily from a social constructionist perspective, which emphasizes the role of communication in constructing reality.

Boundary Construction

Boundary work refers to the ongoing process through which individuals create, manage, transform, and transcend "boundaries" between work and life as they navigate WLC (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Communication scholars have called attention to the fundamentally discursive nature of boundary construction (see Kirby et al., 2003) as well as its socially performative implications (Shumate & Fulk, 2004). Boundaries are socially constructed and changing—individuals create diverse boundaries between work and life that vary along a continuum from segmented to integrated, which "implies that these categories, their contents and their boundary must be negotiated" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 6). Those who segment work and life build and maintain the spheres as **[p. 393 ↓]** separate and unique, while those who integrate construct work and home as intricately interrelated minimize distinctions (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Attending to the communicative practices through which boundaries are built and transcended provides insight into how individuals accomplish work and life.

Ashforth et al. (2000) illustrate that segmentation and integration lead to different stresses: While WL integration leads to a blurring of boundaries that makes *boundary maintenance* an ongoing challenge, WL segmentation requires more intensive *boundary transitions.* Research indicates that generally, segmentation reduces WLC more than integration as it provides individuals with more control and decreased levels of stress—but of course, this depends on the individual and the organization (Kreiner, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005). In Gill's (2006) study, many female entrepreneurs physically separated work and life as well as created/enforced family rules (e.g., having an established family time) and personal rules (e.g., not taking work home) and claimed that such segmentation helped them reduce WLC.

Some scholars suggest that the reasoning for integration will shape its effectiveness in reducing WLC. For example, Eng, Moore, Grunberg, Greenberg, and Sikora (2010) found a vast difference in WLC for those who *planned* to work from home as opposed to those who were *allowed* to do so in order to complete extra work (as this indicated work overload rather than flexibility). As this work progresses, the literature is making space for the possibility that individuals potentially construct diverse WL boundaries. For example, in considering the role of personal digital assistants in boundary work, Golden and Geisler (2007) find participants use the technology both to create a clear distinction between work and life and to develop integrated selves—to achieve the "concurrent and conflicting goals of integration and segmentation" (p. 541).

Identity Construction

Doing WL also involves identity construction, and while we discuss this separately from boundary work, they are certainly interrelated practices. In the first edition of this *Handbook,* we urged a move from roles, conflicts, and outcomes to more subtle processes of identity construction to gain insight into the experience and negotiation of WLC (following Kirby et al., 2003): "What individuals are trying to accomplish is not merely the avoidance of conflict but the positive accomplishment of personhood" (p. 14). Identity construction is emerging as another way of understanding WLC, building on the theorizing of identity as conceptualized in organization studies. In this conception, self-identity is contested and more focused on paid work than in previous eras, requiring individuals to more actively craft a self (Giddens, 1991).

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that self-identities emerge out of the interplay of *identity work* (the ongoing process through which one crafts a self) and *identity regulation* (the ways that social practices shape the process of identity construction). As Wieland (2010) notes, identity constructions draw "not only on one's position as worker but also as family member, citizen, and consumer … and as such involves a negotiation of the demands of work and other parts of life" (p. 505). While identity work is accomplished both through conscious reflection and ongoing practices (Wieland, 2010), it is easiest to identify during major work and life transitions marked with uncertainty (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). WL scholars have focused on identity construction during work role transitions—changes in positions, organizations, or occupations prompt individuals to do identity work in order to make sense of their (new, changed) identity in light of the change (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Job loss also prompts identity work: Buzzanell and Turner (2003) establish how unemployed men did emotion **[p. 394 ↓]** work that enabled them to maintain their identity as breadwinner and their focus on the public rather than private realm. Medved and Kirby (2005) analyze how stay-at-home mothers drew on professionalized discourses (i.e., "I'm the Family CEO") to manage their identities once they no longer engaged in paid work.

Life transitions (e.g., transitioning to parenthood) also provide the opportunity to observe identity construction. Gol den (2001) concludes that first-time (dual-career) parents were active in the identity renegotiation process and worked to reduce anxiety; individuals constructed identities by positioning themselves in relation to their spouses and demonstrated both a continuation of and resistance to traditional gender roles (Golden, 2002). Buzzanell and Liu's (2005) exploration of women's identity work during pregnancy, on leave, and after returning to work illustrates how participants worked to maintain their self-identities as "the same" as they were before pregnancy and to resist the negative identity regulations of others.

Scholars also explore how WL identity construction occurs when one's identity is perceived as countercultural (Meisenbach, 2010b), as is the case with female breadwinners. Medved (2009a) argues that breadwinning mothers draw on moral, personal, and political positions to construct their identity as morally right, a personal fit, and as improving women's role in society. Female breadwinners in Meisenbach's (2010a) study saw their identity as providing them with control, independence, career progress, and appreciation of their partner while also increasing their stress, guilt,

and resentment. As a whole, this scholarship indicates that identity construction is a deeply social process shaped by societal discourses about what is acceptable or desirable (Meisenbach, 2010a). Ideal selves associated with both the public and the private spheres—such as the ideal worker, citizen, mother, father, woman, and man, among others—regulate identity work; individuals respond with strategic and creative positioning through which they satisfy and/or resist those ideals (Wieland, 2010). In this sense, the accomplishment of WL through identity construction is very much shaped by the macrosocietal context. As shown, societal expectations associated with gender are especially consequential.

Research that studies how WL is accomplished through identity construction provides a deeper understanding of the ongoing, messy, and situated process of navigating WLC. Yet at times, this work perpetuates a view of self-identity that presumes the possibility and desirability of developing a coherent self that incorporates all aspects of one's identity (thus, resolving role conflicts). Tracy and Trethewey (2005) suggest an alternative conception to celebrate the benefits and challenges associated with conflicting aspects of self: viewing the self as crystallized—having multiple facets that potentially conflict with one another (see also Gill, 2006). Whether a multifaceted self that incorporates work and life is seen as possible, expected, and/or desirable depends in part on societal discourses. In Sweden, for example, a strong cultural value of moderation helps individuals maintain a healthy tension between work and life (Wieland, 2011). Research considering the implications of viewing the self as crystallized would enable scholars to better understand how WL is accomplished through identity construction.

Seeking Out Practices of Power in Studying Work–Life Conflict

We argue elsewhere (Kirby et al., 2003) that taking a meaning, process-centered perspective makes communication scholars' contributions unique from other disciplines regarding WLC. Medved (2010) further notes an emerging theoretical perspective in the **[p. 395 ↓]** communication-based WL literature: interrogating "discourse and related practices of power [that] … question who has the ability to determine dominant social

meanings" (para. 5). As communication scholars who are mindful of power dynamics in society (e.g., gender, economics, social class), organizations, and relationships, we conclude by embracing this perspective and encouraging more critical work on issues of work, life, and WLC.

Kirby (2006) notes how organizational policies that might be seen as alleviating WLC might concomitantly be seen as the organization creeping into (and controlling more of) personal life. Hoffman and Cowan (2008) expand this notion in uncovering a "corporate ideology of work life" on the websites of Fortune's *100 Best Companies to Work For.* In this ideology, organizations end up defining the proper relationship between paid work and the rest of life, where (a) work is the most important element of life, (b) life means family, (c) individuals are responsible for balance, and (d) organizations control WL programs. Mescher, Benschop, and Doorewaard (2009) also analyzed company WL rhetoric and found that "websites reproduce the traditional cultural norms of an ideal worker who is available full-time, who allows work to prevail over private life, and who is willing to 'go the extra mile'" (p. 35). Overall, when organizations "present work-life programs as benefits to the employee, [they] hide the fact that the ultimate goal of the program is to enhance organizational effectiveness by getting more work out of individual employees" (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008, p. 240).

Hoffman and Cowan (2008), therefore, encourage studying the tension between domination and resistance in organizations regarding WL policies. Shuler's (2006) study of evangelical ministers on a college campus who work and live at home as a total institution is one such example; while participants resisted the pull of the total institution in home-based work by maintaining "boundaries," sometimes they succumbed to the total institution and undermined the public/private dichotomy. Furthermore, Hoffman and Cowan's (2008) finding that "managing the relationship between paid work and the rest of life is the responsibility of the employee, with only the assistance of the organization" (p. 237) reflects the power of the organization to (re)produce a privatized and individualistic approach to WL, at least in the United States. Such a view privileges dominant structures, because when WLC is framed as an individual issue, there will likely not be an organized push for widespread change (see Kirby et al., 2003). Indeed, in their analysis of actual requests for leave, Hoffman and Cowan (2010) define the rule "Work life needs are private and individual" by a scarcity of coalition-based strategies (to be exact, 1 out of 96). Employees do not even think to organize on

issues of WL "balance" because of its framing as an individual issue—a private versus a public concern. In light of this, Tracy (2008) argues for, and we echo, a "reframing of organizational policies as allowing for and promoting *care as a common, collective good*" (p. 171).

In sum, while we have emphasized organizational and individual issues in our examples of paths for practice and future research, certainly there are macro and relational issues as well. Thinking about care as a common good brings to the fore macro issues of gender, not just as a variable to be examined but as a socially constructed divide in the arena of WL with power implications. Indeed, the construction of WLC issues as primarily a "woman's issue" can make it easier to marginalize. In addition, macro issues of social class are also of import as we move forward in studying WLC in communication; while moves have been made to embrace more perspectives (see, e.g., Cowan & Bochantin's, 2011, study of blue-collar employees' WL metaphors and Simpson & Kirby's, 2006, commentary on the **[p. 396 ↓]** opt-out revolution), the research is still largely classist. Furthermore, at the relational level, examining actual dialogue between individuals as they negotiate WL and the power imbued in that dialogue would likely illustrate systematically distorted communication (Deetz, 1992). Overall, there are many directions that critical WL communication research could take, and we look forward to reading these alongside the more descriptive approaches as scholars continue to elucidate issues of WLC across all levels of analysis.

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