"I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE. WHAT DO I NEED TO WRITE ON MY TWO-WEEKS'

NOTICE?": INVESTIGATING COMMUNICATION IN DECISIONS ABOUT WORK-LIFE

CONFLICT

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experience of individuals who strongly considered or decided to quit their jobs due to work-life conflict from a communication perspective, how they communicated with social network members, and how that influenced their decision. Problematic Integration (PI) theory was used to explore how participants experienced work-life challenges and how individuals used social support to help manage their problematic integration. Twenty-two individuals who strongly considered or decided to quit their jobs were interviewed about their personal and professional experiences during that time. Results indicated that work-life conflict emerged from both work and life, and impacted both domains. Work interfered in life more frequently than the reverse. Participants' cognitive discomfort caused by work-life conflict was explained by the four types of PI. Communicating with social network members helped individuals manage feelings of PI, which influenced their decision to leave or remain in their jobs. Social network members are an important element influencing how individuals make decisions related to managing PI and work-life conflict. Additional implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Key-words: work-life conflict; problematic integration theory; social support; voluntary organizational exit

DEDICATION

To my sister, who inspired me to pursue my dreams and wishes despite the adversities,

and to my daughter, who inspires me to pursue harmony between work and life.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

On December 2, 2016, Nico Rosberg surprised the racing media and fans when he announced his retirement only five days after achieving his childhood dream of becoming a Formula One world champion (Spurgeon, 2016). On his Facebook page, the 31-year old driver justified his decision explaining that after two disappointing years, he had been through a very hard season to achieve his ultimate goal. "And of course that had an impact on the ones I love, too – it was a whole family effort of sacrifice, putting everything behind our target," said Rosberg (2016). In his post, Rosberg said it was not easy to make that choice, feeling the pressure of having to excel in his last race to be able to win the championship and finally retire. Rosberg first told his wife about his decision, then his team manager, and then his team director. The support he received from them reassured him of his decision. On Rosberg's Facebook post, fans commented about the surprising decision. Some fans supported his choice and congratulated him for taking the opportunity to spend more time with his family and enjoy his baby daughter. Others, begged him to reconsider, trying to convince Rosberg that his reaction was simply due to the relief from pressure, and he should keep racing and achieve much more. But the decision was already made.

It does not matter if one has fortune and fame, or works in shifts in a small business. Work-life conflict can affect virtually anyone, regardless of their sex, age, race, gender, education, social economic status, work, or where they live. Americans are working more now than they did in the past. A recent Pew Research Center (2016) report indicated that although the average workweek has not increased much, Americans are working more weeks per year. The average workweek was 38.1 hours in 1980 and 38.7 hours in 2015, while Americans worked an average of 43 weeks in 1980 and 46.8 weeks in 2015. This represents an increase of one more

month of work per year. Also, more people are working in non-traditional jobs. The Pew Research Center report (2016) estimates that in 2015 about 16% of the U.S. workforce was employed in alternative jobs. This represents 24 million of individuals working as independent contractors, temporary workers, on-call workers, or employed through an agency or contract firm. Meanwhile, only 49% of the American workers are very satisfied with their current job (Pew Research Center, 2016). The other half of workers are 30% somewhat satisfied, 9% somewhat dissatisfied, and 6% very dissatisfied with their jobs. Workers with higher educational levels and in higher income families tend to be the most satisfied.

Changes in the workforce are also reflected in household arrangements. As of 2015, women represented almost half (46.8%) of the labor force in the U.S., with 56.7% of working-age women working or looking for work (Fry & Stepler, 2017). In almost half (46%) of the heterosexual two-parent households both parents work full-time (Pew Research Center, 2015). In 17% of the households, dad works full-time and mom works part-time, and mom works full-time and dad works part-time or is not employed in 6% of households (Pew Research Center, 2015). Dad works full-time and mom is not employed in only 26% of households. The division of household labor is different among different family arrangements. When both parents work full-time, parents tend to distribute chores more equally, in comparison to the families where mothers work part-time or do not work (Pew Research Center, 2015). Although fathers tend to report the division of labor is more egalitarian, and mothers tend to report they do more at home, overall mothers do more than fathers in terms of managing children's activities and taking care of sick children in families with two full-time working parents (Pew Research Center, 2015). The unequal division of labor may be one of the reasons more working mothers report difficulties in balancing work and family. Sixty percent of working (full- or part-time) mothers reported it is

difficult for them to balance work and family, while 52% of working (full- or part-time) fathers said the same (Pew Research Center, 2015). Work-life conflict is clearly a widespread phenomenon needs to be further understood.

Work-life conflict has been studied in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, family studies, and management for decades, but is relatively new in communication. In the communication discipline, the topic has been investigated both by organizational communication and family communication scholars. Communication scholars take a different approach than other disciplines because they assume that "communication constitutes the work-life phenomena" (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014, p. 351). Based on this principle, communication scholars focus on how communication shapes work-life conflict, how individuals make decisions about it, and how they interact with others about it.

Research about work-life issues considers two important assumptions. First, many individuals actively engage in both work activities and personal activities. *Work* constitutes that which individuals are paid to do. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) offers multiple definitions of work. One definition describes work as "activity in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something; activity that a person engages in regularly to earn a livelihood." Work is often guided by a job description that sets parameters for the duties that count as work for a specific position. As such, what counts as work will be different for people in different positions and professions. In the U.S., the Fair Labor Standards Act regulates overtime pay rules, minimum wage, and child labor standards for all places of employment (Office of Financial Management, n.d.). The 40-hour work week is the standard for full time work in the U.S., however, many individuals may work much more than that. Workers may choose or are sometimes forced to work overtime. Even when they are not working, some positions require

employees to be "on-call," which may mean heading to work with a moment's notice. Some people may work more than one job. As such, although work may often be thought of as a firmly bound entity with specific tasks and time frames, work can also be fluid and ill-defined.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) defines *life* as "the sequence of physical and mental experiences that make up the existence of an individual." In the work-life research, life can be defined as that which exists outside of the time at work or doing work. Family responsibilities, leisure activities, hobbies, education, personal development, and interpersonal relationships are elements that compose the life sphere. Thus, unlike work, what counts as life is often much more personal and specific to the individual and can encompass a wide range of activities and responsibilities.

A second assumption in the work-life research is that work and life spheres constantly overlap and influence each other (Sias, 2009). Thus, work-life interrelationships investigate situations in which the activities performed in one sphere interfere in the ability to perform or in the quality of the activities performed in the other sphere. The interference can be perceived positively or negatively. For instance, a job can have a beneficial impact on one's life, e.g., through income or personal feelings of accomplishment. The interrelationship between work and life can also have a negative impact (e.g., by causing stress that can negatively influence relationships and routines [Wang & Repetti, 2013]). Individuals may experience these interferences as minor inconveniences or challenges, although sometimes the conflict may be severe, leading to health issues, marital problems, poor work performance, and decreased overall satisfaction. In such cases, individuals may perceive that the only way to ultimately resolve the conflict is to engage in a major life change, such as changing jobs or to stop working altogether.

Research on work-life interrelationships has explored some of the sources and outcomes of work-life conflict, as well as the different aspects that influence how individuals experience the phenomenon. Researchers have also explored how individuals use different strategies to deal with work-life conflict, including requesting accommodations and leaving the job. However, research has not explored how individuals experience-work life conflict that leads them to quit or seriously consider quitting a job.

One of the things that makes work-life conflict and decisions about how to manage that conflict so challenging is that work-life conflict is fraught with ambiguity. Individuals may worry about what will happen if they quit their jobs, or whether a new job may be any better. Problematic integration (PI) theory helps explain individuals' experiences when their expectations do not correspond to their realities. This may be the case when individuals expect to be able to have a harmonious work-life interrelationship, but they actually feel they are always rushing, not spending enough time with their loved ones, or are struggling at work. PI theory is used in this study to help understand how individuals may experience work-life conflict as well as how they may manage it. One of the goals of the research is to identify aspects about work-life interrelationships that contribute to feelings of PI.

When individuals encounter challenges in their life, one of the ways that they manage and resolve these challenges is through acquiring social support. Communication of social support is known to help individuals to deal with work-life conflict and PI. Another goal of this study is to investigate the communication between individuals and their social network members when they are considering quitting their jobs due to work-life conflict and how it influences individuals' PI experience and decisions about their work-life conflict.

Work-life conflict is a reality for an increasing number of individuals. Each day is full of challenges, from the time they wake up to the moment they go to bed, and sometimes during their sleep. Researchers have found many sources and outcomes of work-life conflict, demonstrating how it can affect individuals' health, relationships, and overall wellbeing. Dealing with work-life conflict can be difficult, since individuals may not have control over all the elements that compose the conflict. A major change, such as quitting the job, may be a solution for work-life conflict, but little research has explored this topic. Given the prevalence of work-life conflict and its serious consequences, it is necessary to continue to investigate how individuals cope with it. This study seeks to help fill the gap in the research through exploring the experiences of individuals who seriously considered quitting their jobs due to work-life conflict, how they communicated with social network members, and how that influenced PI management.

The thesis is divided in five chapters: introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. Chapter two aggregates the existing literature on work-life interrelationships, exploring different perspectives on the issue. Emerging from the literature review, are the three research questions that guide this study. In chapter three, I describe the methods used to collect and analyze the data for the study. In chapter four, I present the results that emerged from data analysis, organized in three main sections that correspond to the three research questions. Finally, the results are discussed in chapter five, presenting the connections between the findings and the existing literature.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of work-life interrelationships, that is, the interconnections of work and life, is relatively new in communication research. In this chapter, I review existing literature exploring work-life issues, mainly from a communication standpoint. First, the concept of work-life interrelationships is explored including different terminology and metaphors, and what counts as "life" and "work." Second, I review research on how people experience work-life issues, exploring its sources and outcomes, as well as multiple factors influencing individuals' experiences. This includes different macro aspects that are also relevant to work-life interrelationships, namely gender issues, organizational and governmental policies, culture, and other factors. Next, a myriad of different strategies that individuals use to make sense of and cope with work-life conflict are presented. Then, I introduce problematic integration (PI) theory that will serve as a theoretical framework for the research. Next, I discuss the importance of social support as a way for individuals to manage problematic integration and cope with work-life conflict. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the relevance of the present study.

Understanding Work-Life Interrelationships

Work-life interrelationships is a pressing issue that has received increased attention in the past few decades. Dealing with competing demands from personal and professional life can be stressful and create perceptions of work-life imbalance and conflict. Scholars often use an inter-role conflict perspective to understand work-life conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). From this perspective, conflict emerges from the incompatibilities between work tied to a profession, usually taking place outside of the home, and the duties and pressures tied to family roles connected to the home. In connecting the two, "participation in the work (family) role is made

more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). In other words, work-life conflict occurs when the demands from work interfere with the quality of or the individual's ability to perform activities of personal life (e.g., working overtime may prevent the individual from regularly practicing a sport), and/or personal life demands negatively impact professional activities (e.g., having a family member ill may require work leave, or diminish concentration in work tasks).

The term "work-family" is commonly used by family (e.g., Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, & Ziemba, 2003), sociology (e.g., Sweet, 2014), business (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), human relations (e.g., Clark, 2000), and psychology scholars (e.g., Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano, 2008) to describe the dichotomy. Studying work-family issues assumes that work experiences impact family life, and family life impacts work. One problem with this label is its restricted point of view that considers one's experiences outside of work to be restricted to responsibilities connected to one's family. Although families are often a central aspect in many individuals' lives, it is probably not the only dimension of personal life. Furthermore, for those without a family of procreation and/or close relationships with one's family of origin, family may be only a minor aspect of life outside of work.

Recently, many communication scholars adopted the term "work-life" to provide a more comprehensive label, that does not confine life outside of work to the family experience. This term can still be considered problematic, because it situates "work" out of the individual's "life" (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014). As will be illustrated in this review, work and life cannot, and often should not be considered separate entities. For instance, it may be difficult to define clear boundaries between work and personal life for professionals that work from home or in a family business, while for those who work in a separate location, there may be clearer separations

between professional and personal lives. Additionally, a professional identity is often an important part of one's personal identity, and it might be almost impossible to separate one from the other. However, "work-life" is one of the most accepted terms available, and is the term adopted in this study.

Work-life researchers have explored the effects of work experiences on one's personal life, as well as the impact of one's personal life on their work (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). Work and life often present competing demands that individuals may struggle to accommodate. For instance, with more women participating in the workforce but still doing most of the unpaid household labor, it is easy to see how work and life may collide (Perry-Jenkins, Pierce, & Goldberg, 2004). Work-life conflicts are not an individual-level issue. Broader aspects, such as gender ideologies, societal expectations, and governmental and organizational policies, are also important factors that interplay and influence the construct of work-life conflict. Taking into consideration these broader macro aspects is essential to avoid victim blaming, which occurs when the sole responsibility for work-life issues is placed on individuals (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009).

Work-life interrelationships as a communicative phenomenon. Work-life studies have received considerable attention in the communication discipline since the year 2000, beginning with the publication of the themed edition of *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, featuring six articles about work-life conflict (Golden, 2000). The topic gained increased relevance due to three main factors affecting several nations in the world: changes in the demography of workplaces, such as the increasing participation of women in the work force; economic factors, such as unemployment rates, welfare policies, and educational requirements; and the emergence of a moral concern about quality of life (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014).

Communication scholars are uniquely equipped to study work-life issues because individuals construct their realities and perceptions of reality through communication (Kirby et al., 2003). Taking a communication perspective, researchers studying work-life conflict focus on understanding "how *sensemaking* takes place [in work-life conflict], for what reasons, in whose interests, and with what consequences" (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014, p. 351). That is, communication researchers focus on how individuals construct reality through communication, while also considering the broader aspects that also influence work-life issues.

In the communication discipline, most of the research on work-life interrelationships has been conducted from the organizational communication perspective and explore how the issues affect organizations and the individuals in relation to work. Another set of studies approach work-life issues from a family communication perspective, often emphasizing the negative effects of work on personal and family life. Few studies take an integrative perspective, looking at both work and life as interrelated. Three decades ago, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argued that work and families are interdependent and that considering them as completely separate worlds was to be abandoned. In this direction, recognizing the fluidity and the mutual influence of work and life experiences, Golden, Kirby, and Jorgenson (2006) claimed that communication scholars should cross the boundaries of organizational and family communication, and conduct more integrative research. This study attempts to respond this call, bridging the two areas of organizational and family communication, and integrating both perspectives.

Reviewing the literature, it is common to find different labels and nuanced perspectives from which to observe work-life issues. Because the language used to define the phenomenon directly influences how it is perceived and experienced, common terminology used in work-life research is discussed below.

Work-life metaphors. To describe how the phenomenon occurs, is useful to examine the metaphors frequently used in work-life studies. Metaphors help explain how individuals make sense of their experiences with in their use of language. Common metaphors found in work-life research, as well as in everyday conversations, include boundaries, balance, juggling, and weaving meshes.

The *boundaries metaphor* assumes that work and life constitute distinct spheres, separated by barriers (Kirby et al., 2003). For example, the container metaphor was frequently used in early studies of organizational communication. In the container metaphor, the organization is perceived as restricted to a physical place and time, inside which, employees and communication exist (Putnam & Boys, 2006). The boundaries metaphor reinforces the myth of the separate worlds, furthering the notion that certain behaviors are appropriate in one sphere, but not in others. Assuming there are boundaries separating work and life leads to the belief that employees should not mention their families in the workplace or engage in family- related activities, which is often considered unprofessional. It also recreates gender separatism, distinguishing work as public and masculine, and home as private and feminine (Kirby et al., 2003).

Employing the boundaries metaphor, Clark (2000) proposed the work/family border theory to explain "how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance" (p. 750). The theory presents a tangible, simplified picture of the phenomenon. It assumes that 'home' and 'work' are two different domains, with contrasting cultures and purposes, that are delimited by borders. Borders can be physical (e.g., the office's walls), temporal (e.g., working hours, family time), or psychological (e.g., rules about what is appropriate or not in each domain). The borders can vary in

permeability, allowing (or not) elements of a domain to pass to the other domain (e.g., working from home after regular hours, or getting a family call during work hours). The borders can expand or contract according to the demands of each domain, demonstrating its levels of flexibility (e.g., flexible work hours usually allow individuals to define when they start and when they finish their work day, instead of a rigid time rule). Individuals are defined as border-crossers, as they 'go to work' and 'come back home,' which involves crossing the boundary of each domain. Border-crossers can have central or peripheral roles in each domain, depending on their influence and identity. The theory acknowledges members of each domain as relevant participants of the process. When domain members, such as spouses and supervisors, are influential to the border-crossers' experiences, they are defined as border-keepers. Clark (2000) acknowledges the relevance of communication to the work-family interface. She proposed that when border-keepers communicate in a supportive manner, it can increase border-crossers' well-being.

The work/family border theory is useful to understand the work-life phenomenon, but it has some limitations. In this theory, the individuals receive greater attention than the context or policies. From this perspective, individuals have large responsibility for the conflicts that emerge between work and life, and it rests in their hands to manage and solve them. Although it is important to consider individuals as protagonists in this process, by placing the sole responsibility in the hands of the border-crossers, it assumes that people have control of all the instances of their lives, and exempts organizations and culture from their influence.

Balance and juggling metaphors can also assume that people have choices to make regarding work and life responsibilities, and suggest that work-life conflicts are a result of personal fault (Sweet, 2014). The *balance metaphor* relates to a weight scale, and presupposes

that work-life satisfaction can be achieved when there is equal weight, often perceived as amount of time, in each side. Following this thought, balance can be achieved by reducing the amount of time on each side until they are even. However, balance can also be achieved by increasing the weight on each side, which does not seem to be a good solution (Sweet, 2014). Moreover, it implies that the efforts on one side take away energy from the other side. It also suggests that time devoted to each side *should* be equal (Golden et al., 2006). People commonly work about 40 hours out of the 168 hours of a full week, which is less than 25% of the time. By equating work and life, the balance metaphor further diminishes the importance of life, and puts work at a higher level (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). Regardless of such limitations, balance is one of the most popular metaphors used to refer to work-life interrelationships, and it is frequently used on corporate websites to describe their efforts related to family-friendly work policies (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008).

The *juggling metaphor* suggests the mental image of a person keeping in the air their work and life responsibilities, such as job commitments, house work, child care, hobbies, and so on. Individuals must work to keep all items in the air fluidly, without letting anything drop. This metaphor implies personal fault and victim blaming, because it assumes people have a choice to have too many commitments that they do not manage properly (Sweet, 2014). This metaphor does not capture that some responsibilities are not products of choices, but imposed by work commitments or life events. The juggling metaphor attributes to individuals the responsibility of keeping the things flowing in the air. If responsibilities fall and crumble on the ground, the metaphor suggests that the individual was not skilled enough at juggling work and life, and may need to reduce the number of things they have in the air.

The *weaving meshes metaphor* considers people intertwine their work and life responsibilities. Instead of creating boundaries between work and personal life, it assumes individuals can integrate both worlds. The mental picture of a mesh knitted with work and life elements acknowledges that work and life are interdependent, and not always competing, as other metaphors imply. This metaphor may be more appropriate to indicate that a good integration between work and life should be seamless and productive (Golden et al., 2006). Furthermore, weaving meshes is the metaphor that comes closer to the idea of harmony (instead of balance) between life and work, suggested by Wieland (2011) by using language that favors a more productive and harmonious interrelationship.

In sum, the language used to describe a phenomenon shapes the perceptions and experiences of it. Continuing to use problematic metaphors can bring more stress and concerns to individuals. Therefore, the preferred concept used in this study will be the weaving meshes metaphor, although several studies that inform the literature review were built upon different concepts and metaphors. With these considerations in mind, the next section explores how people knit their work-life mesh from the ways they organize their families and their work experience.

What counts as 'life.' To study work-life issues it is important to define what can count as life, although is rare to see researchers articulating such definitions. For some people, 'life' may refer to everything that is not 'work.' For others, 'life' might mean 'family.' In this study, life is understood as personal life and all its elements (it may even include work). Although 'life' comes second in the term 'work-life,' it is the element that individuals are often more concerned about, therefore it takes precedence in this review. Since family constitutes an important factor of one's personal life, it is the first aspect of life discussed in this section.

Changes in family and work configurations over the years have impacted the ways that people arrange their life experiences. Over the centuries, all societies constructed expectations about how individuals should form families and how families should work. It happens similarly everywhere, in Eastern and Western nations, in both developed and developing countries (e.g., Buzzanell, Waymer, Tagle, & Liu, 2007; D'Enbeau, Villamil, & Hellens-Hart, 2015; Schnurr & Zayts, 2012). For example, the image of the perfect 1950's American family, made of a breadwinning father, a caregiver mother, and children was constructed and solidified over the course of many years. As families are becoming more diverse in composition and arrangements, the perceptions about what counts as family are slowly changing.

Families can be defined through different lenses. The most common are biological, sociolegal, and role lenses (Floyd, Mikkelson, & Judd, 2006). The biological lens focuses on genetic relatedness, and represents the most clear-cut and narrow definition of family. From this perspective, only those who share genetic material are considered family. The biological perspective is relevant and influential, and researchers have demonstrated that family members tend to allocate more resources (e.g., social support) to those with whom they are more genetically related (Mikkelson, Floyd, & Pauley, 2011). However, it is a limited perspective, since it does not consider as family same-sex partners (married or not), step, and adopted children, for example. The sociolegal lens offers greater generalization than the biological lens, considering family those relationships that are recognized by laws and regulations (Floyd et al., 2006). Through this lens, married couples, regardless of their sexual orientation, are considered family, as well as adopted children, and common-law marriages in some states. Although this lens also disregards some more diverse family compositions, it offers objective criteria to define family. Finally, a role lens considers family those who share emotional attachment and patterns

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of interaction analogous as family (Floyd et al., 2006). This broader definition implies that families are communicatively constructed by people's actions and interactions. The role lens may be the perspective that is more connected to people's lived experience of family, as it relates to what individuals perceive and consider as family (Floyd et al., 2006). Some families that are not considered valid by biological or sociolegal perspectives rely on discourse to legitimate their existence and validity (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2006).

The presence of children is another important factor in defining family. A Pew Research report indicated that most Americans recognize a family exists when there are children in the household (Taylor, 2010). Although the presence of children tends to be closely aligned with married parents, most of the participants in the study also recognized single parents, unmarried couples, and same-sex couples as a family if they have children at home. However, less than half of Americans considered unmarried and same-sex couples as families if they have no children. Heterosexual married couples without children are considered family by 88%, but the perception of same-sex couples without children as a family is more contentious. Only 45% of Americans consider same-sex couples without children form a family. Thus, the presence of children is often central to granting family status.

Marriage is declining in the U.S. One in seven American adults were married in 1960, whereas only one in five were married in 2008, due to increases in never-married and divorced individuals (Taylor, 2010). Single parents are more common now (25% in 2008) than before (9% in 1960), as well as cohabiting parents, including same-sex partners (6%; Taylor, 2010). Such changes require that researchers include more diverse populations in their studies, to reflect the experiences of larger portions of the society. Adopting role lens to define family may be particularly useful to increase inclusiveness in research.

Additionally, it is increasingly common to find individuals taking care of elder parents. Some divide the attention between raising their children and caring for their aging parents or grandparents, known as the *sandwich generation* (Riley & Bowen, 2005). In their literature review on the topic, Riley and Bowen (2005) collected evidence that support that sandwich generation caregivers and their family members experience increased stress and are at risk of mental strain. Although the authors did not specifically mention work-life conflict, it is reasonable to expect that people in these situations may encounter challenges managing life and work demands.

Based on how employers talk about work-life interrelationships on their organizations' websites where work-life and family-friendly programs are promoted to recruit employees, life is a narrow concept (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). In a study that explored organizational web pages, Hoffman and Cowan (2008) found that life is vaguely defined, often limited to a traditional family's responsibilities, and perhaps some friends or hobbies. The relevance of non-family aspects is diminished, while work is the most prominent element. Activities related to social engagement, community work, activism, culture and education, physical and mental health, for example, are largely ignored by organizations when depicting people's lives.

Besides the centrality of family in work-life studies, it is important to recognize that personal life goes beyond family life. For instance, some individuals' life arrangements are not considered families by definition or by society's perceptions (e.g., single individuals, childless couples, cohabiting partners). Their experiences are likely to differ significantly from those with children, or those involved in elderly care or community engagement, and should not be overlooked. An individual's 'life' includes several circumstances other than family and work. For instance, people often practice hobbies (e.g., gardening, painting), play sports (for pleasure,

health, or competitively), travel (for leisure, to meet other people), engage in personal and professional development activities (e.g., studying), are involved with the community (e.g., volunteering, religious service), and provide support for others (e.g., for parents, siblings, friends, extended family, community members). These are only a few examples of other endless aspects of life that require commitment and time, and could possibly be intertwined in the work-life mesh, regardless of one's family arrangements. Nevertheless, it is rare to see these aspects being considered in studies of work-life issues.

Most work-life conflict studies consider conventional family models, focusing on heterosexual traditional or dual-earner couples (e.g., Zimmerman et al., 2003). Few studies reflect the modern configurations of families, including single parents, homosexual couples, stepfamilies, or even families whose parents have non-traditional working hours (e.g., Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). Even fewer studies look at the experiences of individuals "without family," including cohabiting couples without children, single individuals who live far from their families of origin, or those who are caregivers of their elder parents or siblings (e.g., Schultz, Hoffman, Fredman, & Bainbridge, 2012).

The concept of life is always evolving, accompanying the changes in our society. Life goes beyond family and work, although the research in work-life interrelationships seem to indicate otherwise. Living arrangements are increasingly diverse, which means that researchers need to embrace experiences and individuals who do not conform with the traditional concepts. Expanding and clarifying what life means would help individuals and organizations better articulate the challenges of work-life interrelationships, which could facilitate encountering solutions.

What counts as 'work.' Similar to the transformation of family contours, the notion of work has also deeply changed over time. In the United States, during the colonial period, around the 17th century, work was often performed around the house (Sweet, 2014). Men, women, and children would contribute to all kinds of chores, from planting crops to cooking dinner, from house repairs to childcare. Since all of the work was performed around the house, people did not 'go to work' and 'come back home,' and there was no clear differentiation between work and life, personal and public spheres (Sweet, 2014).

With industrialization, towards the end of the 18th century, the idea of work changed. Men and women started being 'separated' between work and family, as men would go to work, out of the home, and women would stay at home, rearing children and performing the house labor. It was then that the images of the male breadwinner and the female family worker started to be shaped. The paid work began to be more valued in the emerging capitalist system, and the unpaid house work and childcare slowly turned invisible and less valued (Sweet, 2014). In the post-World War II era, the economic prosperity of the U.S. solidified not only the image of the 'perfect' family, with the working husband and the stay-at-home mother, but consequently, the separation of public and private realms.

More recently, in the information era, the U.S. faced a silent transformation in the workplace. Women massively entered the workforce in the last decades, and reached a peak of 50% of the workers in America in 2009 (Economic Policy Institute, n.d.). Women are now more educated, delaying marriage, and having fewer children than in the 1960's (Taylor, 2010). Most married women and mothers with children younger than 18 are working out of the home (Taylor, 2010). Dual earner couples are now the largest family configuration in the U.S., represented by

48% of the heterosexual couples (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), and 60% of same-sex couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

The entrance of more women in the workforce deeply impacted work and personal life arrangements. With more women at work, while still being the primary caregiver and the person responsible for the household labor, the work-life conflict phenomenon emerged and became salient to a large portion of the population (Golden et al., 2006). Women now had to balance work at home and work out of home. With more women in the workforce, men found themselves engaged in more household responsibilities, thus increasing work-life issues for them as well. A more detailed review of gender aspects of work-life conflict is expanded later.

Currently, work is often perceived as a priority over every other aspect of life. Organizations depict work as the most important element of life in their websites (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). Organizational cultures, families, and popular culture reinforce the idea of the ideal worker in the U.S.: an employee who is fully committed to their employer, who works long hours, and who is constantly available for work (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014). In attempts to fulfill this ideal worker norm, many people experience intense work-life conflicts.

In short, the new configurations of life, family, and work impact the way individuals organize their routines and responsibilities for both work and life outside of work. Gender roles, culture, and policies largely influence such instances. Scholars have studied work-life conflict from several perspectives, but most do not take an integrated view of the issue. Various metaphors are helpful to illustrate the phenomenon, but often offer a limited view of the issue, and suggest that individuals are to blame for the conflicts they experience. To avoid having a fragmented view of work-life interrelationships, individuals, organizations, and researchers need

to go beyond traditional and limited perspectives, and focus on being creative, inclusive, and integrative.

Experiencing Work-Life Interrelationships

As discussed in the previous section, work is part of the everyday life of the majority of people under 65 years of age (Wieland, 2011). Work and life not only constantly interact, but are also interdependent: what happens in one domain is likely to impact the other domain. This happens because individuals are one, indivisible, border-crossers, although many people try to keep strong boundaries separating work from life (Clark, 2000). Tensions and uncertainty can emerge from attempts to integrate both domains, and individuals may experience challenges as they navigate work and life. A large body of the work-life research focuses on understanding the sources and outcomes of work-life conflict. With this focus, researchers have identified where conflicts emerge, as well as health and emotional consequences related to it. This research is important because it helps demonstrate the relevance and ubiquity of work-life conflict. In this section, I present research about the positive aspects of work-life interrelationships as well as research about work-life conflict outcomes, sources, and other influencing factors.

Outcomes of work-life interrelationships. Many individuals are able to live and work harmoniously. A small portion of research uncovers how one's life can benefit their work, and how work can enrich life. For instance, one study demonstrated that individuals who reported higher work satisfaction in the afternoon also reported higher satisfaction at home in the evening (Heller & Watson, 2005).

Most studies explore instances when life and work interface is problematic. Work-life conflict has been associated with sleeping problems among women (Lallukka et al., 2014), and an increased risk of emotional exhaustion among both men and women (Leineweber, Baltzer,

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Magnusson Hanson, & Westerlund, 2013). When experiencing work-family conflict, men are more likely to engage in deviant behavior in the workplace (e.g., arrive late, leave early) than women, which, consequently, can negatively impact their careers (Ferguson, Carlson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012).

The negative effects of work-life conflict are not restricted to the person who experiences it; it can affect other family members as well. Individuals experiencing more work-life conflict report less marital satisfaction (Carroll, Hill, Yorgason, Larson, & Sandberg, 2013). This happens, in part, because emotions can be transmitted between spouses in the form of stress contagion (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007). Lavee and Ben-Ari (2007) explain that stress contagion can happen via *spillover*, when the stress from one domain (e.g., work) is experienced in the other domain (e.g., home), or via *crossover*, when stress experienced by one partner leads the other partner to experience stress as well. Work-life conflict experienced by one person can create work-life conflict in their partner's life, causing crossover spillover (Ferguson et al., 2012). This can occur through responding empathically to the partner's stress, or due to increases in family demands when the partner is stressed out and less able to contribute (Ferguson et al., 2012). Lavee and Ben-Ari (2007) found that both spillover and crossover influence couples' emotional states and their perceptions of dyadic closeness. Spillover is a stronger emotion contagion mechanism than crossover for individuals in both high and low-quality marriages. Curiously, couples in high-quality relationships experienced higher levels of crossover. The authors suggest that this may happen because such couples are more attuned to each other's emotions, and therefore are more likely to be influenced by them.

Work-life conflict spillover can lead to domestic violence, and this influence is more likely to exist among individuals who witnessed domestic violence in their family of origin

(Trachtenberg, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 2009). Individuals who hide their emotions at work often engage in *displaced aggression*, taking out their frustrations at home, resulting in family conflict (Carlson et al., 2012). Work-to-family conflict can ultimately lead to family-to-work conflict (Carlson et al., 2012), potentially creating an endless cycle of work-life conflict.

When conflict emerges from work. A plethora of factors can contribute to increased perceptions of work-life conflict. How individuals experience work-life conflict vary from person to person, according to their perceptions, expectations, their life stage, and different stimuli. Among such factors, job adequacy can be a possible source of work-life conflict. Individuals whose jobs are considered barely adequate, providing a little more than sustaining their families above the poverty line, reported having more work-life conflict and less work-life enrichment compared to people in good, optimal, and inadequate jobs (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011). In contrast, individuals in optimal jobs reported the lowest work-life conflict (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011).

Furthermore, job satisfaction influences perceptions of work-life conflict. The popular wisdom says that when people love their job, they do not have to work. Now, researchers have found evidence that supports this claim. Lee, Zvonkovic, and Crawford (2014) found that job *satisfaction* had more influence on perceptions of work-life conflict than the amount of *time* women spent at work. Likewise, participants' *satisfaction* with their leisure activities was more important than the amount *time* spent with leisure in how individuals perceived work-life conflict (Lee et al., 2014).

However, excessive workloads have been found to cause negative effects on individuals. For instance, previous researchers have found that when husbands reported working long hours and high work overload, couples reported less love and more marital conflict, as well as

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relational problems with their adolescent children (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001). Similarly, working on weekends lessens the leisure time individuals have to spend with their families and friends, and those leisure hours are unlikely to be recovered on weekdays (Craig & Brown, 2014).

Flexibility is often given as a solution to work-life issues, but it can also be a cause of it. Challenging the widespread notion that having more job flexibility reduces individuals' work-life conflict, Schieman and Glavin (2008) explored the effects of different levels of schedule control and job autonomy. Job autonomy and schedule control are frequently considered as flexible work conditions often desired by workers, which allow for greater permeability between work and life boundaries. Researchers found that men who had more schedule control and job autonomy also received a higher frequency of work-related contact out of working hours, and brought more work to home, compared to women, thus creating more work-life conflict (Schieman & Glavin, 2008).

Along with flexibility, perceptions of time orientation also influence work-life conflict. Employees who perceive their work to be highly scheduled and plan to accomplish multiple tasks at the same time, often have an increased perception of work-life conflict, compared with those who schedule one task at a time (Barrett, 2014). This may happen because the individuals who are highly scheduled or who schedule multiple things at the same time may not be able to complete all of the tasks as planned, and the work may pile up. Not following a given order to complete such tasks also increases perceptions of imbalance, compared with employees who deal with tasks linearly, because it contributes to work accumulation and the perception of dealing with never-ending tasks. Also, individuals with future time orientation tend to have lower

perceptions of work-life conflict, because in thinking about upcoming tasks or events, they can plan and adjust priorities (Barrett, 2014).

The use of mobile communication technologies can also increase boundary permeability. For some people, such technology is perceived as a positive resource, because it allows them to complete their work on more convenient hours, outside of work (Wright et al., 2014). But this practice can become another source of imbalance for those who prefer more rigid separations between life and work, since boundaries are blurred by mobile communication technologies. When people carried work tasks into their home, it significantly increased their work-life conflict perceptions (Wright et al., 2014). Consequently, work-life conflict caused by the use of mobile communication technologies was related to increased job burnout and reduced job satisfaction.

The use of mobile communication technologies outside of work can further influence employer expectations. Brown and Palvia (2015) found that while employees' productivity did not increase with the use of communication technologies, employers augmented their expectations. Employers and co-workers increasingly expect employees to always be connected and available, which in turn, elevated perceptions of work-life conflict (Brown & Palvia, 2015).

Employees who have an abusive supervisor (i.e., perceived by the subordinates as using sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, except for physical contact) can also experience more prevalent work-life conflict (Carlson et al., 2012; Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervision has been linked to several negative outcomes, including lower job satisfaction, lower job commitment, lower life satisfaction, greater depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and higher work-life conflict (Tepper, 2000), as well as workplace deviance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). These effects are more pronounced among employees with reduced job mobility (Tepper, 2000). Employees with an abusive supervisor may suffer from burnout and surface acting (i.e.,

when one hides their real emotions to certain circumstances), to preserve their job and avoid retaliation (Carlson et al., 2012).

When conflict emerges from life. Aspects related to personal life can also contribute to increased perceptions of work-life conflict. One example is the division of unpaid household labor. Perceptions of unbalanced household work can lead to stress, frustration, and interpersonal conflict, especially for people who feel they are doing most of the house work and without time to enjoy other, more enjoyable, aspects of life (Kurdek, 1994; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004).

In general, unpaid household labor entails activities essential to family maintenance such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and the like. Household labor is often regarded as less important than paid work by society (Sweet, 2014), as well as in academia (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004). Because of the traditional gender roles of husband-breadwinner and wife-caregiver, women often perform more unpaid house work than men, regardless of whether they have a job outside of the home. This can even occur in relationships that members perceive as being more egalitarian (Sweet, 2014).

The presence of children in the house can also influence how people divide house work. Researchers have suggested that the division of family work is more conflicting when there are children living in the household and both parents work outside of the home (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004). This is possibly due to the elevated number of tasks that need to be accomplished to rear children. Parents may not agree in how such tasks should be accomplished, or who should do it. Having more children also contributes to increases in work-life conflict, especially home-to-work conflict, regardless of the marital status of parents (Nomaguchi, 2012). But an early study about areas of conflict for same-sex and opposite-sex couples not living with children identified another relevant reason. In that study, the division of unpaid house work was influenced by a

factor labeled as "power" (Kurdek, 1994). Here, power included situations when "one partner was lording over the other partner" (Kurdek, 1994, p. 927). This suggests that power imbalances in the relationship can also contribute to work-life conflict.

The marital status of parents can further influence perceptions of work-life conflict. Nomaguchi (2012) found that married mothers and married fathers reported less home-to-work conflict, compared to single mothers and single fathers. The more house work responsibilities the parents had, the more conflict they described, which is probably why single mothers reported significantly more home-to-work conflict than any other parents. The results further suggest that family characteristics had more influence on work-life conflict than job characteristics, such as job demand levels, job pressure, family-friendly culture, and others.

Blaming individuals for the work-life conflict they experience does not capture the broader aspects related to such issues. Individuals may be constrained and have no power or autonomy to make decisions or changes, or there are no other options available at the individual level. Taking a macro perspective is necessary to gain a holistic understanding of other influential factors such as gender, organizational and governmental policies, and cultural aspects that influence how people live and work. These factors are constantly intersecting and intertwining in people's daily life, further illustrating the complexity of work-life interrelationships.

Gender and work-life conflict. The work-life conflict literature is permeated by discussions about gender. Many studies highlight differences in the experiences of men and women. In most cases, the differences rest in how men and women make meaning of their experiences, how they were socialized, and what is expected to be feminine or masculine work

or behavior (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004). Thus, it is not a matter of biological differences, but a gender discussion.

The challenges of dealing with work and life responsibilities became more apparent as the number of women in the workforce increased (Sweet, 2014). Because women give birth to babies, in general, society also expects them to be the primary caregiver and homemaker. Accommodating these responsibilities with a job or career can be complicated (Ivy, 2017). For instance, the commuter wives (i.e., wives who lived in a different home than their families for at least three days of the week) interviewed in Bergen, Kirby, and McBride's study (2007) received a variety of messages from their family members, friends, and acquaintances reinforcing traditional gender expectations. Some people told them that women should follow their supposed natural instinct and take care of their homes and husbands, instead of working and living outside of the home. Others doubted their spouses' and child(ren)'s abilities to survive in their absence, and expressed sympathy for the husbands. Some further questioned the quality and stability of commuter wives' marriages. These messages demonstrate how gender notions are ingrained in our society and permeate virtually all individuals' experiences, including work-life matters.

Individuals are socialized about work-life issues from an early age, and gender plays a role in the types of messages young men and women receive from family members and media. Looking at the influence of family in the experiences of older children, Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd (2006) found that young adults received advice to find enjoyable and fulfilling work, so that they would have a happier life. Young men and women received similar messages about the importance and centrality of family, and the role family should play in life. They were told similarly to prioritize family over work. However, young women recalled, more often than men, receiving advice to make career choices based on

anticipated family responsibilities, including leaving paid work to take care of children. Such work and family socializing messages can be perceived as perpetuating gendered views of work and family. The researchers also found that men frequently received messages about the importance of family, advising them to create space for family in their lives. This might suggest a slight discourse shift in traditional gendered ideologies of breadwinning men.

Looking specifically how women develop early expectations about work, Damaske (2011) found that intersections between class, race, and gender influenced how women formed opinions about their future work. Women raised in middle-class families, regardless of their race, expected to work full-time continuously throughout their lives, and did not even consider another option. Their expectation of continuous participation in the workforce was largely influenced by their parents' expectations for them to succeed in school and at work. For working-class women, there were different perspectives. African-American women, highly influenced by a strong communal expectation that women engage in paid work, took for granted their participation in the workforce throughout their lives. They did not even consider not working as an option. However, some White and Latina working-class women thought they would work occasionally, while others expected to work continuously. Perceptions of opportunities and constraints influenced them. Some White and Latina working-class women were taught that participation in the work-force was crucial to success and independence, while others grew up seeing their mothers' work as unsatisfactory, not essential, or as help, and not real work. They were often advised that advancing in education was not for them, and it would only get in the way of building a family (Damaske, 2011).

Consequently, differences in the anticipatory vocational socialization (i.e., how individuals are socialized into work before entering the workforce) between young males and

females influence women to accept less than ideal jobs more often than men. Job adequacy exists on a continuum, ranging from "good jobs" to "bad jobs" in terms of how structural (e.g., wages, benefits, job security) and psychosocial attributes (e.g., job autonomy, opportunity to learn) are combined (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011). Following this logic, optimal jobs have favorable structural and psychosocial characteristics while barely adequate jobs lack both aspects, but pay more than poverty-level wages. Psychological good jobs have good psychosocial attributes but lack structural attributes, economically good jobs lack psychosocial attributes but have good structural attributes, and inadequate jobs lack both structural and psychosocial attributes and pay under poverty-level wages (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011). Women are more likely to work in less adequate jobs than men to better attend family demands (Becker & Moen, 1999). Men working in less than optimal jobs suffered more negative consequences and more work-life conflict than women, especially in dual-earner marriages (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011). The authors reasoned that this might be another effect of gendered career and life expectations. In other words, when men are working inadequate jobs, it challenges their breadwinner role (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011). Men who are not the breadwinner may suffer more and have more work-life conflict because their reduced ability to provide for their families threatens their masculine identity (Meisenbach, 2010). It is also possible that men in dual-earner marriages contribute more to house chores than when they are the sole breadwinner, while women often expect to take care of the house whether they work outside of the home or not (Bass & Grzywacz, 2011). Working long hours and with high overload prompted work-life conflict for men, which negatively affected their relationships with their spouses and children (Crouter et al., 2001).

The way men and women construct their family and work identities also influence how they experience work-life conflict. Women often prefer certain careers or make certain career choices that enable them to accommodate their family' needs, but that can constrain their career progression (e. g., Baker, 2010). Even when they succeed in their careers, the success may come accompanied by feelings of guilt and resentment for being away from home and family (Meisenbach, 2010). Greenhaus, Peng, and Allen (2012) found that the extent to which women are invested in their family roles influences the amount of time they commit to work when they are able to adjust their hours. They also found that high family satisfaction and high amount of family time was related to a strong family identity and a weak work identity. These women worked less than others, suggesting that, when possible, women adjust their working hours to be consistent with their identities. In contrast, for men, the hours worked were not associated with the strength of their family or work identities. The authors reasoned that it does not mean that men are irresponsive to work and family identities, they may just construe their identities differently. What is most important to note is that this study adds more evidences to indicate how men and women experience and cope with work-life conflict differently.

According to Perry-Jenkins and colleagues (2004), "gender and communication patterns shape not only how family chores are distributed but also the meaning and value given to the division of family work" (p. 543). This distinction heavily influences how couples negotiate and interact about such tasks. The ways couples negotiate the division of labor is often unequal and a source of conflict (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004). Wood (2011) argued that men and women frequently interpret levels of meaning differently. She pointed out that women often attribute relationship meanings to domestic labor, while men often perceive no connection between domestic work and affection. This is especially important to note when conflicts emerge due to

domestic tasks. If women attach relational meaning to domestic chores, they are likely to feel unloved when men do not care about such tasks. Wood argues that when individuals measure men's contribution to domestic labor by using a women's ruler, it is most likely that men will not have a good performance. This perception is aligned with previous studies indicating that men contribute less to domestic labor, and are also perceived as contributing less (Riforgiate & Boren, 2015).

Curiously, Denker (2013) found that couples often negotiate the division of labor based on the abilities they have or lack. In other words, one partner might be excused from doing the laundry or the childcare because they do not know how to or are incapable of doing it properly. By doing that, some couples create a justification for an unequal division of the household work. Some partners take advantage of the situation and use a strategic incompetence to avoid doing tasks they prefer not to.

Not only does a person's gender influence their experiences, but one's gender ideology is also influential. People may hold more or less traditional perceptions of what is appropriate for each gender, and how couples should divide the household work and child care. Specifically, previous research pinpointed that men's traditional gender ideology is negatively related with men's involvement in child care, but it is not associated with their involvement in house work (Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon, & Kiger, 2006). The authors reasoned that this finding might indicate another possible shift in men's gender ideologies, particularly related to their participation in child care. In contrast, if the house work is perceived as an option, rather than a responsibility for more liberal men, they might prefer to engage in child care instead (Stevens et al., 2006). Fathers privileged traditional masculine identities when dealing with work-life conflict, even when they had to perform stereotypically feminine work (Duckworth & Buzzanell,

2009). In the event of job loss, men and their families used emotion work, displaying emotions different than what they were actually feeling, to manage their identities and a socially appropriate image (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003).

Understanding how same-sex romantic partners divide the household chores may offer new insights on the division of labor, as well as creative ways to address this issue. People often make distinctions between masculine and feminine house chores. Women are more likely to engage in activities inside the house, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, whereas men are more likely to engage in activities outside the house, such as mowing the lawn and house repairs (Riforgiate & Boren, 2015). Boren (2007) studied how same-sex romantic partners negotiate the division of household work. He found that neither gender, income, education, nor relationship length had a significant impact on how couples divided the labor. However, when individuals perceived the division of house labor as more egalitarian, they reported higher relationship satisfaction and higher perception of fairness. Furthermore, in a post hoc analysis, Boren found that communication may be the key to understanding how same-sex couples negotiate the division of house labor. Some of the participants indicated that they communicate (e.g., talk, discuss, negotiate) with their partners to decide who would do what chores.

Finally, one's sexuality can also influence their early expectations about work. Damaske (2011) noted that one of her participants, knowing she would not be able to depend on a men's breadwinning wage or a husband's success because she was lesbian, considered that working full-time was her only option. In this sense, her sexuality influenced her work expectations and options. This finding highlights the need for more research exploring LGBT people's experiences related to work-life issues. Damaske (2011) specifically argued for more research to

explore the intersections of sexuality with race, class, and gender in shaping women's expectations about work.

Organizational policies, regulations, and work-life conflict. Organizational policies are a strong influencer on work-life conflict. Organizational leaders have increasingly recognized the problems caused by work-life conflicts and how they influence organizational outcomes, such as performance and productivity. Organizations have been adopting different strategies to lessen their employees' work-life conflict, such as offering "family-friendly policies" like leaves, flexible schedules, working from outside the organization, and use of communication technologies, but it does not always translate to more positive outcomes (Bourne & Forman, 2014; Dixon & Dougherty, 2014; Wright et al., 2014).

Governments have also established some regulations related to work-life conflict. In the United States, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) establishes that employees can take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave without losing their jobs, seniority, or health insurance provided by the employer (National partnership for women & families, 2016). FMLA includes leaves to take care of new children, family members with serious health conditions, or to recover from their own serious illness. Same-sex spouses and their children are also included in FMLA coverage (National partnership for women & families, 2016). However, FMLA does not cover all employees (i.e., must be employed for at least 12 months, in organizations with 50 or more employers, and who are leaving to take care of their own serious health condition or specific family members) and only grants unpaid leaves (National partnership for women & families, 2016). Some organizations voluntarily created internal policies to offer paid leaves to their employees, in addition to what is determined by FMLA, but the coverage varies widely from one organization to another.

In other countries, different laws and organizational polices, as well as different cultural practices, suggest a different panorama. In a literature review about organizational policies to foster work-life balance and its consequences, Akter (2016) identified some of the best practices among the prevailing organizations in different European countries. Flexible hours appeared as an important theme to enable women to continue their career. However, participants indicated that managerial and peer support are crucial for flexibility to be a real option. Additionally, providing child care services have a significant role in enabling women to continue working.

Flexibility can be understood in different ways. Flexibility is understood as the degree to which the borders between work and life expand or contract. Those borders can be physical, temporal, or psychological (Clark, 2000). Cowan and Hoffman (2007) found that employees conceptualize work-life flexibility in four different categories: *time flexibility* refers to the freedom to schedule work and life commitments, including alternative work hours, in short or long-term perspectives. *Space flexibility* can be related both to physical space and mental space, which includes both telecommuting and alternative work locations, as well as thinking about work in the life spaces, or thinking about life in the work place. *Evaluation flexibility* addresses employees' concerns about how they are evaluated when they are not physically present in the workplace because of flexible arrangements. Many organizations and supervisors still put a premium on how much time employees work and how much they are seen at work in performance assessments, instead of relying on the task completion and the quality of the work delivered. Finally, *compensation flexibility* encompasses financial concerns. Some employees believe that money can contribute to better work-life arrangements, and were content to trade overtime for money. Others, prefer to trade overtime for time off, and believed that money did not compensate for overtime hours.

Some organizations offer flexible work schedules to reduce work-life conflict. However, research shows that flexibility does not always resolve the problem. Researchers have found that people often work even more when they have flexible schedules, especially when they are the business owners (Bourne & Forman, 2014). The use of communication technologies (e.g., laptop, cell phones) facilitate people to blur the borders of work and home. Employees can work from outside of the organization by using their cell phones or laptops, with virtual access to the organization's resources. Conversely, employees can coordinate their personal life's activities from work and be in contact with family and friends, by using the same or similar devices. Researchers found that for individuals who perceive the use of communication technologies outside of working hours as positive and convenient, it contributed to lower perceptions of work-life conflict (Wright et al., 2014). However, the overall findings suggest that the use of mobile technology outside of working hours tends to increase stress and perceptions of work-life conflict (Brown & Palvia, 2015; Wright et al., 2014).

Golden (2013) investigated the work-life interactions of employees of a high-technology organization and found five ways in which they combine, reproduce, and/or transform the rules and resources from work and from home, when accomplishing work from home and home at work. She found that employees and their families may accept the work performed at home, mediated by technology, but they adapt the rules to permit family interaction. Some employees are selective and delimit how and how much work they perform from home. Employees' families take advantage of the permeable boundaries between home and work to contact their family members at work, as a form of reciprocity. And employees may delimit how and how much their families are "present" in the work place, limiting contact during the work day, or using only personal resources to maintain contact. Importantly, people have different experiences

and expectations of how these rules and resources should work. In this sense, each employee and their family established the use of communication technologies according to their preferences while keeping in mind the idea of reciprocity. In this study, reciprocity was mentioned when employees had flexibility in the workplace to contact their families, and also flexibility to do work from home. Similarly, they had flexible schedules, but were expected to be available to work outside regular hours if something should happen. All of these instances illustrate how the use of communication technologies, especially mobile communication function to blurry borders of work and life.

In general, having family-friendly policies does not automatically solve work-life conflict problems. Policies may not benefit all employees in the same way because different employees have different needs and experiences. For instance, employees with children may benefit from unpaid leave to take children to medical appointments, while employees without children may not have a similar benefit to care for a loved one who is not a family member. When employees perceive their peers are being privileged, they may experience feelings of resentment, which can result in negative perceptions attached to the use of family-friendly benefits (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014; Kirby & Krone, 2002). Additionally, some benefits available are not used due to lack of clarity on the policies, the influence of the supervisor in deciding which arrangements' requests should be attended, and potential negative perceptions others may have about who uses those benefits (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002).

The organizational culture may also influence how family-friendly benefits and FMLA are perceived and used. In some work environments, employees who take FMLA leaves or use the family-friendly benefits offered by the company are perceived as receiving preferential or unfair treatment, suffer negative evaluations, hear pejorative comments, and are pressured to not

use the benefits by their peers and supervisors (Kirby & Krone, 2002). The policies and benefits may exist, but the extent to which policies are followed and benefits are used may be contingent on supervisors' openness and the organizational culture (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016; Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Even the personal values and beliefs of organization's high-ranked executives can influence which organizational polices are in place, and how they are interpreted and practiced. Tracy and Rivera (2010) found that frequently, managers and supervisors are not familiar with the challenges of work-life conflict, thus they do not value or perceive work-life conflict as an important or relevant issue. These individuals are often males with a higher socioeconomic status, whose wives "do not need" to work, and therefore, they perceive women's work as an option, and not a desire or necessity. These executives tend to have more traditional beliefs about males as the breadwinner and females as the caregiver. They tend to encourage women when they decide to leave the company to be a stay-at-home mother, and do not perceive it as problematic for the organization. Additionally, these executives often practice workaholic behaviors and expect their employees to do the same. In doing so, they underestimate the importance of corporate policies to minimize work-life conflict, and reinforce the belief that work-life conflict is a personal issue. In sum, executives' beliefs and values can influence the organizations' policies on work-life harmony, especially for women.

Organizational policies are influential to work-life conflict for small businesses as well. Ironically, the same policies that are created to reduce work-life conflict can ultimately create more stress. For instance, women business owners, such as in-home day care providers, often open their own business to have more autonomy and flexible work. However, they may struggle to manage the lack of boundaries between their homes and workplaces (Butler & Modaff, 2008).

Working from home was intended to enable them to have flexibility and stay at home with their own children, but it ultimately constrained their interactions with family members. Many of these individuals communicatively reframed their experiences in different terms to minimize the cognitive dissonance of the situation (Butler & Modaff, 2008). In the same direction, women business owners have to create justifications for themselves whenever they need to make adjustments in their schedules to fit life needs (Bourne & Forman, 2014). For instance, many of them feel guilty when they take time off, for any reason, even though they have "never-ending workweeks," which involve working long hours every day of the week, including weekends (Bourne & Forman, 2014, p. 72). Even though these women had the freedom to make choices and control their schedules without asking permission of a supervisor, they also had to justify their choices and fit their schedules to their work needs. These findings reinforce the widespread perception that work should be a priority over everything else, even life.

      Other factors that influence work-life interrelationships.

      Cultural aspects. Family communication can influence children's socialization to work and career, transmitting their own beliefs. Buzzanell, Berkelaar, and Kisselburgh (2011) found that family members can influence and encourage children to think about work, discover and pursue their interests. At the same time, family influence is limited to some extent since children have agency to design their own careers, establishing what they want to do or to be when they grow up. Families can also help their children to learn how to deal with work-life challenges in the future. Young women who observed their mothers and young men who observed their fathers dealing with work-life conflict were more aware of and committed to this issue (Basuil & Casper, 2012). This finding suggests that observing parents' experiences and attempts to balance

work and life can influence young adults to better plan and deal with such questions in their future (Basuil & Casper, 2012).

Furthermore, the broader culture influences how people perceive and create expectations about their life and career. The children in Buzzanell and colleagues' (2011) study were from Belgium, China, Lebanon, and the United States, and their career expectations reflected their nations' contexts. Children observed and extracted cues from conversations and their local contexts to inform their choices and construct their realities. They may want to pursue a certain career because "it's fun" (p. 155), because they "like it" (p. 156), or because it is meaningful and so they can "help the people" (p. 157; Buzzanell et al., 2011).

Women transitioning into working motherhood coped with their new work-life challenges in different ways according to a study conducted by Buzzanell and colleagues (2007). They constructed a new identity (no longer a working woman, but a working mother) influenced by their cultures' values and beliefs. Asian mothers struggled between collectivist and individualist values, while trying to maintain multiple positive images: be a good person, a good mother, a good worker, a good daughter, a good colleague, and good representative of their cultural perception of family. They relied on their parents and in-laws to care for their children, or managed to take care of everything by themselves. Hispanic mothers struggled to return to paid work after creating a strong bond with their newly born babies while prioritizing their familial role. They relied on their extended family to provide care for their babies. Because this arrangement was considered appropriate in their culture, they would be perceived as good mothers. African American mothers struggled to negotiate their autonomy and independence with their connectedness with their friends and community. They relied on themselves to

financially provide for their families, but counted on their girlfriends and extended kinship network to build a net of support for their needs.

Culture can be so influential that Powell, Francesco, and Ling (2009) proposed a new culture-sensitive theory of work-family interface. The authors noted that many work-life studies are conducted in the United States, using U.S. based theories, investigating American participants' experiences. As a result, many studies simply ignore the importance of culture in how individuals integrate work and life. They also noted that a few studies that recognize culture as a relevant dimension, are often limited to explore differences between individualistic and collectivistic aspects of culture (i.e., people in individualistic cultures tend to live more independently, whereas those in collectivist cultures have closer links, participating on one or several groups). Therefore, they argued researchers should investigate not only collectivist/individualist aspects, but also humane orientation (i.e., the extent to which a culture encourages and rewards individuals for being altruistic, fair, generous and kind to others), specificity and diffusion (i.e., how a culture defines different concepts, whether it is very specific and well defined, or more holistic and integrative), and gender egalitarianism (the extent to which a culture minimizes gender role differences, promoting gender equality) (Powell et al., 2009). Attending to their claim, researchers started to integrate these aspects into their studies, and have increasingly found that such cultural aspects influence how people experience and deal with work-life issues (e.g., Casper, Harris, Taylor-Bianco, & Wayne, 2011; Haar, Russo, Sune, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014; Masuda et al., 2012).

In the same direction, Schnurr and Zayts (2012) found that expatriate employees from Western countries faced work-life challenges when working in Hong-Kong due to culture shock. For instance, many of the expatriates were surprised with the local culture of regularly working

late and overtime. Even when the expatriates were done with their work, the locals expected them to stay at work because their teammates were not done working. This example of a tension between collectivist and individualist cultures was the source of work-life conflict for many expatriates.

   Generational differences. Culture and ethnicity are not the only aspects that help explain why people experience work-life interrelationships so differently. Individuals from different generations often have different perspectives of work and life experiences, not only because they are living different life stages, but also because they grew up in different contexts and have different values and beliefs. Although some authors diverge on the precise division of the generations, there is some agreement that traditionalists or mature individuals were born between 1925 and 1945; baby boomers were born right after the end of World War II, from 1946 to 1964; the generation X individuals were born between 1965 and 1983 (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008); and the generation Y individuals were born between 1978 and 1990 (Favero & Heath, 2012). The overlap of the dates suggests some blurry boundaries between generations X and Y.

   Individuals from roughly 25 to 49 years of age are often in the middle of their careers, when they are more likely to work long hours and are trying to define their work identities (Huffman, Culbertson, Henning, & Goh, 2013). At the same time, this is when people are more likely to be highly involved with family responsibilities with young children at home, which poses increased work-life challenges for these individuals (Huffman et al., 2013). Researchers suggest that the generations X and Y value work-life balance more than the older cohorts, and they care less about money and prestige than being with their families and harmonizing work and life (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Favero & Heath, 2012).

Baby boomers are often the managers and supervisors of generation X and Y individuals, and while boomers may perceive work-life friendly programs as desirable, younger employees consider it as indispensable, and want to be part of its development and implementation (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Some baby boomers may perceive the generations X and Y as "entitled" and believe younger employees should work hard before enjoying the privileges of work-life friendly programs (Favero & Heath, 2012). On the other hand, some generation X and Y individuals see baby boomers as distrustful, since they insist in the importance of physical presence at the workplace and challenge the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements (Favero & Heath, 2012). Researchers argue that organizations should look beyond these stereotyped views of both generations and consider both concerns and demands to build more robust programs that take into consideration the needs of each generation in the workplace (Favero & Heath, 2012).

The influence of popular media. Popular press, movies, and other different media outlets create and reinforce images of the ideal worker and how to manage work-life conflict. Sotirin, Buzzanell, and Turner (2007) analyzed popular press literature that recommend managerial techniques to organize family life and personal relationships. Families use these techniques when they establish criteria for happiness, determine schedules, deadlines, and end-of-year goals. The family then becomes an enterprise, which promotes a work orientation at home. They found that using managerial strategies at home privileges logic and rationality, values that are highly praised in workplaces. By doing this, the boundaries between home and work are blurred and contribute to a destabilization of notions of public and private. The authors clarify that not all managerial techniques are negative, but that they should not be applied universally across all domains of life indistinctly. This study is aligned with Denker and Dougherty's (2013) findings

that dual-earner couples use corporate discourse (i.e., talking about corporate values and practices) to frame and describe their relationships. They also deal with conflict and emotions in a rational fashion and adopt managerial practices and beliefs in their personal life.

Lahman and Lietzenmayer (2015) analyzed two popular movies and 44 articles from popular press magazines and learned that they all reinforce a common message to workers, especially women: *do it all*. The movies analyzed, *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2011) and *One Fine Day* (1996) (as cited in Lahman & Lietzenmayer, 2015), depict ideals of the working parents who do it all, in particular, juggling work and family demands. They also promote rivalry between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers, as well as working mothers and working women without children. The magazine articles analyzed primarily provided women with work-life messages and advice. Some articles recommended that women find help so they are able to do it all, even if they do not do it all by themselves. Others, advised women to create boundaries between work and life, suggesting different strategies like setting aside personal time, tracking time spent in tasks, learning how to say no, and to taking care of their own health. Some articles also described how individuals may need to shift identities to be able to do it all. In this theme, work-life balance was portrayed as a status achieved by privileged individuals, who follow traditional gender roles. When women leave the workplace to stay at home, they are no longer perceived as intellectually equal to their husbands, causing an identity shift. Lahman and Lietzenmayer (2015) argued that it is disappointing that different media outlets continue urging workers to continue to *do it all*, because it is an unsustainable goal. They also criticized media outlets for neglecting the voices of individuals without privilege, education, and money.

Popular press has named the women who left the paid workforce to stay at home as part of the *opt-out revolution*, while many academic authors criticize this label and argue it is a myth

(Graff, 2007; Kuperberg & Stone, 2008; Metz, 2011; Vavrus, 2007). Kuperberg and Stone (2008) analyzed popular press opt-out articles and found they were mostly editorial or opinion pieces written by authors who are stay-at-home mothers trying to justify their decision or persuade others to follow their path. The majority of these articles were focused on family life and children rearing, minimizing the role of husbands, and ignoring work. Furthermore, these articles portrayed the opt-out as being a choice made by women alone, mainly because of their parenting responsibilities, while work constraints and barriers were rarely mentioned. The opt-out phenomenon is mainly identified amongst a very small portion of the American population, formed by highly educated, white women, who had high-status jobs and are married to husbands with high-incomes that can support them to stay at home (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008). In contrast, statistics show that the number of women who work outside the home with and without children continues to increase in the U.S. across race, age, and education level (Taylor, 2010), suggesting that the opt-out phenomenon may be a very specific event for a small niche of people.

The opt-out process is often portrayed by media outlets as a choice (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008), but Graff (2007) argues this is a misleading label. In her analysis, she argues many women are pushed out instead of opting out when they "*do* feel forced to choose between work and family" after "they've failed to be *either* good mothers or good workers" (p. 52; emphasis in original). To support this claim, she cites facts that are also present in this literature review, including that Americans are working longer hours than in the past decades, that the U.S. is one of the few countries in the world without paid maternity leave laws, and that American women are taking shorter maternity leaves and having children later in life. Graff (2007) also notes that the popular press rarely mentions that the lack of flexibility in the workplace is one of the main reasons women leave their jobs, and that after leaving the workforce, women feel lonely and

depressed for being downgraded to a less respected position, despite the fact that many of them continue to bring income home through a part-time job or working from home.

The way various popular media sources portray work-life issues and idealized stay-at-home mothers is noteworthy because it can impact how the society as a whole perceives such issues, which can impact policy as well. Graff (2007) claims that "if journalism repeatedly frames the wrong problem, then the folks who make public policy may very well deliver the wrong solution" (p. 52). She continues her argument claiming for changes in laws, school hours, and organizational policies to enable people to work and support their families in a more harmonious manner.

As researchers demonstrated over the past decade, work-life interrelationships can be conflicting. Conflict can emerge from personal life demands, work-related situations, or both. Several aspects influence how individuals experience work-life conflict, including gender, culture, generation, policies and regulations at their workplace, where they live, and how popular press depicts the phenomenon. The individuals' experiences are also different depending on how they cope with work-life conflict, which is discussed in the next section.

Coping with Work-Life Conflict

Although research focused on roles and outcomes is important and is represented in a large body of the work-life literature, it rarely addresses communication questions. Work-life conflict is a socially constructed phenomenon. It varies according to individual perceptions, how people talk about their experiences, and how they cope with the unique challenges they face. Work-life conflict also varies across the individuals' life span. Depending on the life stage individuals are living, 'balance' can be interpreted in different ways. What used to be valued when one was single is likely to change when they get married and have children, or when their

parents grow older and need care. In the process of coping with work-life conflict, individuals struggle to make meaning from their lived experiences.

       Communicating to handle tensions and conflict. Carroll and her colleagues (2013) studied the relevance of constructive and destructive communication in dealing with work-family conflict. They found that constructive and destructive communication mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction. Couples who engage in constructive communication (i.e., the ability to cope with work and life demands effectively) experience less work-life conflict and more marital satisfaction than couples who engage in destructive communication (e.g., criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling). The authors further suggested that high quality communication can buffer the aspects, like work-family conflict, that lead to decreased marital satisfaction for couples. Dual-earner couples also use relational maintenance behaviors**,** such as humor and shared tasks, to negotiate household work and minimize work-life conflicts and gender inequities within their marriage (Denker, 2013).

       Taking a dialectic perspective, Yoshimura (2013) argued that work-family can be considered a dialectical tension. She contends that the interrelationship between work and family is marked by functional opposite poles that are interdependent with one another. In her study, she was able to identify that the use of denial and disorientation strategies, considered to be less functional, were related to increased levels of work-family tension and lower levels of marital quality. Additionally, the use of recalibration and reaffirmation strategies, considered as the most positive strategies to deal with dialectical tensions, were related to lower work-family conflict. Although Yoshimura (2013) and Carroll et al. (2013) studied only work-family interrelationships, the results offer helpful insights of how communication can help individuals to cope with broader work-life issues.

Distributing responsibilities. Helpful insights to manage life and work balance were also shared by Zimmerman and colleagues (2003). The authors investigated the adaptive strategies used by dual-earner, heterosexual couples who believed that they successfully balanced family and work demands. The recipe for success appears to be in an egalitarian division of activities and responsibilities. These couples reported an equal division of hours spent on household work, which was often achieved through renegotiation and re-evaluation of the division of the house work. They also reported very similar numbers of hours spent in childcare. Although wives had slightly more responsibilities with children, husbands were also actively parenting. Couples disagreed on how they divided the decision-making responsibilities. Wives perceived it to be more equal, whereas husbands acknowledged their wives to take slightly more responsibility on making decisions. The authors suggest this difference may be related to the general tendency that women are the organizers or gatekeepers of families. Another point of contention was in the value of each partner's career. Husbands perceived both partners' careers to be equally valued, but wives perceived husbands' careers were prioritized. This finding is corroborated by the Harvard Business School's alumni report, where former students, both female and male, indicated the biggest barrier to women advancing in their careers is their tendency to prioritize family over work (Harvard Business School, 2013).

Although these findings reflect traditional gender ideologies, many individuals do not belong to a traditional nuclear family. Dixon and Dougherty (2014) note that "traditional family is not merely a choice, but rather it is compulsory in that a composite of discursive expectations, unspoken rules, and organizational norms converge to create an expectation that workers will conform to the traditional family structure" (p. 7). They found that individuals who do not fit into the concept of a traditional family (e.g., single individuals, members of LGBTQ families) are

marginalized in the workplace. They are often perceived as "others" who do not fit in some policies and traditions. In some instances, the participants had to suppress their identities and avoid talking about their personal lives. In others, they had to deal with hypervisibility, when coworkers knew about their alternative family arrangements and engaged in intense inquiry about their personal lives. To deal with such challenges, people in alternative families had to work around the compulsory traditional family. The authors explain that this meant not only working with people in traditional families, but also yielding to the needs of the traditional families. The participants were often supportive of family care, and understood the needs of coworkers in traditional families. However, both singles and LGBTQ individuals were expected to work more hours to compensate their coworkers' family leaves, and that created feelings of resentment and injustice.

Requesting accommodations. In attempting to accommodate life and work demands, employees often make requests to their supervisors. Hoffman and Cowan (2010) identified six specific rules and three resources commonly utilized by employees when making requests to accommodate work-life conflict. First, making a request can threaten the employee's reputation (e.g., one can be perceived as a slacker or less dependable when requesting accommodations), thus costs and benefits should be carefully measured before the request is placed. Second, family requests are perceived as more appropriate, and therefore easier to be approved by supervisors, than non-family ones. Third, employees should not ask for what they know will not be allowed. This knowledge may come from their own or others' previous experiences and perceptions of the organization's culture. Fourth, because organizational interests are a priority, requests should emphasize the benefits or minimize the negative impact to the organization. The fifth rule says that work-life requests are private and individual, and should not be treated as group concerns.

Finally, the sixth rule indicates that simply informing the supervisor about the accommodations can be more effective than requesting it. Additionally, employees need to use three resources to increase their chances of getting their requests approved: using family as a resource for a request often legitimizes the requests; appealing to the employee's own competence to emphasize the low impact to the organization; and knowing the organization is an important resource to help employees to strategically craft their requests in light of organizational needs.

These rules may be applicable to many workplaces, but they may not fit well with the needs of blue-collar workers. Bochantin and Cowan (2016) explored the strategies that blue-collar workers use to request work-life accommodations at work. Many blue-collar workers used several proactive strategies to request work-life accommodations after carefully planning their requests. Proactive strategies included circumvention (i.e., bypassing hierarchical structures to make a request to a higher level of authority), relating (i.e., establishing a commonality with the supervisor before making the request), factual appeals (i.e., presenting facts that bolstered their credibility and job performance), and honesty (i.e., simply being honest about their desired requests).

Blue-collar workers also used reactive strategies, when they had to make requests in response to supervisors' comments or reactions to initial requests. These included ultimatums (i.e., requests were presented as either-or situations) and other focused or accusatory strategies (e.g., accusing supervisors of favoritism of others; shifting the blame). Individuals who used proactive strategies were more likely to have their requests accepted. When using reactive strategies, most of the participants were unsuccessful in their intents. The outcomes achieved by the participants suggest that proactive, carefully planned strategies tend to be more likely

successful than the reactive ones. It is important to note that sometimes employees' requests will not be granted. In such cases, they must find other ways to deal with the problematic situation.

Leaving the job. Some individuals choose to leave their job to deal with work-life conflict. Watanabe and Falci (2016) investigated the aspects that lead full-time tenure-line professors in higher education to consider leaving their jobs to find better work-life balance. Surveying professors from sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as social and behavioral sciences (SBS), the authors found that work-related demands and resources were stronger predictors of turnover intentions related to work-life conflict than family demands and resources. Job satisfaction, work-to-family spillover, and supportive work-family culture were significant predictors of work-life conflict related to turnover intentions.

Married mothers experiencing work-life conflict are more likely than other parents (i.e., single mothers, single fathers, and married fathers) to leave the workforce (Nomaguchi, 2012). A combination of work and personal reasons shape individuals' decisions to leave their jobs (Metz, 2011). Although family responsibilities alone are perceived as a secondary factor, the integration of the two spheres is often problematic for women with or without children (Metz, 2011). As discussed before, the opt-out phenomenon often portrayed by popular media as a trend. However, scholars have argued that this phenomenon is concentrated amongst white, middle to upper class professional women, and not necessarily to the general population (Graff, 2007; Kuperberg & Stone, 2008; Vavrus, 2007). This is supported by the fact that the U.S. the number of women entering the workforce continues to increase and that most women continue working after having children (Taylor, 2010).

Women are not the only ones who exit the workforce to take care of their families. Exploring the experiences of couples with breadwinning mother and stay-at-home fathers,

Medved and Rawlins (2011) found that the decision of opting out of the workforce happened to better accommodate dads' work and life needs. This non-traditional arrangement often occurred because the mothers had a higher income and the fathers had a temperament to take care of children (Medved & Rawlins, 2011). Although this study touched on how partners communicatively decided to make this change in their lives, we know little about how individuals make the decision to quit a job, and how different sources of social support may influence this process.

Few studies explore the instances in which individuals leave their job in response to work-life conflict. Because this decision can largely impact individuals' lives as well as organizations, more research is needed to understand how this process occurs especially the role of communication in shaping decisions. Previous research on relationship dissolution and voluntary organizational exit provide some insights to further understand this phenomenon.

Similar to the process of disengaging from an interpersonal relationship (Duck, 1982), resigning from a job is a communicative process that starts before the employee formally leaves the organization. Jablin (2001) proposed that voluntary organizational exit is composed of three basic phases: *preannouncement*, *announcement and actual exit*, and *postexit*, each one marked by different patterns of communication. During the preannouncement phase, individuals are gradually disengaging from the organization while making their decision to leave. In all phases, communication processes vary, depending on the individual and the situation. For instance, during the preannouncement phase, the employee leaving the organization can send explicit or implicit cues about their potential exit to members of the organization (such as peer coworkers or supervisors), or to individuals external to the organization (such as clients, suppliers, or family

members). Understanding the voluntary organizational exit phases provides further understanding of how individuals navigate this process.

Looking at the preannouncement phase, Tan and Kramer (2012) found that individuals use five communicative strategies to make the decision to leave, before announcing downward career changes. Strategies included seeking feedback from family members and friends and incorporating their opinions in the decision. They also sought social support, mainly from like-minded people, to guarantee they would receive encouragement. In contrast, they avoid talking with individuals whom they knew would discourage them, limiting the effects of their negative feedback.

Family members and friends are also important sources of support and advice during the announcement phase. Klatzke (2016) found that once the employee makes the decision to leave, they communicate with their inner-circle, composed of close family members, friends, or coworkers, before they officially resign. Leavers generally engage in much effort to prepare their exit announcement. Leavers changing careers must deal with three main issues to communicate the exit to others: timing the announcement to occur in the best moment possible; framing the message using different communication strategies to gain acceptance from others; and strategizing the delivery, including adopting various media (e.g., face to face, phone, text message) to effectively communicate the message and downplay the significance of the career change (Tan & Kramer, 2012).

The announcement and exit phase is when the employee publicly communicates their decision to exit the organization, and the postexit phase comes after the employee leaves the organization. During the postexit phase, the leaver must manage new uncertainties about the future, and negotiate a new work-related identity. For instance, Buzzanell and Turner (2003)

found that individuals and their family members engage in emotion work after a job loss (involuntary exit) to express positive emotions, and to make their lives look and feel like before the job loss. Individuals who made downward career changes also had to deal with uncertainties in the postexit phase. They used communicative strategies to reframe, refocus, or recalibrate their new identities in their new career (Tan & Kramer, 2012).

A number of studies examine aspects of work-life interrelationships, but only few investigate situations when individuals leave their jobs to cope with work-life conflict. From those, most focus on childcare responsibilities, and some explore the predictors of intentions to leave. None of the studies identified in this literature review focus on how individuals experience the process of leaving a job due to work-life conflict. What leads individuals to consider quitting as a solution for work-life conflict? What are the circumstances that prompt individuals to consider quitting their jobs? What do they experience in this process? This gap in the literature leads to the first research question of this study:

RQ1: How do individuals experience work-life conflict that prompts them to consider quitting their jobs?

Problematic Integration and Work-Life Conflict

Problematic integration (PI) theory, proposed by Austin Babrow (1992), can be helpful to explain how individuals experience and deal with work-life challenges. PI theory was created to explain the tensions between individuals' expectations and desires, and their perceptions of situations and outcomes from a communication perspective. The first two propositions of PI theory are built on the assumption that people form probabilistic and evaluative orientations about their experiences. The probabilistic orientation refers to the likelihood that something will happen (i.e., expectation, probability, or likelihood that something may happen) (Babrow, 1992).

When one wonders, for instance, what their chances are of taking a vacation day from work, they are applying a probabilistic orientation. Individuals may evaluate the thing or event in a range of possibilities. They may believe that it will occur, will likely occur, that it may occur, that it may not occur, that it is not likely to occur, that it will definitely not occur, or that they are uncertain about the likelihood.

The evaluative orientation relates to how people assess something and attribute meaning to it (e.g., good or bad, desirable or not). For instance, individuals evaluate whether taking that vacation day off from work is good or bad to their career progression, or whether it is a desirable thing or not. Things can be evaluated in a variety of ways, depending on the situation and the person. Evaluations may range from positive to negative, from indifference to relevance, or from good to bad. People can evaluate and attribute meaning to things, people, events, objects, and situations in innumerous ways

The third proposition of PI theory suggests that probabilistic and evaluative orientations not only occur in parallel, but they are also integrated and interdependent. Often, the integration of the probabilistic and evaluative orientations occurs seamlessly. A positive integration occurs when beliefs and expectations are aligned with values and desires, or when preferences are in line with the perceived reality (Babrow, 2014). This happens, for instance, when one wants to attend a concert and finds a good deal to buy the tickets, or when their football team wins. In these situations, the integration of probabilistic and evaluative orientations occurs unconsciously, and most people do not notice the process occurring, because it takes minimal or no effort to process.

Probabilistic and evaluative orientations are easier to integrate when three factors occur: there are clear probabilities, consistent evaluations, and convergence of probability and

evaluation. Probabilities are clear when the likelihood of an event to occur is known, and individuals do not have uncertainty about it. For instance, a concert is scheduled on Saturday and there are no reasons for it to be cancelled (positive and likely). When the event is evaluated consistently to one's sense of reality, it contributes to a seamless integration. Continuing with the concert example, when an individual likes the artist that is performing and evaluates the concert as a great and enjoyable experience, the evaluation is consistent with their sense of reality. When an individual's perceptions of probability and evaluation converge (i.e., a bad thing is unlikely to happen, or a good thing is likely to happen), the integration of both orientations occurs seamlessly and routinely. This will happen when the person who got a good deal on the tickets for the concert on Saturday, enjoys the performance, and has a good time.

However, the integration of probabilistic and evaluative orientations can be problematic. The integration of probabilistic and evaluative orientations becomes problematic when probabilities are unclear, evaluations are inconsistent, and probability and evaluation diverge. For instance, the artist coming to the concert is sick and the person suspects the concert may be cancelled, or the tickets for the concert may be expensive, or the concert may not be that good. In these cases, people may experience uncertainty, stress, or anxiety, which can negatively influence decision-making processes.

Babrow (1992) proposed four main ways in which the integration of the probabilistic and evaluative orientations is problematic: divergence, ambivalence, ambiguity, and impossibility. *Divergence* occurs when there are discrepancies between an individual's desires and expectations. In other words, when a desirable thing is unlikely to happen, there is divergence. Likewise, divergence is present when an undesirable thing is likely to happen. For instance, individuals may experience divergence when they want to go meet with their friends after work,

but they cannot leave the office before they complete several reports that are due that day. In Babrow's (1992) words, some happiness is unlikely, some sorrow is likely.

Individuals experience *ambiguity* when probabilities and evaluations are unknown, uncertain, or unknowable; in other word, they are ambiguous. Ambiguity exists when a set of probabilities could happen, and one does not know which one is more likely to happen, or when all the possibilities appear to be equally likely. Ambiguity also exists when one does not know the probability that something will occur. In some instances, it may be impossible to know the possibilities and probabilities that a desired or undesired event will occur. For instance, an employee may experience ambiguity while waiting for their supervisor return from business travel and is unsure of what day the supervisor will return to the office, at what time they will arrive, or in what mood they will be. Experiencing ambiguity can be nerve racking for some individuals, and it can cause anxiety and stress due to lack of information about the uncertainties.

Ambivalence occurs in two main ways: when similarly evaluated alternatives are mutually exclusive, or when an object or situation brings contradictory feelings (Babrow, 1992). When mutually exclusive alternatives are similarly evaluated (both positively or negatively), choosing one of two good alternatives represents losing one good choice, while choosing one of two bad alternatives means certain unhappiness. For example, when one is looking for a job and receives two good offers, but can only choose only one and must let the other good offer go. In contrast, individuals may have only bad job opportunities, and must choose one because they need to work. Ambivalence due to contradictory feelings occurs when the same situation or object is evaluated as both positive and negative simultaneously. The thought of leaving a job that is disliked may bring positive feelings and relief, while simultaneously leading to sadness,

guilt, and worry. Feelings of ambivalence can be tolerated up to a certain degree before becoming pathological, once the feelings are intensely opposite (Babrow, 1992).

Finally, the fourth main type of problematic integration proposed by Babrow (1992) is *impossibility*. The main concept of impossibility is that there is certainty that a desired outcome cannot be achieved. For example, an individual might be certain that they will never become pregnant, no matter how much they want or how hard they try. Because certainty may be difficult to be established, events with extremely low possibilities are sometimes perceived as impossible, as are some theoretically possible, but pragmatically impossible events or outcomes. The greater the positive value attributed to a certain event (i.e., the more the thing is desired), the more problematic is its impossibility. People facing impossibility may feel sadness, anger, denial, or revolt. Eventually, they may accept the impossibility.

In all types of PI, how something is evaluated can interfere in the probability that it happens. In other words, the more someone wants something, the more they are likely to get it. For instance, if a person really wants to attend a concert, they will try hard to make time for it and to find resources to attend it, and this can increase their chances of being able to go. If they do not care for it, it is likely that they will put no effort towards it. With cases of impossibility, this may not hold true, or be a source of major frustration and sadness.

Communication plays an important role in this theory. When facing situations of PI, people often experience negative or conflicting feelings. To minimize these undesired feelings caused by PI, people are motivated to seek a solution. One way to address it is through communication. People often seek information and support from others when facing problematic integration of all sorts (e.g., Dennis, Kunkel, & Keyton, 2008; Ford, Babrow, & Stohl, 1996). Communicating with others may help one in coping with problematic integration situations.

Through conversations with others, individuals may increase or reduce their uncertainty, find other alternatives, or have a better understanding of what is likely to happen. In the case of ambiguity, for instance, one may want to reduce ambiguity by seeking information. Individuals may consult with family, friends, or experts to build a clearer understanding of the probabilities, or a more accurate evaluation of the situation. In other cases, communication may be used to maintain or increase ambiguity, because having more certainty that an undesired thing is likely to happen can be terrifying. Maintaining or increasing ambiguity can help individuals remain hopeful in face of a difficult situation (Ford et al., 1996).

When facing divergence, people may want to talk with others about the situation. They may be encouraged by their family members or friends to see the situation in a different way. By adjusting one's evaluation orientation, the problem may seem better, or worse, which may motivate people to seek change. Having a better understanding of the problem and its consequences and outcomes can help people to be more prepared to deal with difficult situations. such as when someone is diagnosed with a serious disease. Having more information and social support can help people to endure or manage these PI situations (e.g., Dennis et al., 2008; Ford et al., 1996).

PI theory has been mostly applied in health communication studies (e.g., Ford et al., 1996; Polk, 2005; Sundstrom, Ferrara, DeMaria, Baker-Whitcomb, & Payne, 2017), to help scholars and practitioners understand how people experience and cope a variety of situations involving individuals' health. For instance, PI has been used to study how individuals cope when they are diagnosed with a serious disease like cancer (Dennis et al., 2008; Ford et al., 1996), how patients make decisions about health treatments that involve risks and side effects (Hines,

Babrow, Badzek, & Moss, 2001), and how people make choices about their health care (Sundstrom et al., 2017).

PI theory can also be helpful to understand the complex interplay of work-life interrelationships. It can help us understand the challenging nature of experiencing work-life conflict. When experiencing work-life conflict, people often face problematic integration of probabilistic and evaluative orientations. For instance, a working mother may experience ambivalence when trying to accommodate family and work demands, which become mutually exclusive alternatives. One who needs to remain in a disliked job to be able to provide resources for their family might experience a likely sorrow situation, while others might perceive it as mutually exclusive alternatives. Making decisions related to work-life interrelationships such as quitting a job to ease conflict is often difficult because there are many variables to be considered and so much at stake, which also involve the problematic integration of desires and probabilities.

Researchers have not yet examined how individuals' experiences of work-life conflict may be understood as experiences of problematic integration. Understanding how individuals feel about and make sense of work-life conflict can provide insight on how to help individuals manage and cope with challenges that emerge as a result of this conflict. One way to gain this understanding is to investigate the ways that work-life interrelationships lead to problematic integration. This leads to the second research question:

RQ2: How does perceptions of work-life conflict connect with feelings of problematic integration for individuals?

Gathering Social Support

Receiving social support can minimize perceptions of work-life conflict (Edwards, 2006; 2008). Social support is defined as "verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and

providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience" (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987, p. 19). In other words, social support is made of supportive communication that mutually affects senders' and receivers' affective, cognitive, and behavioral states. There are three main assumptions that guide social support research (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). First, people engage in supportive interactions as part of their need for human contact and search for meaning. Second, support occurs when interaction helps to reduce one's uncertainty and increase a sense of control. Finally, social support is a reciprocal process that occurs within a social network of relationships, also called as ties. These assumptions are further discussed below.

Communication has a central role in social support, since individuals exchange (i.e., directly or indirectly ask and/or provide) help through communication (MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011). Individuals usually have a reason to seek support. When experiencing stressful events, uncomfortable or painful situations, or dealing with unknown or uncertain circumstances, individuals are motivated to seek supportive communication. Providers usually strive to say or do something meaningful for recipients. However, supportive messages may be perceived differently by senders and receivers, depending on how individuals attribute meaning to the messages. For instance, a provider may say something intended to be supportive, and the receiver may perceive it as manipulative or condescending. When senders and receivers attribute similar meanings to the symbols and messages they exchange, it is likely that the messages will be perceived as consistent and positive (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987).

Originally, scholars conceptualized social support as a means to reduce uncertainty in a given situation (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Messages designed to reduce uncertainty in the face of adversarial circumstances help receivers have more confidence and increase perception of

control of their environment. However, research combining social support and PI theory suggest that social support can also be used to maintain or increase uncertainty, for example when an undesired thing is likely to happen. Ford and colleagues (1996) found that some of the messages of support created by members of a breast cancer social support group were designed to maintain or increase uncertainty. In most cases, this happened in response to scenarios where a negative thing was likely to happen. A possible explanation is that not all uncertainty is bad, as Babrow (2001) clarified, and increasing or maintaining some levels of uncertainty can help individuals to remain hopeful.

Supportive relationships are linked to each other forming a structured web. Individuals are likely to seek support when facing stressful events from people they know well, but they can also find support from acquaintances or strangers (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Close and intimate relationships are the most frequent providers of social support, including immediate family members, romantic partners, and friends, which are *strong ties* (Gray, 2014). Strong ties are usually based on interpersonal relationships, where relational partners recognize each other as unique individuals (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Support may also be provided by professionals (e.g., health care providers; Gray, 2014), coworkers, and even strangers, including the increasingly popular online support groups (e.g., Tanis, 2008). The ties with these individuals are usually weaker, although are usually more abundant than strong ties. *Weak ties* are often grounded on role-based relationships, where interactions are guided by context and rules, and relational partners are perceived as part of a group, instead of a unique individual. The importance of weak ties should not be underscored, since they can provide support when strong ties are disrupted, or surpass the limitations of the strong ties (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987).

The source of support messages can influence their perceived helpfulness, depending on various characteristics, including demographic (e.g., age, gender, culture), personality (e.g., empathy traits), cognitive (e.g., ability to communicate), relational (e.g., interest on and care about the support receiver), and situational variables (e.g., problem complexity, motivation to provide support [Gray, 2014; MacGeorge et al., 2011]). The receiver's perceptions about the support provider are also important to the evaluation of the support received. Whether the provider is perceived as an expert, trustworthy, and how much the receiver likes the provider can also influence the perceived helpfulness and effectiveness of social support messages (Gray, 2014; MacGeorge et al., 2011).

Social support is often divided in three major categories: emotional support, informational support, and instrumental or tangible support. *Emotional support* includes communication that provides comfort and understanding. It typically involves showing care and concern, for which empathy is essential. *Informational support* is provided in the form of information and advice, when one offers knowledge and possible solutions. *Instrumental* or *tangible support* encompasses goods and services or practical help (Gray, 2014; Tanis, 2008). Individuals may seek support using direct or indirect strategies (e.g., asking for help vs. complaining), and verbal or non-verbal communication (e.g., talking vs. crying), which is likely to influence how support is received (MacGeorge et al., 2011).

Gathering social support can influence how individuals experience and cope with work-life conflict. Having a high-quality relationship with supervisors and coworkers that includes social support, can contribute to reduced perceptions of work-life conflict (Major et al., 2008). Additionally, Krouse and Afifi (2007) found that individuals used eight different strategies to cope with work-life conflict in the workplace including venting with peers, venting with

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supervisors, seeking advice from coworkers, and requesting instrumental support from peers and supervisors. Even when employees had higher daily workloads, they perceived work-family conflict was lessened when their supervisor was supportive or worked to accommodate their work-family needs (Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015).

Individuals can also seek and receive support in their homes to cope with work-life conflict. For instance, working mothers experienced less work-life conflict when they perceived that their husbands were supportive (Edwards, 2006). Additionally, when the women perceived that their husbands offered them emotional and instrumental support, both when they actively sought for support and when received unsolicited support, they experienced higher marital satisfaction (Edwards, 2008). Taken together, these studies suggest that social support can be a useful strategy to minimize work-life conflict.

Problematic Integration (PI) theory and social support processes can help us understand how individuals experience and cope with work-life conflict. The literature review suggests an important gap when it comes to voluntary exit due to work-life conflict. People are likely to experience PI when experiencing work-life conflict and when considering quitting their job. Social support seems to be one helpful coping strategy. Work-life conflict can create uncertainty. Is their job affecting their quality of life, or are they being unable to conciliate both? Should they leave this job? What will happen if they quit? Is this the right decision to make? Will they be able to find another job soon? Will they have enough financial resources in the meantime? Will the new job be better than the current? Some studies explored communicative aspects of the decision to quit a job or changing careers, but did not focus on work-life issues. Those studies demonstrated that individuals communicate with social network members about their decision to leave or change jobs, even before they officially announce their resignation (e.g., Tan & Kramer,

2012). However, it is unclear how the communication occurs in the context of work-life conflict. Is the process similar? Whom do they turn to for advice and sharing their experiences? Who are these network members and how do they influence individuals' decisions? In which moment do they discuss their intentions with social network members? What is the content of their communication? This leads to the third research question:

RQ3: How does communication with social network members help individuals to manage problematic integration when deciding to leave their jobs due to work-life conflict?

Summary and Relevance of the Study

The literature review above indicates that work-life conflict is an important area of investigation. Communication scholars have yet to uncover how people who are considering quitting their jobs due to work-life conflict communicate about it with their social networks, the feedback they receive, and its influence. This study is important because it relates to a phenomenon experienced by a large number of individuals, regardless of their sex, age, race, gender, life arrangements, or area of work. Notably, understanding the experiences of traditional and dual-earner couples is important, but it does not fully represent the wide variety of family configurations of our society. We know little about the struggles of single parents, couples without children, or same-sex couples, who manage work-life conflict. This research seeks to attend Kirby and Buzzanell's (2014) call for more studies to explore how people make sense of their work-life experiences and how they explain their choices to others. Bochantin (2008) also called for alternate ways of studying work-life conflict, to understand how people experience such conflict and socially construct their realities. This study attends to both calls.

The study of work-life conflict is a relatively new and flourishing area in communication studies, integrating interpersonal and organizational communication studies, although it has been

explored in other disciplines for quite a long time (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1995, Staines, 1980). Adopting a communication perspective allows researchers to explore how individuals make sense of their work-life conflict experiences and how they construct their reality in communication with other individuals. This perspective can also facilitate a more integrative view of the phenomenon when it considers how individuals interact with the various elements that surround them.

Work-life conflict is a phenomenon that can happen to virtually any adult, and the results of this study can be helpful to provide further insight to individuals, social network members, counseling services, and organizations wishing to improve their work-life interrelationships. This study will also contribute to advancements in the work-life conflict literature. Specifically, it sheds light on the situations that prompt individuals to consider leaving their jobs. Understanding these challenges can help individuals, scholars, organizations, and policy makers think about solutions that may contribute to a more harmonic work-life interface.

Additionally, this research expands the application of Problematic Integration (PI) theory (Babrow, 1992). PI theory has successfully been applied to a variety of health communication studies that focus on helping patients, practitioners, and scholars understand and cope with complex situations, such as diagnosis, treatments, and end of life decisions. Applying the PI theory to the work-life context brings new possibilities to understand this phenomenon and to expand the application of the theory. The current study also expands the research on social support when individuals experience work-life conflict and strive to make decisions.

CHAPTER III – METHODS

To gain a deeper understanding on how individuals experience work-life issues that prompt them to consider quitting their jobs and how communication with social network members influenced the decision-making process, a qualitative approach was used. With this method, it is possible to explore individuals' specific experiences and learn how they socially construct their realities through communication. Kirby and Buzzanell (2014) specifically called for more studies to explore sensemaking and social construction in work-life conflict. I took a phenomenological approach to explore how individuals experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology aims to describe how people who had similar experiences with a given phenomenon attribute meaning to it. This perspective is the most aligned with the research questions I seek to answer in this study.

Participants

Participants were recruited using a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013). To participate in the study, individuals had to be 18 years of age or older and have decided to or strongly considered quitting a job in the last five years to improve work-life balance. Similar to the procedures used by Tan and Kramer (2012), I made the decision to set five years as a criteria to minimize any issues the participants experienced recalling their decisions. After receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I started recruiting participants to the study. In the recruiting messages, I used the term work-life balance, because it is the most common expression used and recognized by the individuals, organizations, and media outlets. In the recruiting message, people were encouraged to share the study information with others. They were also informed that all participants would be enrolled in a drawing to win a $50 Amazon gift card at the end of the study. A copy of the recruiting scripts can be found in Appendix A.

The researcher asked permission to share the recruiting message in twelve Facebook groups related to work-life balance. These groups included working mothers, stay at home fathers, and similar themes. Only four of the groups agreed to share the recruiting message with their members. These groups were "Work from home moms and dads," "Quit your job society," "Work/life balance success: Tips & advice," and "Balance of life: Get fit & healthy." The researcher also posted the recruitment message on a personal Facebook page and some contacts shared the post on their personal pages. The recruitment message was also posted on CRTNET, a listserv of communication scholars.

In addition, the researcher asked professors at a Texas university to share information about the study with their students in undergraduate and graduate classes. Three professors agreed to email the study recruitment message to their students in a graduate business class, two undergraduate classes, a communication course and a political science class. Four professors allowed me to visit their classes in person to recruit participants. The researcher visited seven communication classes, five undergraduate and two graduate courses. During the class visits, the researcher handed a flyer to all students with the study information and welcomed them to share the information with people in their social network who might be interested in participating.

As a result, more than 30 individuals contacted the researcher. Some did not meet the study criteria, or did not follow through in scheduling and conducting the interview. Of the final sample, five participants were recruited from the classes visits, three from the emails sent out by the professors, two from the listserv post, one from a Facebook group, one from the personal Facebook page post, and ten from others sharing the information.

The researcher interviewed 23 participants. One of the participants did not meet the study criteria and was removed from the analysis. Therefore, the final sample included 22

participants. Information about the participants is displayed in Table 1. Participants were 17

women and five men, with ages ranging from 25 to 50 years of age ($M = 31$). Eleven participants

Table 1.
Participants' Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Marital Status	Children
Abigail	28	Hispanic / Latino	Bachelor's	Married	No
Ben	44	White	Bachelor's	Married	Yes, over 18
Carlos	50	Hispanic / Latino	Associate	Married	Yes, over 18
Carol	26	Hispanic / Latino / White	Master's	Married	No
Danielle	35	White	Bachelor's	Divorced	Yes, under 18
Hannah	30	White	Master's	Married	No
Jacob	28	Hispanic / Latino	Master's	Single	No
Kimberly	40	Hispanic / Latino	Associate	Divorced	Yes, under 18
Madeline	25	Hispanic / Latino / White	Bachelor's	Single	Yes, under 18
Makayla	28	Black	Some college	Divorced	No
Mariella	25	Hispanic / Latino	Master's	Single	No
Mary	26	White	Bachelor's	Single	No
Matthew	33	White	Bachelor's	Married	Yes, under 18
Rachel	27	Hispanic / Latino	Bachelor's	Single	No
Rebecca	42	White	Bachelor's	Married	Yes, under 18
Riley	29	White	Master's	Single	No
Ruth	29	Hispanic / Latino	Bachelor's	Married	No
Samantha	26	Hispanic / Latino	Bachelor's	Single	No
Sam	29	White	Master's	Single	No
Stacy	27	White	Bachelor's	Single	No
Terri	29	White	Bachelor's	Separated	Yes, under 18
Vanessa	31	White	Doctorate	Married	No

categorized themselves as White, eight Hispanic or Latino, two Hispanic or Latino and White,

and one Black. Nine participants were single, nine were married, three were divorced, and one

was separated. From the nine married individuals, eight had an opposite-sex, and one had a

same-sex spouse. The sample included 14 individuals with children living with them and eight

without children. At the moment of the interview, six had children younger than 18 and two had

children older than 18. One participant had some college degree, two had Associate's degrees, 12 had Bachelor's degrees, six had Master's degrees, and one had a Doctorate degree. At the time of the interviews, participants lived in five different states: Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Seventeen of the participants quit their job before the interviews, and five did not. From those, only three were still working in the same position at the time of the interview. One of them was fired, another did not renew the working contract when it expired, and the other remained at the same job. The participants quit or strongly considered quitting a wide variety of job positions in different industries, including a teller supervisor at a national credit union, front desk agent at a chain hotel, accountant at a construction company, registered dietician at a nursing home, business owner of a sporting goods organization, fundraiser for a non-profit organization, sales associate at a furniture store chain, investigator for a child protective services, sales and marketing manager at a student housing complex, cost engineer at a construction company, operations engineer at a large chemical company, graduate teaching assistant at a university, educator at a museum, manager at a university radio station, store manager for a multinational retailing corporation, talent development facilitator for a multinational retailing corporation, bookkeeper at a local furniture company, behavioral educator at a public school while also a gymnastics coach at a local gym, project manager at a direct mail company, tenure-track professor at a university, project engineer at heavy steel fabrication company, and graphic design intern at a locally owned insurance agency while also adjunct instructor at university. All participants quit or strongly considered quitting their jobs in the last five years, except one, who left work eight years before. Because this participant could recall the experience vividly, their answers were included in the data.

Data Collection

All of the interviews were conducted by the author between April and June of 2017. The locations were chosen based on participants' preferences and availability. Six interviews were conducted in a conference room on campus and one was conducted in a dining area at the university. Five were conducted in three different coffee shops. One interview was conducted in a wine bar. To accommodate participants' busy schedules and those in disperse geographic locations, five interviews were conducted using the online video-conferencing application Skype™ and four via telephone.

Participants reviewed and signed the informed consent form and answered demographic questions before the interview. Those who participated via telephone and Skype™ interviews were requested by email to review, complete, and email back the informed consent and the demographic questionnaire prior to the interview. In the face-to-face meetings, I walked the participants through both documents and requested their signatures before starting the interview. In the demographic questionnaire, the participants had the opportunity to choose to review their interview transcript. This technique helps qualitative researchers make sure that the participants' experiences are being accurately captured in the transcripts. The purpose of this method is to help ensure the validity of the data. Four participants opted to review their transcripts. Upon review, two of them indicated minimal changes that were then incorporated to the data. The informed consent form and the demographic questionnaire can be found in Appendix B and C, respectively.

In the informed consent document, participants were asked permission to have the interview audio recorded. Upon obtaining their authorization, the researcher started recording the conversation. During the face-to-face interviews, a mobile phone application called Voice

Recorder was used to record the conversation. In the telephone interviews, an application called TapeACall™ installed on the researchers' personal mobile phone was used. Finally, in the Skype™ interviews, the researcher used the MP3 Skype recorder application installed on a personal computer. The interviews were, on average, 47 minutes long, ranging from 19 to 99 minutes. The phone interviews were, on average, 17 minutes shorter than the face-to-face ones, including via Skype™. Skype™ interviews were only 7 minutes shorter, on average, than the ones in person.

All interviews followed a semi-structured protocol with eight open-ended questions about both personal and professional lives. Each question had additional probe questions to gain additional information. The questions explored the participants' experiences during the process of considering quitting their jobs. The interviews began with questions that asked participants to describe their regular day at work and their personal life at the time they had the job they were considering quitting. Next, they were asked whether and how work interfered in their personal life, and the other way around. Then, participants were asked about the circumstances that led them to consider quitting the job and how the process evolved. They were also asked if they talked with other people about the process, how they shared the ideas with their social network members, and how these conversations influenced their final decision. Next, they were asked about how they ultimately made a decision, what the most important factors were, and how they felt about it. Finally, they were asked if they would like to add any additional information. The interviews were planned to follow this specific sequence. However, the semi-structured nature of this protocol allowed me to adjust the flow of the questions to the participants' answers and reactions, while making sure to have all the questions answered. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

The final sample adheres to Creswell's (2013) recommendations for phenomenological studies. All of the participants experienced the phenomenon investigated, although with some noticeable differences and similarities. Creswell (2013) recommended a sample size ranging from 3 to 15 individuals. However, the main criteria to determine the size of the sample in qualitative research is not a quantifiable number, but data saturation. Saturation occurs "when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After 20 interviews (one was later excluded from the data), the researcher perceived the data saturation was reached. The researcher then conducted three additional interviews, which solidified the data saturation. The data collected also meets Creswell's (2013) maximum variation sampling criterion, since participants had a variety of different backgrounds and demographic characteristics.

The researcher transcribed all of the interviews verbatim. One participant emailed after the interview requesting to include additional thoughts to their testimony so the additional comments were added to the end of their interview transcript. One of the interviews was not recorded due to a technical failure. Immediately after the interview, a mock transcript of the interview with field notes was created and shared with the participant, who generously reviewed it and added comments and details, enriching and validating the data. As a result, the data corpus summed 387 pages of double-spaced transcribed interviews. On average, the transcripts were 18 pages long, ranging from 9 to 34 pages.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral. This process consists of several loops of data analysis. Creswell noted that these steps are interrelated and may occur

simultaneously. The researcher started with organizing all of the data, which consisted of printing the transcripts and binding them in the sequence of the interviews. Then, the researcher read the entire data set several times, to get a general sense of the whole database. During the reading step, handwritten memos and notes were added to the margins of the pages and at the end of each interview. The notes and memos included things that were outstanding on the data, things that were repeated by other participants, and a general sense of each participants' experiences. This memoing process facilitated understanding and organization of ideas and was a helpful preparation to the next step, coding. When coding, the researcher read again the transcripts, notes, and memos and handwrote the recurring codes in notecards, organizing them in groups of related codes. Several codes emerged from the data. As the researcher interpreted the meaning of codes, similar codes were grouped and aggregated, refining the coding process. Next, the codes were organized in major themes, representing the experiences and contexts in which the participants experienced the work-life conflict. The researcher explored multiple ways to arrange the codes and themes, until it became organized and meaningful. All these steps were conducted manually, with minimal computer assistance.

Finally, excerpts of the data were selected to illustrate the themes and subthemes, also serving as supporting evidence of the findings. The participants' names were changed for pseudonyms and other identifiers were omitted in the results, protecting their confidentiality. The results are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of individuals who strongly considered or decided to quit their jobs because of work-life conflict, how they communicated with social network members in this process, and how these interactions influenced their experience and decision. This chapter is divided into three main sections, reflecting each of the research questions that emerged in the literature review. The questions are answered based on the data collected and analyzed, following the methods described in the previous chapter. The first section describes how individuals experienced the phenomenon, specifically, how the participants experienced life, work, and work-life conflict. The second section explores how participants experienced problematic integration as it relates to work-life conflict. Finally, section three explores four different aspects relating to communication between participants and social network members about work-life conflict.

Living with Work-Life Conflict

The first research question aimed to understand the participants' experiences with work-life conflict. The answers for this research question are divided into three sections: experiencing life, experiencing work, and experiencing conflict. The first two sections describe how participants perceived life and work. The third describes the points where work and life intersected and created conflict. In each section, the participants' experiences reported in the interviews are explained in themes and sub-themes and are illustrated with participants' quotes.

Experiencing life. To understand the experiences of individuals who decided to or strongly considered quitting their jobs because of work-life conflict, we must first understand what "life" meant to them. The elements that make up individuals' lives outside of work are greatly varied. Because "life" is so complex, participants talked not only about specific tasks and

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activities that were included in life, but also what life should be. Four themes emerged in this section: life is to be enjoyed, life is to be spent with loved ones, life is full of responsibilities, and life is work.

Life is to be enjoyed. When the participants talked about their personal lives, much of the content was related to enjoyable activities and moments. Many participants talked about dating and socializing with their friends, including going out at night, drinking, dancing, having brunch, or spending time together. Many talked about exercising, enjoying the outdoors, and practicing hobbies, such as going to the gym and practicing cross-fit, snowshoeing, camping, going to the beach or to a water park, watching TV shows and series, watching football, watching their kids' games, going to the movies, hunting, fishing, playing guitar, attending concerts, reading, painting, crocheting, and crafting. Some wanted to relax, unwind, and sleep, while some wanted to play with their pets. Others wanted to travel, visit their families and friends, and go sightseeing. However, they did not always have time and energy to perform those activities in the frequency they would like to. Whenever participants had a chance, they fit one of these enjoyable activities into their busy lives. Matthew, for example, said he would make the most of every chance he had to go hunting or fishing with his family. He explained,

> Those are both things that I love to do, and I don't do them enough, but these are things that I like. My son, we hunt together, we also fish together. And I go with my daughter fishing. Even the whole family, one time, we all went fishing together. That was a lot of fun. It's just something that I try to squeeze it in. I may only get to go deer hunting a couple of times a year. Maybe fishing, maybe 3 or 4 times a year. But I make the most of it when I can go.

On the peak of her work-life conflict, Madeline was feeling so tired and depressed, she started preferring different activities. She said, "instead of, hey, let's go for a hike and a picnic, it was, let's just stay home and watch movies." Jacob had his work week so full, he would only have time to relax on the weekend, after his Saturday shift. He explained,

> All Sunday I was off. So, that was my time to hang out with friends, go to the movies, or watch football, do whatever I want to do. So, I had that day and a half to relax and unwind.

Sometimes, the participants described needing to find a quick moment to do something enjoyable. Kimberly said,

> I am a creature of summer. I come from a tropical island. So, I have to be out on the water, somehow. . . . And I would breath, just five seconds in the ferry, to inhale the air, inhale the sun, and ride back at work.

> All of the participants talked about moments they enjoyed as part of their personal lives. They looked forward to having these moments after a long day or a long week of work. Whether the participants enjoyed life alone or in company of their family and friends, it was important for them to find time and energy for these activities.

Life is to be with loved ones. For most participants, being with their loved ones was an important part of their lives. Individuals spent a lot of time with their loved ones, doing things together, planning what they would do in the future, and looking forward to these occasions. The interactions with loved ones are further divided into three categories: family, romantic relationships, and friends.

Family. Interacting with family members was essential to all participants. Parents, children, and siblings were the most mentioned ones, but participants also interacted with nieces,

nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws. The relationships with family members were often perceived as important and enjoyable, however sometimes difficult. For example, Makayla moved in with her parents after she got divorced and described the importance of spending time together, "we're a very tight knit family anyway. We do Sunday dinners all the time." Rebecca, who had to frequently travel for work, valued the everyday moments with her family. She explained, "technology makes it easier, but does not replace dinner table conversations or the ones that happen spontaneously." Visiting family on birthdays and holidays was mentioned by many participants as an important event. Many participants lived far from their family of origin and wished they could get together more often. As Mary explained,

> My family is super important. I wish I could see them more. I miss them a lot. . . . We're not a super close kind of family. We don't talk on the phone every day, or anything like that, but it's definitely important to be there for holidays.

And Abigail commented,

> When it's my mom's birthday, or my grandma's birthday, or my sister's birthday, or my nephew's birthday day [I want to be sure] that I'm able to figure it out so that I can get away [from work] for one day and be part of that.

> Many participants clearly expressed that their family was their life. For those individuals, family was their main priority, main responsibility, and a major source of joy. This was especially true for participants with children. For example, Carlos, married father of two, did not hesitate to say, "my personal life was my family." He later elaborated:

> I am a family man. And when I got married, when I was younger, I always wanted to be a family man, and nothing else. That's the most important thing. Above a career, I've always wanted to be a family man.

Similarly, Kimberly, divorced mother of two, said about being a mother, "That's my biggest job!" Ben, married father of three, described his priorities very clearly, "That's the two most important things to me. I mean, as far as being a husband and then, obviously, being a father."

Significant others. Being in a romantic relationship was important for participants, whether they were married or not. For some participants, the significant other was the first person they mentioned when I asked about their personal lives. The spouse or romantic partner tended to be one of the participants' closest supporters and someone who would listen to the participants' problems with work-life conflict. Ben, who had been married for 24 years, emphasized the importance of this relationship. For him, being a husband was one of the most important things in his life:

> If I have to put in priority, it would probably be second only to being a father. My wife is my best friend, so, literally, we do everything together. So, we work out together, we cook together, we don't ever take separate trips or anything like that, we do everything together.

Rachel explained that her boyfriend was important to her. She said, "I do everything for him. And he does a lot for me though, too. It's a give and take, which is rare." Samuel also said when he is in a relationship, it is important for him. He added, "having that balance is important to me, between getting help and giving help when it comes to those stressful situations. So yeah, that's something that I've definitely put a lot of effort in in the past." Sometimes, a relationship was also a turbulent part of life, as Samantha explained, "the emotional drama, the emotional drag that comes with a relationship, and every relationship has their ups and downs."

Friends. Friends were also important in participants' lives outside of work. Participants talked about spending time with friends and doing things together. Friends were there not only

for the fun times, but also when participants were struggling. Often, close friends were perceived as part of the family. For Hannah, for example, her friends were like a family and she would make sure to make time for them. She said, "I have a very strong, very strong friend group. I made family in my friends, and we are very, very close, very tight knit. I call my best friend my brother." And she later complemented, "I have great friends and I make time for them, and that's very important. . . . I would hang out just about every night with my friends to complain about how bad my job was." Making time for family, friends, and romantic partners was important in participants' lives.

Life is full of responsibilities. Participants also focused on the many responsibilities they had in their personal lives. They discussed how these responsibilities were an important part of their private time and how much time and effort was necessary to deal with these responsibilities. This theme is subdivided into four categories: household chores, caregiving, running errands, and education. Each of the subdivisions are detailed below.

Household chores. Unsurprisingly, household work was one of the most cited responsibilities. Individuals had a series of responsibilities to maintain the space where they lived, such as cleaning the house, doing laundry and folding clothes, mowing the grass and doing yardwork, doing the dishes, helping around the house, and washing and fixing the car. They also talked about the resources they needed, like cooking and grocery shopping. Some mentioned responsibilities with the family members who lived with them, for instance, nursing babies and feeding children, bathing children and putting them to sleep, as well as responsibilities with themselves, such as maintaining a healthy diet, applying make-up, shaving their legs, and brushing their hair. Such demands are time consuming.

When individuals perceived imbalances in the division of tasks and errands, it could become a source of conflict and dissatisfaction. Some participants relied on their partners and sometimes on their children to share the household work. Vanessa, for instance, had her boyfriend mow her lawn when she had no time for that:

> I was renting a house, but I had to take care of the yard myself and it would take me two and a half hours to mow. So, if I didn't have time to do it, I would ask him and he would come over and mow for me. 'Cause two and a half hours to mow a lawn when you're trying to work as much as I was, there was just no time for it.

Ben also had his other family members taking care of the household tasks. He explained:

> My wife was pretty understanding, and she had a non-stressful, pretty flexible job. So, most of the errands and stuff like that, she took care of. . . . I have three boys, so it got to a point to where the tasks around the house, like mowing and stuff like that, they just took care of. So, there wasn't a lot of tasks for me to do, just because I was constantly working.

However, not all participants had help. For instance, Kimberly, a mother of two, had to take care of everything by herself. "I didn't have much help from my spouse at the time, because I was a Navy wife, and he was fully deployed. So, basically, I was fulfilling both roles, mom and dad." And she added, "I'm working, and at the same time I still have to cut the grass, and still have to wash the car." Similarly, Mary felt doing most of the house work with little help from her boyfriend was stressful:

> Ideally, I would cook and he would do the dishes, and that would be the perfect evening. But that doesn't always happen. He also coaches, so, whenever I was working at [organization], he would coach until about 9:45 at night. So I would go workout and I'd

see him. But then I'd come home, and I shower, and do the dishes, and cook dinner, and then he'd get home, and we eat super late, and then go to bed. So, a lot of the times, I'd stress, 'cause I felt like I did a lot of the stuff on my own.

Many participants had pets, such as dogs, cats, chickens, and horses, with whom they loved to play. Apart from the fun, taking care of animals meant extra responsibilities for the participants. Rachel talked about a few of the things she had to do for her family horses. "Take their horse shoe, and feed them, and brush, and brighten them. They can't do anything for themselves. We have to do everything for them," she said. For Ruth, taking care of the dogs, cats, and chickens was vital. "Yeah, make sure nobody tries to eat anybody else," she said.

Caregiving. Providing care for loved ones was also an important part of the participants' personal lives. Some of the participants were the primary caregivers for their children and elderly family members or had increased demands to provide care for them. When talking about caregiving, the participants had warm words and were glad to be able to help those they loved. For example, Jacob described his relationship with his father and grandmother, with whom he lived:

> I think family is important. And my father took care of me, so I want to make sure I can take care of him. My grandmother she didn't take care of me, but it helps my dad, it alleviates some stress from my dad. And if it feels like I can help him, I may as well.

However, caregiving takes time, which was already scarce for most participants. Demands from caregiving often posed challenges in their personal lives as well as work.

Participants who were caregivers of elderly family members often had extra demands to take care of on top of their regular ones. For example, participants mentioned they had to run additional errands, help with transportation, wake up at night to help them, and sometimes just be

there to offer a word of support. In this process, many participants struggled to accomplish all of these tasks in their time off of work. Rebecca, for instance, asked her supervisor to minimize her travel for a short period, so she could assist her grandfather:

> I could work locally so I could go back to my hometown every weekend, and a peer in [city X] could take my class in [city X], which also would save travel expenses. I just needed a few weeks to help him transition to homecare with hospice.

> Child rearing is also demanding. Some parents felt that their work was reducing the amount and the quality of the time they were spending with their children, and the care they were providing. When Terri returned to work nine weeks after having her baby, she had difficulties with breastfeeding:

> I couldn't pump much, so my mother-in-law would look after her when I was at work in the afternoon. And sometimes I would try and pump a little bit, so that if she just started crying, they had something to give her. And often it wasn't enough. And so I started to get text messages or I'd would pick her up after and I can tell she'd been hysterical for like an hour, 'cause she's hungry. And that was horrible. That was really horrible."

Taking care of family members was not described by the participants as a problem. Rather, they were happy to be able to care for their parents, grandparents, and children. Nevertheless, being a caregiver was an additional responsibility for participants to carry, with all the time, effort, and concerns that it included.

Running errands. Many participants talked about many of the errands they had to do. Things that may be small and overlooked can easily compound and take time. In Samantha's words, "so many little things that you don't think about. Even now, I'm having problems like, you got to find time to put gas in the car! Heaven forbid!" Errands can be for one's self or for

others. Mariella runs some errands for her family, "just picking up things from my mom when she needed stuff. Or picking up books that my brother wanted at the library." Makayla liked to pay some of her bills in person. She explained, "my car payment is something I usually feel better if I go to the bank for. So I have to get up early, even on the Saturday, to make sure I get all the stuff in." However insignificant they might seem, running errands added another layer of responsibilities to the participants' lives.

Education. Many of the participants were attending school during the time of the interviews, but education was not always on the top of the participants' lists when they were talking about their personal life. Advancing education was perceived as a means to progress in their careers. However, attending school was not described as part of the "work" experience. For many, education was not part of the enjoyable side of life either. Makayla, who was planning to quit one of her two jobs to focus on school, said her education was her priority. She explained, "I spent too many years putting school on the back burner for a partner. I'm almost 30 years old, I'm 28. I can't be putting school on the back burner for anybody at this point. I need it for myself." In addition, participants had to find time to attend classes and do homework. Like other participants, Samantha struggled to find time to do her homework while working long hours. She said, "if I'm gonna be here until 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock at night, when am I supposed to go home and do homework?" Some participants, like Makayla, found a solution for this problem: integrating work and education. She explained, "at work is the best time to get studying done. It's quiet, nobody's going to necessarily be bothering me."

In sum, participants were responsible for a long list of activities in their personal life. Some of the activities were fun and enjoyable for participants, while others were tied to a variety of responsibilities including home, spouse or partner, children, extended family, and education.

Taking care of multiple responsibilities demanded participants' time and effort, composing the complex portrait of their "lives" outside of work.

Life is to serve the community. Many participants served their communities. Participants engaged in voluntary work, helped with religious activities, or aided recreational groups. Serving the community often brought to participants a sense of accomplishment, belonging, and giving back. Rebecca, for example, served in her church. "I was involved with the church, we played in the church band," she said. Rachel was a volunteer for an income tax program helping low income families file their taxes for free. Explaining why she volunteered, she said, "that's the reason why I took a step further from a volunteer to be the project coordinator. Because I loved it, and how much I learned from the process." Caroline said being part of her community, "it's giving me purpose."

Serving the community was a positive part of participants' lives. These activities were voluntary, did not have monetary compensation, and took time from individuals who were already busy. The major compensation was the satisfaction to be part of something bigger and to make a difference in the world. They did not always have time to participate in these activities, but it was something they looked forward to doing.

Life is work. Work was an important part of the participants' lives. Curiously, when asked about their personal lives, some participants talked about their work. The same happened in the other direction; some participants talked about their life when asked about their career. Specifically, work for these individuals is part of experiencing a fulfilling life. This demonstrates that work is intrinsically related to life. Work occurs within the life experience, it brings important contributions to life, and it cannot be separated from life. This happened when I asked Rachel, for example, how important was for her to have a career. She said, "my entire life I

wanna be a career woman, I don't wanna get married until I'm in my thirties. I don't wanna have children until maybe later thirties, if any." Similarly, Hannah talked about her family while she was explaining about her career. She said:

> I've always really wanted to love what I do, and that is something my mom raised me with. My grandmother would tell me, "don't you ever ruin your life by having children." She had 6 kids. "Don't ruin your life by having children." And I'm like, "grandma, you had 6 kids and your daughter is right here!" . . . My mother used to say, "don't you ever take a job where you have to work. You take a job that you love, and you'll never work a day in your life."

This illustrates that work and career are integrated in people's lives, in their plans for the future, and how they see themselves.

Experiencing work. Separating work from life can be difficult, because work is part of life. Individuals are the same throughout the day, although engaging in their different roles. They tend to experience private life quite differently than work. This section explores what counts as work for the participants. Three themes emerged from the data: never-ending workdays, toxic workplace, and prioritizing career.

Never-ending workdays. Some participants were always working. Work continued after individuals left their workplace, even after working long hours. Participants who were full-time employees reported working eight to 10 hours a day, but some mentioned working up to 16 hours per day or 80 hours per week, without considering the time spent with emails, phone calls, and text messages outside of work. Working long hours were often not enough. As Ruth explained, "even with a 10-hour day, you often had to stay late, or work through lunch, or take it home." In fact, participants started working long before they walked into their organizations. As

soon as they woke up, many participants were answering phone calls, text messages, and emails. Never-ending workdays have no breaks. Work is present during lunch and dinner, weekends and days off, vacations, and holidays. For example, Kimberly, a bookkeeper, started working before she walked in the office, "I would have emails before I came in the door, and phone calls from the boss with things that needed to be taken care of right away." Abigail worked on fundraising for a non-profit organization, and would routinely work during her lunch break. She explained, "obviously, it's time to eat, but I had so much work to do, that I couldn't get out and have lunch, I had to eat it at my desk, for the most part. It was never fun."

After their long work hours, many participants continued working from home, during weekends, holidays, and vacations. For example, Mary was a sales and marketing manager at an apartment complex. She was expected to continue working beyond her regular hours to attend her clients' demands. She said, "students don't just stop hitting you at 8pm, or at 5pm, so it was a lot of putting out fires after hours, or if I was on vacation, on weekends, so that job never stopped." Samantha had to work on her days off to help unload the truck with the store merchandise. She explained,

> You cannot call it a day off, when you are there early, so you can't go out the night
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> before, 'cause you gonna be there earlier than usual. And then you don't know how long
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> you gonna be there, so you can't really make plans.

Some participants had work concerns in mind all of the time, preventing them from relaxing and enjoying their time off. Abigail was responsible for fundraising events, which required her to be always connected on her work phone. She stated:

> I was always on my phone. Because work was demanding so much out of me, to where I
>
> really didn't feel like I was invested, or really building meaningful relationships, or

spending meaningful time with people, even though I was physically there, but I was always like, oh, I have to take this call, I have to answer this email, which is kind of not nice.

Furthermore, some participants would wake up in the middle of the night thinking about work, and some had dreams about work. For example, Ben, a store manager, had to work every night after his regular 10- to 12-hour shifts. He explained his situation, "I would, literally, would wake up every night, in the middle of the night, at 2 o'clock in the morning, just to see how my overnight team was doing, so I knew what the next day would look like."

Many participants attributed having extended work days to understaffed teams. Riley, a registered dietician, worked for a nursing home. She explained her situation, "basically, if someone didn't show up for work, I had to work it, so that was very stressful, because I had to work their shift in addition to doing my work." Many others, like Ruth, blamed the workplace culture:

Work tried the whole work-life balance. They made me sign a contract and everything. They talked about it a lot. But implementation, that's a whole other story. 'Cause, upper management will tell you they care about your work-life balance. And then they will give you so much work and really thin deadlines, and they don't understand when it's late, that work-life balance goes off the window.

Regardless of the reasons, never-ending workdays were an experience shared by most participants.

Toxic workplace. Many participants reported working in a negative workplace environment. Their daily work was filled with threats, blame, lack of trust, sexism, and ethical issues. These issues were mostly present in relationships with peers and supervisors, but also

with clients. Particularly problematic was the report of abusive supervision. Several participants reported having a supervisor that was aggressive, offensive, relentless, or who frequently yelled at employees. Stacy's account of her workplace summarizes what many participants experienced:

> That was just a negative overall environment. Beyond the stress, there were people always yelling at each other and my boss was kind of not very ethical. She would ask me to lie to clients and things like that. So, there were a lot of things making me uncomfortable.

Several participants reported having problems with their supervisors. Madeline, for instance, described her abusive supervisor's behavior, "if he was working overnight, he'd call me in the middle of the night and yell at me. If he was working in the late evening, he would call me in the late evening to yell at me." One day, when she proposed a new shift arrangement that would allow her to work the same amount of hours, but spend more time with her daughter, her supervisor denied the request arguing, "'it's not my fault you didn't know how to use birth control.'" Some participants had a constant fear of being laid off, which was reinforced by the attitudes of people in higher hierarchical levels of the company. Ben worked under continuous threats. "The threats that you'd lose your job if your store wasn't the way it was supposed to be." Working in a negative environment was stressful for the participants.

Prioritizing career. Some participants talked about their career as their priority. Others criticized what they perceived as a societal tendency to prioritize career. Prioritizing the career was often articulated in opposition to family. In the participants' accounts, it seemed that having a family and having a career were two competing goals, sometimes mutually exclusive. Some individuals explained that they wanted to establish a solid career before starting a family. For

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example, Mary said, "my career is my ultimate goal, really. My number one goal, basically. I would love to have a family one day, but that's not what I'm thinking about, so career is probably number one." For Madeline, having her child soon after high school brought additional challenges to her career. She said, "if I hadn't had my daughter, and I had just had time to grow up on my own, I probably still would've maybe try to get a degree and find a job I really liked."

Many participants criticized the prioritization of career over life. They argued that it is important to have a career, but life should be more than that. Danielle, for example, said "there's way more to life than just working. Yes, I think a career is important, but we overdo it. Our society overdoes it." Similarly, Matthew analyzed, "it's one thing to have a career and provide for your family. But if that becomes your life, then, to me it just it's not worth it, if all you're doing is just working all the time." Hoping for a solution, Madeline said, "I think that it needs to be a way that you can do both."

Experiencing work-life conflict. This section explores how participants experienced work-life conflict. Work-life conflict happens when something expected in one of the domains is interfering with the other. A problem at work, for instance, is usually expected to remain in the workplace. People experience work-life conflict when work problems bleed into their personal life. The same happens in the opposite direction; life problems are expected to stay at home, but sometimes they are carried to the workplace. Some issues are not restricted to work or life, they are omnipresent. These issues emerge from both work and life, and influence both domains. Six themes emerged from the data to explain the conflicting intersections of participants' work and life. The themes include: work consumed my life, health problems, partner disagreements, something changed, it is (not) about money, and, all at the same time.

Work consumed my life. For many participants, work existed day and night, nonstop. This exhausting experience consumed participants' lives. This happened in different ways. The participants had no energy for their life, they felt that organizations controlled their lives, and they had difficulties in setting boundaries between work and life. Each of these subthemes is described below.

No energy for life. Working 50 or more hours per week was exhausting for the participants. Handling the stress that came from a negative workplace was draining. Many participants reported they had no energy to do anything after work. All they wanted to do was to relax before the next day. As Ben said, "really, it was more the kind of unwinding, just to do it again. That's basically how were the evenings." Several participants said they had no life. As Riley explained,

> I didn't have one. I really didn't. I very rarely did anything that was fun. I was maybe, once a month go hang out with a friend. And every now and then I'd go see a movie. But I had a lot of stress. And I think it was almost putting me into a depression. So even on the weekends I, even if I didn't have to get called in to work, I still wouldn't even do anything.

Many participants, like Danielle, have not had paid time off or vacations in a long time. She explained, "I was there for two and a half years. I cashed out all of my vacation time." Madeline was so drained by her work that she had no energy to search for another job "I'm so emotionally exhausted [that] by the time I'm off work, I don't really want to apply for other jobs."

Organizations control life. Some participants felt that the organizations where they worked were controlling their lives. They felt that organizations controlled their time, their

money, their career options, and consequentially their life. Carlos explained what many participants also perceived:

> There's a lot of managers like that, and it's too much. I don't know why they do that. The principle that's everywhere, they have to control every aspect of someone's life, and I did not appreciate that. And with new technology [it] was getting worse and worse.

Furthermore, participants felt that organizations controlled how much personal time they had. The time available for personal activities was what was left after work, which was often perceived as not enough. For example, Vanessa, who lived in a northern state, said she no longer had time to go enjoy the outdoors:

> The last year that I was there, at that job, I didn't get a chance to go snowshoeing a single time, because I had so much work to do. . . . There was no way for me to [go snowshoeing], if I was going to keep up with my work.

Organizations were also perceived as controlling participants' finances and even participants' careers. As Madeline described her employers, "it's terrible when somebody is holding the strings to your pocket book, and therefore your life." Hannah was unhappy when her company decided to move her to a different branch. She felt she had no control over her own career:

> The company at any point could just change my job, without my input. They gave me no control. They really gave me some options, but not one of those options was an option I felt compelled to take. They set me up to fail.

Participants expected to have some degree of control of their own careers and be able to make choices. However, many of these participants perceived that organizations controlled even that aspect of their lives.

Establishing boundaries. Participants struggled to establish boundaries between work and personal life. Many said they did not let their personal life interfere with their work performance. They desired and perceived that they could keep home at home. In contrast, most felt that it was very difficult to keep work at work and discussed many ways in which work was interfering in their lives, suggesting that the boundaries may be more permeable from one side and more restrictive from the other. As illustrated in the theme "never-ending workdays," participants often brought work concerns to their personal relationships, worked from home during downtime, and even dreamed about work. They felt they could not leave work at work. Contrarily, Jacob, who had two part-time jobs and was his grandmother's primary caregiver, explained he would not allow his personal life to interfere in his work:

> I don't think I allowed to. I never made excuses for myself. Even if I woke up at 4 in the morning to help my grandmother, I never thought, you know what, this is my grandmother's fault, I'm going to take the day off today. No. I never missed a day at work teaching. I never missed a day at work at the agency.

Some participants wished for a stronger separation between work and life, believing this would help them achieve more balance. As Abigail said, "I was frustrated with work, that I couldn't leave work at work." Others perceived their work and life were intertwined and could not be separated. In those cases, the boundaries were blurred and elements from one domain were often present in the other. This happened with participants who worked with their family members, as well as some participants who could not see themselves as different people at home and at work. Makayla, for example, worked with her mother, "I work in education, my mom also works on education. And she was the principal at the school that I work at. So, my mom, essentially, was my boss. And so, it was more of an intertwining." Carlos owned a business with

his sister and explained that it was different than working in non-family businesses. For instance, he had to invite employees to his sons' choir presentations and other family events. He explained that the management would not be happy "if they were finding out that we went somewhere without asking them, or we went to the beach without asking employees, without asking the management, that was my sister."

In sum, participants felt work was consuming their lives. Regardless of the attempts to establish or manage boundaries, all of the participants reported that work bled into and negatively interfered with their personal life at some level. Many participants reported they worked so much and had so much stress, that they had no time to enjoy their personal life, and no energy to do the things they liked.

Health problems. Many participants reported experiencing mental and physical health problems. Mental health problems included depression, anxiety, mental breakdowns, and suicidal thoughts. Physical health problems included sleeping problems, eating disorders, and gastro-intestinal issues. These health issues were not merely impacting people's lives and work performance, but were also emerging from work and life at the same time. Individuals cannot choose when or where they will feel sick, but have to carry their health issues wherever they go. As Ruth discussed her depression and anxiety issues, she said, "a lot of it just compounded. It affected my personal life, and it affected my work." Many participants were diagnosed by doctors and had to take sick leaves to take care of their wellbeing. Mary's story summarizes the reports of many participants. She explained,

> I remember there was a good couple of months between probably November and January
> that we [the business] were not doing well at all, as far as leasing, and I probably lost like
> 10 pounds. I wasn't eating, I wasn't sleeping, I was waking up in the middle of the night

thinking of, oh my god, I forgot to respond to that e-mail, or oh I did never post, or I never replied to that comment. [I was] so stressed out, that it was literally affecting my physical health, because I didn't even have an appetite. I was just so stressed.

Some participants felt that they had entered a seemingly endless cycle, where they felt so stressed with work-life conflict that they got sick, which in turn made them feel more stressed. For example, when Mariella was diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome, she felt that her stress increased.

So, I went to the doctor and he said, 'well you have irritable bowel syndrome, because of your stress.' And that's something that doesn't go away. You manage it by managing your stress. . . . So, I realized that, oh my gosh, this could happen while I'm teaching. And then what? I would say, 'oh, wait here students, I'm just going to take a break,' and I come back 20 minutes later. That just can't happen. It's funny because having the irritable bowel syndrome made things more stressful for me. Because I was stressing about when I would be sick.

Three participants reported having suicidal thoughts at the time. Hannah's account illustrates the experience:

At one point in time, I was so upset at my job that I was thinking about suicide, I was like, I could just crash into this train. I don't wanna die, but maybe it'll keep me from having to go to this job.

As Ruth's depression worsened, she was granted a sick leave. She explained:

I had been given leave from work, 'cause I've gotten very bad in my depression and anxiety. I've gotten suicidal [at] that point. And so, the company gave me some time to go and deal with it, with counseling. They gave me two weeks.

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In sum, participants experienced an array of health issues while having work-life conflict. It is not possible to determine whether work-life conflict caused these issues, but these issues influenced work-life conflict.

Partner disagreements. Some participants reported having disagreements with a significant other related to their work-life conflict. Topics of disagreement often included career choices and future plans, such as whether or not to have children. Arguments were both causing and caused by work-life conflict, affecting participants' personal and professional lives. Ruth, for example, had many disagreements with her husband. She said, "it almost broke up our marriage. Just because of the insane amount of argument we're having over me working there, not coming home on time, having to work on the weekends." In addition to the arguments about her job, they also disagreed about plans for the future. She explained,

> My husband and I had talked of having children before we got married. And then after we got married, he kind of realized he didn't want to have children [anymore]. So, I'm coming to terms with that for several years. That's not going to be part of the plan anymore. Which means I need to find a career that's really fulfilling. And I think that led a lot to me be very dissatisfied in what I was doing. Because being there before I quit, I could've continue to do it. I could've continued to swallow for another 5 years until I had kids and that was a light at the end of the tunnel. There's no light, anymore, for getting out. So, I need to find something that I really want to do, since I'm going to do it for forever.

As she agreed to disagree with her husband in this topic, Ruth had to adjust her life and career expectations. Similarly, Caroline also had disagreements with her partner related to work-life conflict. She said, "it created a lot of arguments, because I wanted a career. And it was hard for

me to get that career, because we were always moving around for my husband, for his career."

She described a situation when she felt her husband did not value her career:

> I scolded him. It wasn't the first time that he had done that, where he had planned a trip
> before me being able to ask work. At a different job, he had done that and I told him,
> 'you know, you need to put my-- you think my jobs are just whatever. They're not
> important enough. That's what this is making me feel like. So, for you to book these trips,
> you are telling me that my job's not important enough for me to make sure that I can
> work around it.' So. I basically, had to tell them him, 'you need to stop doing this.'

Some participants had arguments with their partners or spouses, and went through

divorces and break-ups around the time when they were considering quitting their jobs. Although

these events mostly happened in the private sphere, the feelings that come before or after an

argument with a partner tend to follow individuals wherever they went. Having severe arguments

with partners often impacted participants' performance at work in different ways, whether it was

because they were late for work, stressed, or distracted. For example, for Samantha, having

arguments with her boyfriend was detrimental to her health and job performance. She stated,

> I remember having a personal argument that kept me up until 4:30, 5 o'clock in the
> morning, when I had to get up to go to work at 7:30, you know, that sort of thing. That
> wasn't very healthy for me. And I don't do well on lack of sleep, like I said, sleep is very
> important to me.

Disagreements and arguments with partners added another layer of conflict for participants.

Something changed. Sometimes, things were going well for the participants until

something changed at home or at work that increased their work-life conflict. These changes

were unexpected, undesired, or inevitable, and led to increased perceptions of imbalance. In

some instances, participants wanted something to change, hoping it would reduce the conflict.

Some changes happened in the participants' lives outside of work. For instance, the birth of a

child or the diagnosis of a serious disease can bring about significant life changes. Terri, for

instance, saw her whole life and work change when she became a mother, although she never

planned that. She said "it's not something I ever thought I would do [being a mother], but now

that I'm doing it, I love it. I wouldn't change it for the world. But it was never a life goal of

mine."

Many participants experienced changes in their workplace. Some had a new supervisor,

were allocated in a new team, were moved to a new location, or had significant changes in their

job descriptions. For example, Jacob had two part-time jobs at the same time, but one of them

eventually became a full-time job. He explained, "that 20 hours soon became 40 hours, because

they liked how I was working." Ruth had difficulties working in her new team, after her previous

project was concluded. She described how work changed for her:

> When that project ended, I moved to another project [with a] completely different team.
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> And as soon as that transition happened, I was ready to leave. It was a much bigger, it
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> was a project like twice the size, we had three times as many people on the team, and
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> their personalities were awful. There were a lot of type A, very aggressive [people]. I
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> don't know, just the whole feeling of the team was completely different. And it wasn't
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> that tighten up family feeling [like the previous team], it was just like, I work with a
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> bunch of assholes.

Sometimes participants requested temporary or permanent changes in their schedule or

duties to ease their work-life conflict. Some of the changes were requested to allow the

participants to take care of an ill family member, to attend school, to spend time with their

children, or to have flexibility to do another activity. Participants often explained that their supervisors denied their requests. For example, when her grandfather was going through cancer treatment, Rebecca asked her supervisor to temporarily reduce her work traveling. Rebecca said, "I just needed a few weeks to help him transition to homecare with hospice, but my supervisor did not accept it – I would not hit my 'travel quota.'" Caroline had a similar situation, when her supervisor was not willing to change her schedule to allow her to study before night classes. She explained, "When I would say, please don't schedule me for Tuesdays and Thursdays, those are my night classes, they would still schedule me on Tuesdays and Thursdays." Some participants would get their requests accepted, but it was perceived as a negative thing in the company and possibly detrimental to their career. As Matthew said:

> If I had to leave, ask permission to leave early, I felt like I was getting looked down upon for asking to leave early. And asking to leave early, I mean, it's not that early. It's like, I want to leave at 4:30 today, instead of 6 o'clock. I guess, that would be kind of an inconvenience.

Changes in work or home contributed to the participants' perceptions of work-life conflict. Unwanted changes in the workplace often made participants unhappy. Changes in personal life increased participants' responsibilities and required them to spend more time in the personal sphere. Some participants requested changes to help manage the work-life conflict they were experiencing. If they their requests were denied, participants' experience of stress and conflict often increased.

It is (not) about money. Most individuals work in exchange for money. People need money to obtain resources to live: pay the rent or mortgage, purchase groceries, clothing, hygiene items, and so on. Money relates to both life and work domains and is often a concern in

work-life conflict. The link between money and work-life conflict can happen in three ways. Many times, people endure severe work-life conflict because they need the money and cannot afford to leave their job. They would leave their job immediately if they had other sources of income or did not need the money. In contrast, some people perceived that some work-life conflict was so terrible that no sum of money was enough to compensate it. Some participants perceived that work-life conflict could be compensated by some amount of money, but they were not getting enough. In the first category is Rachel, who remained at her job, and explained that one of the reasons to stay was money:

> The world revolves around money. If I had all the money in the world, I would probably not be working where I'm working now. I would be at a coffee shop, or open up my own business, work way less. Or open up a foundation.

> Most of the participants in this study fall in the second and third categories, since most of them quit their jobs. Ben, for example, endured almost 20 years of work-life conflict because he needed to provide for his family, until he realized he could be happy with less money. He explained,

> I was going to be store manager, I knew I was gonna make a six-figure income. So, it's kind of justified that way. It was justified that I was able to buy them whatever they wanted, and they had latest game systems, and phones, and all that sort of stuff. So, it's kind of justified that way. But I think, as I got older, whether they had liked or not, [I had] that realization that material things aren't the most important, so then, you quit making those justifications. So I think in the beginning, I justified that. Now, obviously, it's more of a regret.

For many participants, the conflict was so escalated that money could not keep them at that job. Hannah reasoned about it, "I think that the money is worrisome. You always worry about money. But there was not enough money in the world to stay at that job. Not enough." For other participants, the work-life conflict was not worth the pay they were receiving, but said they were likely to be more tolerant if they were being paid more. As Abigail explained,

> If you're getting paid $250,000 a year, you're expected to put in more effort, I'm sure. Right. I wasn't making $250,000 a year. I think that if my compensation matched up with the amount of work, I think I would have been a little more okay with it.

When some participants quit, they were offered a pay raise. They reflected about it and considered whether making more money would be worth continuing working in that job. Stacy, for instance, considered her supervisor's offer before rejecting it:

> So, then, I told my boss and she tried to convince me to stay, and offered me a raise, a big raise. So I had to think about it for a few days. But I still realized having the money didn't matter that much, because I was just so miserable.

For many of the participants, being satisfied with work and life was more important than making more money. Participants recognized the importance of money, but questioned its value. Like many participants, Carlos, a former business owner, said that money did not bring happiness:

> I made a lot of money at one time, but I was never happy. . . . the more money you make, the more stress, the more you have to [do], your time is valuable toward the corporation, toward your business, or whatever you're doing. I tried not to get stressed out at work, but it was always stressful. And I did not enjoy. I'm trying to put into words. It was nice to earn a lot of money. But if you have no time to spend it, what is it good for?

Similarly, Carol questioned "what's the point of having a job that is meant to be play money, if you're not going to be playing?"

After quitting, many participants said they were making less money in their new occupations, but they were happier. Ben, for instance, was no longer the primary breadwinner of the house, but he and his family are much happier after he quit. He said, "we went from making a considerable amount of money, my wife and I, to making far less. But I would say that we are probably happier now then we've ever been." Likewise, Samantha was happier making less money because she was able to find balance:

The money was great. I'm not gonna lie, I was making more money than I'm gonna be making with my MBA and that was [at] the end of my bachelor's degree. I was finishing my bachelor's. I can be making a lot less money the end of my master's degree than I was making back then, but I'm gonna be a lot happier! I can tell you that my work-life balance is a lot better now than it was then. And that's something that is super important. You have to be happy about where you're going to work and what's that balance.

Clearly, participants valued money, since it is an indispensable resource in today's world. However, the work-life conflict that most of them experienced was not worth the money they were making, even when it surpassed a six-figure yearly income.

All at the same time. Participants often expressed they felt that everything was happening at the same time. Most individuals experienced several of the themes described above simultaneously. This led to situations that seemed impossible to resolve if participants remained at their jobs. For example, Caroline tried to adjust her schedule to fit her graduate classes, but her supervisor did not agree. Then, she had to do all her homework during the little time she was off work, giving her no time for family. She explained,

The workload started to pile up, the readings, having to spend nights reading these

materials, and having to set up how to write. And I wasn't able to get that stuff done,

because I was either at work, or I was writing, and not spending time with my husband.

In some cases, on top of all the work-life conflict participants experienced, something

unexpected happened, adding another layer of problems. Mary, for example, described her case:

[At work] there was this thing we called turn, which is basically, we had 10 days to get

everybody moved out, clean everything, and get everybody moved in. That was 10 days

of horror. . . . And then around that time, the apartment I was living in, it was a brand

new, and they found mold in it, so, they terminated our lease. So, in conjunction with the

10 days of hell, I was having to pack my apartment to move out. That was a lot of fun.

Dealing with so many problems at the same time was overwhelmingly difficult.

Work-life conflict was troublesome for the participants. It was not just having no time to

do hobbies or disliking a job. It meant having serious health issues, having insufficient time to

accomplish basic tasks, having no energy to do fun things, having no control of their lives,

careers, or schedules. Work-life conflict was everywhere, from the disagreements with partners

or spouses to the difficulty in leaving work concerns at work. At the same time, money was

always a concern for participants, complicating how they experienced and framed their

experiences. Going through so many issues at the same time was overwhelming.

In sum, living with work-life conflict means that the experiences of life and work are

interrelated through a series of conflicting situations. As demonstrated, life encompasses more

than family and it is more than just time away from work. Participants wanted to have fun, spend

meaningful time with their loved ones, be able to take care of their many responsibilities, as well

as serve the community. Their work experience was often negative, with workdays that never

ended and toxic workplaces. Although career was deemed important for most participants, those who prioritized career often did so in opposition to their families, suggesting that one cannot successfully accomplish both. Conflict happened at various intersections of work and life. Most of these intersections were both causes and consequences of conflict. Work consumed participants' lives, taking away their time, energy, control, and boundaries. Many participants went through health problems related to work-life conflict, which in some cases escalated to life threatening situations. Participants also experienced work-life conflict in relation to their significant other and money issues. Moreover, these conflicting instances tended to accumulate, and participants had to handle them all at the same time.

Experiencing Problematic Integration

The second research question aimed to explain how individuals experienced problematic integration (PI) related to work-life conflict. PI occurs when evaluative and probabilistic orientations do not come together harmoniously. That means that something highly desirable is unlikely or impossible to happen, something undesirable is very likely to happen, that the alternatives and respective outcomes are unknown, or that the likelihood of the alternatives are unknown. Feelings of PI emerged in different ways in participants' experiences, reflecting the four types of problematic integration: divergence, ambiguity, ambivalence, and impossibility. These four categories are discussed below as it relates to the work-life conflict experienced by the participants.

Divergence. Divergence was the most frequently mentioned type of problematic integration. Divergence occurs when there are discrepancies between desires and expectations, (e.g., something highly desired is unlikely to happen or something undesired is very likely to occur). Participants' expectations for what their life, work, or career would be like were quite

different than their realities. In this case, happiness is unlikely, since there is a low probability

that participants' expectations will be met. All of the participants perceived that their job was not

meeting their expectations in some manner. In most cases, participants lived with divergence for

a while. Feeling miserable and undervalued, these participants could not achieve their ideals of a

fulfilling work experience. For example, Hannah had high expectations for her career, but she

felt she could not achieve those goals working for a controlling organization:

> So for me, my career has meant everything to me, that I would be satisfied with my job,
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> that I would do meaningful and important work, that I would serve people, that I would
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> serve a wider community, that my job would be honorable, that my job would have
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> meaning, and that meaning to someone's lives. That I could solve people's problems that
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> I could help them be better people. . . . And I can find meaning in just about any work.
>
> But I cannot find meaning in a work that is so restrictive. I was a cog in a wheel.

Many participants felt that their employers did not recognize their work and efforts

properly. Individuals wanted to be recognized in exchange for long hours, extra work, or doing

more than they were expected to. They expected recognition in the form of promotions, payment

raises, bonuses, or even a voucher for a spa to demonstrate the employers' appreciation. For

Riley, like other participants, lack of recognition was an important element in deciding to quit.

> I was really good worker. I mean, I did a whole lot more than I was supposed to do, and I
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> was always getting a lot of compliments on how much extra stuff I did, and how good of
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> a job I did. And then, I got the information about my annual raise, and they'd give you a
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> range. You can either get anywhere from 3 to 5% salary increase. And they decided to
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> just give me the 3%. And that was when I, that night I looked for another job. Because it
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> made me very stressed. It made me really mad, that I had done all this work, I had no life

for so long, I was doing all this extra stuff, and I was doing a really good job at it all, and they gave me the bare minimum. So, I just felt underappreciated.

Overall, participants hoped that things would be better at some point, which helped them endure divergence for some time.

Ambiguity. Many participants experienced ambiguity. In problematic integration theory, ambiguity occurs when probabilities and outcomes are unknown. That means that it is hard to know which alternative is more likely to happen, and whether the outcomes of each alternative are likely to be good or bad. When experiencing ambiguity, individuals had uncertainty about their uncertainties. Ambiguity was particularly relevant when thinking about leaving the job. Participants mentioned worrying about what would happen if they quit, whether the new job would be any different, or how they would handle their finances. It was difficult for participants to know what would happen and whether the new situation would be better. For example, when Terri was returning to work after having her child, she thought to herself, "maybe I won't be able to do this. I thought I'll go back for a little bit and see what it's like." For others, there were so many possible outcomes, they felt overwhelmed. Mary, for example, was trying to relocate to a different city, hoping that this would improve her work-life balance, but at the same time, she feared it would impact her romantic relationship. She said,

I knew I couldn't stay [at work], but I didn't wanna leave him [boyfriend]. So, I was really upset for two weeks. [I had] anxiety, I cried a lot, 'cause I was like, what am I gonna do? What if I leave, and really don't make it? And he's already telling me, 'we can commute, we'll see each other.' But I'm a realistic person. Can that work? And is that gonna work? So I was already really upset about having to leave him, but I was gonna do it, so I could go work in [branch at different city].

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Mary desired to move to have a better work experience and a smoother integration of work and life, but she was not sure what the new job would really be like. In addition, moving would mean that she would have a long distance romantic relationship and she was uncertain whether that would work. When facing ambiguity, there was so much uncertainty that most participants did not know what to do.

Ambivalence. According to PI theory, ambiguity occurs when individuals see themselves having to choose between mutually exclusive alternatives that are similarly evaluated. Feeling ambivalence often prompts contradictory feelings and responses. Participants experienced ambivalence in two different ways. First, they perceived they had to choose between two mutually exclusive, negative alternatives. For instance, some participants did not like their job and wanted to quit, but perceived that leaving would be detrimental to their career. Rachel, for example, was unhappy at her job but believed that she needed to stay there for three years or it would hurt her career. She explained,

> I know I need to do something different. I know that I'm not meant to sit behind a desk
> for 8 hours a day, but I have to. For three years, I have to stay in this position. . . . I have
> to stay there for three years, because [otherwise] it is detrimental to your career.

Similarly, Vanessa was afraid that her new job would be perceived as a step down in her career and would jeopardize her future. She said,

> It was difficult for me because I was in a tenure-track position. And to take a step
> backwards, career wise, was a little bit difficult to comprehend, like, why would I do this
> to myself? I feel like this is daunting my career a little bit.

In the second type of ambivalence, participants experienced contradictory feelings. Even though participants reported feeling unhappy with their jobs, it was hard for many of them to

leave. There were often aspects of the job they liked. Additionally, work was so important that quitting was not an easy process. This happened not only to individuals who were leaving their jobs to stay at home or to be fully dedicated to their education, but also to some who were starting a new job. For example, Riley, said,

> The last day was sad, 'cause, I felt like it was a big part of my life. So, it was hard to leave, even though I wanted to leave so bad. But still, the last day was really hard to leave.

The same feeling happened for Caroline. She explained,

> It was hard to want to leave it, but at the same time, I was just not being able to get stuff done. And I wasn't able to have a life, basically. . . . So that's what tear up my heart, when I was like, I don't want to leave, because I was able to be creative in that job. . . . So, it was painful to think about leaving it.

Although ambivalence brought contradictory feelings when participants were leaving their jobs, it did not prevent most of them from making the change.

Impossibility. In some instances, feelings of divergence, ambiguity, and ambivalence morph into feelings of impossibility. According to PI theory, impossibility occurs when individuals recognize that something they really want to happen never will, or that they cannot stop something bad from happening. The participants experienced impossibility when they realized that their work-life conflict was not going to improve in their current position. This realization often occurred after a significant event at home or work that served as a trigger, or when events accumulated to reach a threshold. These events made participants realize that it would be impossible to enjoy work or have a satisfying life without a major change. For many

participants, realizing that impossibility propelled them to make a life change. For Ruth, a combination of factors made it clear that her job was going to continue the same way. She said,

> I think it was a combination of knowing I wasn't going to be moved to a different department. Knowing I wasn't gonna get a raise, or a promotion. And then, just knowing there wasn't gonna be a replacement for my supervisor when I got back [from sick leave]. Those four things made working there just completely unbearable.

She knew what was going to happen. As participants perceived that their work experience was not going to change, they realized that *they* should change. Like many participants, Abigail tried to make arrangements in her workplace, waited for her supervisor's promises to become a reality, and hoped for a positive change. However, after some time, it was clear that things were not going to improve. She said, "after two years, it was like, this isn't going to change, so I'm going to change." When participants realized the chances of improving their work-life conflict were null, they decided to quit.

In sum, participants' experiences of work-life conflict led to feelings of problematic integration. Most participants experienced divergence, since their expectations for life and work were often unmet. Many participants also felt ambiguity as they battled the uncertainties involved in quitting their jobs to find more harmony between work and life. At the same time, it was difficult for many of them to leave their jobs. Contradictory feelings of ambivalence permeated the decision-making process because work was important for these individuals and they often liked some aspects of their jobs. Finally, impossibility happened when participants saw a dead-end. Certainty that life and work were impossible to integrate without conflict made many participants realize they needed to make a change.

Communicating During Work-Life Conflict

Research question three asked how communication with social network members helped participants manage feelings of problematic integration associated with work-life conflict, particularly as it relates to decisions about quitting or remaining in their jobs. Four themes emerged. The first section describes the social network members with whom participants communicated during the decision-making process. The second section describes participants' communication with social network members. It focuses on what participants expected from their conversations with social network members. The third section describes how social network members responded to participants. Finally, the fourth section explains how communication with social network members helped participants manage problematic integration associated with work-life conflict.

Social network members. Participants talked with social network members about their work-life conflict and decision on whether or not to quit their jobs. This section is divided in three categories: family members, friends, and coworkers. Coworkers are further divided into peers, supervisors, and specialists, reflecting the uniqueness of these different interlocutors. Each category and sub-category describes types of social network members participants communicated with about their work situations.

Family members. Participants talked with several family members, including spouses and partners, parents, children, siblings, and in-laws. Spouses and partners were one of the main family members with whom participants talked. Like many other participants, Carlos said, "I talked to my wife every day about it. And she knows I was very unhappy." Vanessa talked with many of her close family members, summarizing what many participants also experienced, "[I

talked with] my partner, my parents, I talked to my sister a little bit . . . . And I also definitely talk to my partner's parents, as well."

Curiously, some participants were influenced by their children's input or interactions with them, even when they were so young that they could not speak. Although many did not have conversations per se, parents perceived their young children were noticing their work-life conflict and reacting to it. For example, Rebecca was concerned when her sons started reacting to her problems at work. She said, "I didn't like that they were starting to say negative things about my supervisor, my job, . . . [and were] angry towards a person they had never met." Kimberly's daughter made her realize she needed to quit. "She told me one day, 'mom, why are you always so tired?' Because I would just come home, cook dinner, and go to sleep. That was basically it," she explained. Similarly, Danielle described an episode with her daughter:

One day she got this little leapfrog laptop for Christmas or her birthday or something, and she came over and she climbed up my lap and she opened her computer and she started doing it [typing]. And I don't think she was like a year old yet, maybe just a year, and I was like, that's all she sees, that's what mommy does, is sit in front of a computer, and I was like that. That broke my heart.

Participants often sought out family members' opinions, even when they thought their family members may be unable to help. This happened when participants perceived the family member could not relate to or understand the situation, when the family members' own experiences with work were questionable, or when they were perceived as biased. For instance, Mariella's mother was always encouraging her to quit, because she knew her daughter was miserable. However, Mariella thought her mom could not relate to her experiences, and thus did not take her seriously. She explained,

I don't think I took my mom as seriously as I could have. 'Cause, you know, she's my mom. And we have a weird relationship. And I feel like that she didn't really understand the pressure I'd put on myself and what I went through every day. So, there was also the feeling of that she wanted me to quit for her benefit. So, I had to take all those things into account.

Stacy thought her mom could relate to the situation she was going through, but was unsure about her advice. She said,

I know she [mother] always leaves jobs, and will have no job for a while. So I didn't want to like listen to her completely, I [was] like, ok well, I don't know if that's worked out for you so well in the past. [laughs] But, yes, she always would tell me that I should quit.

In sum, all participants communicated with their family members about work-life conflict. Having support from the family was important for participants, even when their opinions were not the most valued.

Friends. Participants often contacted their friends to talk about their problems and ideas. Work-life conflict was a common topic of conversations among friends. For example, Abigail texted her friends on a regular basis to talk about work issues on their group chat. She explained, "I swear, at least once a month somebody said that they hate their job. Between the three of us, someone is like, 'I hate my job!' Yeah, I talk with them, it's good." Ruth relied on her best friend when she quit without having another job lined up. She said, "my best friend, he'd always been extremely supportive. So that conversation was very simple."

Some friends were perceived as experts by the participants. These friends often had had a previous experience that qualified them as experts. For instance, these friends were often older than the participants, had more life experience, or had had similar work-life conflict before. For

example, Samantha consulted an experienced friend several times to help her make a decision. She said, "I definitely had my friend [name], he was kind of my confident. He was a business owner, he's a lot older than me, so I respected his wisdom and advice." Similarly, Mary consulted her expert friend whenever she wanted to know the truth:

I talked with one of my friends, [name], she works out at the gym. She's a little older than me, so I do go to her a lot because she has life experience, and I think she is really, she's not fake, she's not ever gonna tell me something that I wanna hear; she always tells me the truth. So, I go to her a lot, when I really need the real truth.

Caroline consulted with a former professor who experienced a problem like her. Caroline said,

She did quit her job back when I was in high school, as my teacher, because she needed to take a step back and reconnect with her family. So, she was someone that I literally believed knew what I was going through.

Coworkers. Participants also talked with their coworkers, including peers, supervisors, specialists, and in one case, business partner. The interaction with peers was quite different than with supervisors or specialists, therefore these are explained separately below.

Peers. Because they worked in the same environment, peers often had a similar work experience as the participants and they could relate to the difficulties that participants were facing. They were in an equal power position, so participants often vented and complained with their peers. For instance, Ben would vent about the long hours he was working with his peers during lunch. He said,

We would talk amongst other store managers, because we, as store managers, we would meet for lunch a couple of days a week. We're all going through the same things. . . . We

would say, we would joke, 'oh, I worked 14 days in a row. Oh, I worked 20 days in a

row,' that sort of stuff.

Peers were also an important source of information. Participants consulted about many topics

with their peers. Matthew, for example, learned about other good jobs in his industry by talking

with the peers who were leaving the company before him. He said, "as people would leave, I

would ask them, 'hey, where you going?' And I had a pretty good idea where people were going,

the different opportunities that were out there."

Supervisors. The interaction with supervisors was different than with peers. Because

supervisors had a higher hierarchical level and power position, participants were not as open

with them as they were with their peers. Some participants raised concerns about work-life issues

or problems in the work environment to their supervisors, but were afraid that this could

negatively impact their jobs. Also, participants reported that few supervisors were open to listen

to employees' concerns. Ruth, for instance, was concerned for her job security and reported that

most managers in her former company were not receptive of work-life issues. She explained,

I'd be in the side of caution and just refuse to say anything that might jeopardize my job.

Very few times I brought it up with my first project manager. I got along with her fairly

well [and] she was very receptive to people not being happy with the company. But

others were, 'you must drink the Kool-Aid,' and basically, they expected you to be

brainwashed into the company culture, and just agree with everything. Those people, you

couldn't talk to them about it. I tried, once and all I got was buzz words that all of the

sudden everybody starts saying, like all the management is saying same thing. That's

how these conversations went. And I'm like, there's no point, they're not even listening.

Some participants tried to negotiate accommodations with their supervisors, but these conversations were often unfruitful. As many other participants, Abigail tried to work things out with her supervisor, but did not get what she expected.

> I expressed the concerns to my supervisor a little bit and she's like, 'I promise it'll get better, I promise it'll get better.' But it never did. Or, 'I promise I'll put in for a higher rate salary for you,' but it never did.

Specialists. Some participants consulted with specialists such as accountants or HR specialists to get advice and help. For instance, an HR specialist in the company told Rebecca she could take time off with FMLA to take care of her grandfather. She said,

> When I was talking with the HR, she told me I could take some time off from FMLA to take care of my grandfather, who was going through a cancer treatment. My supervisor didn't offer it, and I didn't know I could use that benefit until HR offered it. Then I took 3 or 4 weeks of FMLA leave.

Carlos consulted his Certified Public Accountant (CPA) to dissolve his business partnership with his sister. He explained,

> We had a bookkeeper. He's just an amazing guy, that not only takes care of me, he's a CPA. He's the CPA to take care of all that major stuff. He helped, he was negotiating the whole sell. And he was very fair.

In sum, coworkers were important social network members with whom participants talked. In different manners, peers, supervisors, and experts influenced how participants coped and made decisions.

Seeking support. Participants reached out to social network members for support to help them manage work-life conflict. This section explores what participants wanted or hoped to get

when they talked with social network members. Participants reached out to social network members when they wanted to vent, to talk through the issues, to make plans, or to inform them of the decision they had already made. These four main areas are further detailed below.

Venting. Participants wanted to relieve their stress by venting or complaining to their social network members. Venting was one of the most common reasons people talked with their family, friends, and peer coworkers. Being able to "air grievances," as Samuel described, was a relief for the participants. Having a listener available was all they needed sometimes. The use of humor was present in venting and complaining. Making fun of a difficult situation can be a relief, at least momentarily. Some participants reported they would complain and vent while drinking with their friends, or during lunch. Hannah, for example, said, "I complained to everyone. Anyone who would listen. Like my friends, my family, like everybody knew how miserable I was." Samuel described the conversations with his friends, "most of my friends use a lot of humor, so it's maybe, I'll complain about something and then my friend will make a joke about it. Or maybe bring it up later in a joking way."

Talking through. Sometimes, participants wanted to discuss their problems and share ideas. More than just having someone to listen, they wanted to have someone to help them think through their issues, and evaluate their situation, alternatives, and possible outcomes. Some participants wanted their social network members' opinions. Going over different aspects of their problems and process of decision-making helped participants get advice without being in a vulnerable position of asking permission to quit the job. Sometimes, having someone playing the devil's advocate helped individuals make sure they were making the right decision. For example, Vanessa's sister helped her go through her plan of quitting. Her sister asked, "'well, what's this gonna be like for your career?' kinda just making sure I was thinking through everything."

Similarly, Abigail liked to discuss ideas with her friends, husband, mother, and sister. She explained her decision-making process,

> So, I usually go through the hierarchy: having an idea, then having it validated, and then if they don't agree with me or don't think I'm seeing the full picture, it's nice because usually my two friends will weigh in and say, 'look at it this way,' or 'look at it that way,' and it's nice to see both sides of it.

Making plans. Participants made plans related to quitting in conjunction with social network members. Their plans included practical things, like establishing deadlines and action plans, as well as subjective things such as fantasizing about how their lives would be after quitting and what they would do after leaving the job. Samuel, for example, talked about some possibilities with his girlfriend at the time. He said, "we did talk about things occasionally like if we were going to move somewhere else, or the realistic nature of finding something else or the job market or something like that." Ruth also talked about plans with her peer coworkers and with her husband. When talking with her peers, she discussed different possibilities for the future, "where'd we go, work that had openings." With her husband, she would make more tangible plans, as she explained, "the plan was always have another job lined up before you quit. . . . All the way we talked about it, it wasn't for me to be unemployed. It was for me to have a different job." Some participants also made specific plans related to submitting their resignation letters. Stacy, for instance, was making plans with her boyfriend to match her last day at work with their vacations. She explained:

> I think one day, I just talked to my boyfriend at the time, and just said, 'I think I'm going to send in my two-weeks' notice, so that Thanksgiving would be my last day.' And I

thought that would be good timing. And we were going to be taking, I think we were

going to be taking a vacation or something like that.

Although not all participants followed through with their plans, many counted on their social

network to help them make plans for the future.

Informing of the decision. Participants also wanted to inform social network members of

their decision to quit their job. Most individuals talked, at least briefly, with their social network

members about their work-life conflict before communicating their decision. For instance,

Samantha had talked with her confidant friend several times about the issues she was having at

work, and after she quit, she was happy to share the news with him. She said, "I asked for the

advice on what do I need to write on my two-weeks [notice], and then I turned it in, and I told

him a couple of days later." Similarly, Danielle told her parents she was thinking about quitting,

and only talked about it again after she got a new position. She explained, "I didn't want to be

like 'hey, I'm going to get a new job' and then not. That would suck."

Some participants shared the decision with family and friends before resigning. Others

chose not discuss the issues with some of their social network members before making a decision

or taking action. Later, they shared the decision with those social network members. Often, the

social network members knew about the difficult work situation, but were not part of the

decision-making process. For instance, Riley had mentioned to her mother that she was unhappy,

but did not talk about quitting. She said,

'Cause my mom, I told her that I wanted to move back to [city], and I told her that I was

really stressed out. So, she knew. But I didn't talk to her while I was making the decision,

just because I didn't want to stress her out or anything.

Ruth did not talk with her aunts, uncles, and cousins about her problems at work, but after she quit she had to tell them. She said,

> Our family gets together a lot. And so, it would come up, 'how was work?' 'Well, I'm not currently working'. And then it's like, 'oh, why?' It's like, 'well, I just didn't want to be there anymore.' I never found a really good way to explain it to other people who don't know me, who weren't there, who didn't see what it was doing to myself.

Thus, participants communicated with social network members hoping to get help with managing work-life conflict, and informing others about their decision to quit. Some wanted to vent and complain, while others wanted an opinion, or to make plans together about a future life away from that job.

Receiving social support. Participants described receiving varying types of social support from social network members. Getting support helped the participants manage work-life conflict and make decisions. Participants received emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, unconditional support, and some received no support. Each is described below.

Emotional support. Participants received a lot of emotional support from their social network members. Validation, empathy, and encouragement helped participants gain a sense of belonging and that it was okay to feel that way. Hannah, for example, said her family and friends were very encouraging. "They said all the things that your family says when you need to do that." Madeline said it was helpful just having her boyfriend listen to her. She explained,

> My boyfriend would be like, 'yeah, that sucks.' He would give me a lot of validation, talk to me about it, try to give me possible solutions. But there wasn't much that he could do, other than sitting there and listen to me complain, which was helpful.

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Rebecca explained that hearing others' perspectives and knowing they would be there to help her was encouraging. She said,

> Hearing other people's troubles also helps put our own in perspective, made me realize this was not that big of deal. Everyone encounters struggles and hard decisions and even being unemployed would not be the end of the world, just a change in lifestyle. They would be there to help me through it.

Instrumental support. Participants received tangible help in the form of job referrals, work accommodations, and even money. Some participants had their friends bring dinner or pick up their children after school when they were not available. Having this instrumental support available helped participants alleviate the rough situations they were going through. For instance, Ruth's peer coworkers helped her find new jobs, and they covered for each other when they had job interviews at another company. She said,

> It was like, 'what are you looking?' And 'have you applied to this place?' We would swap, basically, job openings we've heard of, interviews we've gone to, covering for each other if we had an interview. Knowing you had to take extra clothes, not letting anybody see you.

Caroline had help from her coworkers so that she could study during work time. She explained,

> I had to rely on my coworkers to help with setting up the experiments. I had to rely on my coworkers to keep quiet, that, oh, Carol is in the back, reading. So, I had to rely on my coworkers not to rat me out. And, it stunk to put my coworkers in that position. And I didn't like that I had to. But again, I was appreciative that they were willing to say, 'Carol is doing something else right now.'

Rebecca had applied for some job positions and had some interviews, but was not hired. After talking about her plans with a former coworker, she finally got a new job. She explained, "the job was not a posted position. I would have never known about it if not for that conversation. She referred me, my previous interviews were available, and it all happened very fast."

Informational support. Participants often received advice and information from their social network members. Gathering advice and information helped participants make decisions about their situation. When Samantha had her first emotional breakdown at work, she asked her friend's advice. She said, "He's like, 'pull yourself together.' He's like, 'if you're really upset, think about it, and if you're really upset, write out a two-weeks [notice], and hand it to them.'" Caroline asked her former teachers' advice to help inform her decision, "Talking to a couple of past teachers, and asked them for advice. Saying, 'what would you do in my position?'" When Matthew asked his peers who were leaving the company where they were going to work, he discovered some valuable information, "I could work less hours and potentially even make more money than what I was making."

Unconditional support. Although this is not a previously reported type of social support, many participants reported their social network members offered them unconditional support. For these people, they would support the participants regardless of what they would decide to do. This was very common among spouses. Some participants reported their parents were also unconditional supporters. For example, Abigail said her husband was supportive regardless of her decision. She said, "he was like, 'whatever you want, whatever makes you happy.'" Mary reported her boyfriend had the same attitude. She said,

He was like, 'if that's what you wanna do, then do it' . . . and he's like, 'oh, okay babe, whatever you want.' But, he was definitely supportive. And he's like, 'if you're not happy, and that's what you think it's best, then do it.'

Participants were particularly thankful for receiving this type of support.

No support. Some participants had social network members who provided no support at all. Some people were just not interested or did not care about participants' problems. Many participants who contacted their supervisors or others in their organizations to address work-life conflict, reported receiving no support. Rebecca and her team, for instance, complained about her supervisor's lack of flexibility and abusive treatment, but nothing seemed to happen. She said, "team members had been giving her feedback and trying to escalate our issues over the last 12 months, but it had fallen on deaf ears up to this point." Having no support happened not only in the workplace, but also in some participants' families. For example, Madeline complained about her work-life conflict to her mother and received no support. She said, "she would just be like, 'I've got enough stress on my life. I really don't wanna hear about what you have to say.'" Likewise, all Ruth received from some family members were some "weird looks," when she told aunts, uncles, and cousins that she quit her job. She said,

A lot of it was like, 'oh, OK.' They didn't mind, obviously, it's none of their business, really. But, other than the weird looks, there wasn't anything verbal that was like, 'why would you do that? That's really stupid.' Nothing like that. It's just, you get that feeling, when they want to say, 'that was stupid,' but they don't.

In sum, most participants received social support in different forms, coming from different social network members. Receiving emotional, instrumental, informational, and unconditional support was very helpful for participants to endure their challenges.

The influence of social network members. Social network members influenced how individuals experienced problematic integration (PI) related to work-life conflict. Individuals experience PI when there are discrepancies between evaluative and probabilistic orientations, which cause feelings of divergence, ambiguity, ambivalence, and impossibility. This section explains how social network members helped participants to reduce their perceptions of PI in some instances, and in others, to increase it. Furthermore, their influence was reflected in the participants' decisions. Two themes emerged from the data: reducing PI and increasing PI.

Reducing problematic integration. Individuals experiencing PI must often manage high levels of uncertainty. In ambiguity, for instance, individuals do not know which alternatives are more likely to happen and do not know whether the outcomes of the alternatives are good or bad. Communicating with social network members helped participants reduce PI by lessening the uncertainty they were feeling. This happened both for those who quit and those who did not quit their jobs. Talking with social network members helped participants to have more certainty, especially that leaving the job would be the right move. Getting validation from social network members helped participants move forward and submit their resignation letter, or searching for a new job. For example, Mary relied on her family to help her make her decision:

> My family, what they think has always been a really big important factor to me. So, if
> they had all said, 'no, you need a job, you need to stick it out, what else are you gonna
> do?' I would've probably have a lot of second thoughts, at least about quitting that way.
> But they didn't. They all told me, 'you just need to leave. Why you gonna give them two
> weeks?' and I was like, you're right.

For Jacob, having support from his father accelerated his resignation. He explained, "it probably expedited it. Maybe I would've considered more. I can't really say, 'cause I don't know. Maybe I would've done the same decision, maybe I would've done just later on the week."

Participants talked with their family and friends about their miserable situations. Many of them were experiencing divergence, as their reality was not corresponding to their expectations, and they realized that they were likely to be unhappy in that job. When social network members offered them unconditional support, it was easier for participants to make a decision. Some participants were able to make a decision without asking for specific advice or discussing quitting with their social network members. For example, Danielle said, "I made the decision on my own, but hearing positive feedback I'm sure was encouraging." Receiving affirmation and support from social network members helped reduce participants' problematic integration. It brought them more certainty that their current work was bad and that they could have a better work-life balance working somewhere else (i.e., reducing the uncertainty about the alternatives and its outcomes). This helped participants make decisions and move on with their plans.

Increasing problematic integration. In other cases, communicating with social network members increased participants' perceptions of PI, especially ambiguity and ambivalence. This made it harder for them to decide what to do. Some social network members increased participants' uncertainties about what could happen in the future, for instance whether other jobs would be any better than the one they had. The participants who experienced this increase in PI where unable to make a decision, whether to leave or to remain in their jobs. Some participants received conflicting information coming from sources with different levels of trust, which made uncertainty increase. For example, Samuel's social network members offered him opposite opinions about his situation. He said,

Well, with my dad it's usually "just stick it out, you're going to have that experience anywhere you go." And it was usually the opposite of my girlfriend because we had always talked about moving somewhere else, and so she was always realistic, but she was like, "I know you can find a job anywhere" and was supportive and encouraging about potentially having to find a new job.

Some participants were so consumed by their miserable situation that they could not take any action. In addition, they were increasingly feeling ambivalence, perceiving that they only had mutually exclusive, negative alternatives to choose. They could not make a decision. Instead, they just hoped for change. Madeline, for example, was unsure about what to do. She waited for something to change, thinking "that at some point I was gonna get that manager position. And it just never happened. So I kept thinking, maybe I'll move up, maybe I'll become a manager." Instead of being promoted, she was eventually fired.

In sum, social network members influenced how participants experienced PI related to work-life conflict. Many factors contributed to participants' decision to quit or remain at their jobs. Having social support helped participants reduce uncertainty and ease PI associated with work-life conflict. Receiving conflicting support increased their uncertainty and increased their perceptions of PI. Instead of taking action, they remained experiencing PI, until something else happened.

Taken together, communicating with social network members during work-life conflict helped participants manage PI and influenced their decision-making processes. Several social network members participated in this process, including family members, coworkers, and friends. Participants initiated the conversations by venting and talking through their issues, and most received support from social network members. Support was received in the form of

information and advice, tangible help, and emotional support. Some participants received unconditional support from some social network members, while others received no support at all. Receiving support helped participants cope with work-life conflict. Moreover, conversations with social network members influenced how participants experienced PI and their decision-making process. When communication contributed to reduce PI, participants had more certainty and more clarity, making it easier to decide what to do. In contrast, when communication increased their PI, participants had difficulties making a decision.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the work-life interface research by exploring an understudied area: the experience of individuals who strongly considered quitting their jobs due to work-life conflict. Kirby and Buzzanell (2014) encouraged researchers to continue to explore how people make sense of their work-life experiences, and Bochantin (2008) called for alternate ways of studying work-life conflict. This study attended to both calls by investigating individuals' experiences of managing work-life conflict. It explored how participants experienced work, life, and work-life conflict. This project also investigated how participants experienced problematic integration (PI) in relation to their work-life conflict, which provided a new application of PI theory. Finally, the study explored how communication with social network members helped participants manage PI related to work-life conflict, and how it influenced their decision to quit or remain at their jobs. This chapter discusses these findings and their implications, as well as the study's limitations, and offers directions for future research on the topic.

Living with Work-Life Conflict

This study investigated how individuals conceptualized and bound life outside of work. The participants discussed multiple categories of life. These include: life is to be enjoyed, life is to be with loved ones, life is full of responsibilities, life is to serve the community, and life is work. These results suggest that there are several elements in one's life that interplay with each other: not only the fun and enjoyable moments alone or experienced in the company of loved ones, but also responsibilities and work outside of work. Thus, life outside of work can be divided into two categories: *life work* and *life fun*. Life work includes essentially unpaid work such as household chores, caregiving for children and/or parents, running errands, education, and community work. Participants reported having layers of responsibilities associated with

managing a household, having a family, living alone, being a caregiver, advancing their

education, and participating in their communities. These activities are often not optional, but

have to be accomplished. It is part of life to have obligations and chores.

In contrast, life fun includes enjoyable activities such as hobbies, socializing with friends

and family, relaxing, practicing exercises, and spending time with family, friends, and romantic

partners. Participants needed these fun activities and looked forward to them (Trenberth &

Dewe, 2002). Being part of family, a romantic relationship, or friend groups require interaction

and time spent together as part of relational maintenance. Indeed, individuals spend more time

maintaining their relationships than initiating or terminating them (Duck, 1988). Exercising,

relaxing, and practicing hobbies were also important to the participants' wellbeing.

If life outside of work has two contrasting domains (life work and life fun), it is likely

that individuals experience some work-life conflict within the realm of life. Individuals try to

accommodate both their responsibilities and their desires in life outside of work. For instance,

when participants said they had no life or they wanted to have more life, they were often

referring to the life fun domain, the enjoyable moments. It was difficult for many participants to

have fun, because when after work they still had to cook, clean, or take care of family members.

Leisure and relaxation are important activities to relieve stress (Trenberth & Dewe, 2002).

Activities that help people escape from work stress, including active, challenging activities such

as meeting new people, competing with others, and using one's skills, as well as passive,

recuperative activities such as relaxing, enjoying the nature, and contemplating something

peaceful (Trenberth & Dewe, 2002). Both active challenging and passive recuperative activities

are important to manage work stress, hence the importance of the different things that compose

the life fun domain for the participants. However, the life fun activities were more easily

postponed or abandoned than the life work ones. The time devoted to accomplishing obligations and chores outweighed the time spent with leisure, because obligations are often perceived as more important than optional recreational activities. This had implications for participants, as they felt they had no fun life.

Future research should further investigate the existence of the work life-fun life conflict and how individuals experience it. Acknowledging this additional layer of conflict sheds light into the complex interplay between work and life. Previous research found that organizations fail to recognize and address life demands partly because life is often understood as family time and obligations (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). By analyzing how work-life issues are represented in organizational websites, Hoffman and Cowan (2008) identified that organizations understand work as the most important thing in life, and that life means family. That is, when organizations refer to life, they mean family life, based on the extensive use of the term "family;" the frequent mentions to spouse, children, parents, and family activities; and the portrayal of the traditional family in discussions of non-work life. Besides the "family life," the notion of "life" was never clearly defined on the organizational websites. The present study found evidence that life is more complex than that.

Previous research has indicated that when employees make family-related requests for work-life accommodation they are more likely to have their requests approved than requests related to other personal instances (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010). As a result, employees who need to accommodate elements other than family are less likely to benefit from organizational policies, and their requests are more likely to be denied, as suggested by Dixon and Dougherty (2014). In their study, employees who could not use the family-friendly benefits (e.g., maternity leave, family related leaves) felt resentment toward those who benefited, because they had to do

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the work of those taking leaves. In organizations, this is likely to cause employees to have lower job satisfaction and increased turnover rates.

This study focused on individuals who strongly considered or decided to leave their jobs due to work-life conflict. For organizations, this means additional costs on hiring and training new employees. If organizations do not recognize the additional elements that compose individuals' lives, it is likely that organizational policies and supervisors will not address the needs and demands that emerge from these other elements. Having a clearer understanding of what counts as life can help organizations design better work-life programs that truly respect and accommodate the diverse needs of their employees. This could increase retention rates among employees who are the primary caregivers of other family members, who face many challenges in their personal lives, or who simply have different personal goals and activities. Having benefits and policies that recognize the actual challenges that employees face when integrating their work, work lives, and fun lives would potentially reduce turn-over rates and employee replacement costs for organizations. The costs of turnover include direct expenses such as job advertisements, interviewing, and initial training, as well as hidden costs related to having an inexperienced new hired such as the extra work of other employees while replacing the employee, possible errors, and loss of productivity (Hillmer, Hillmer, & McRoberts, 2004). There may be also costs due to loss of revenue, for instance, in the case of turnover among sales people (Darmon, 1990).

This study also examined how people conceptualize work. Here, participants did not articulate the features and responsibilities of their jobs, but discussed challenges they faced. Specifically, they talked about the long hours they worked, how much work was carried to their personal lives, the toxic workplace environment they encountered, and how prioritizing career

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was often competing with family. The findings about the meaning of work for participants who decided to quit their jobs is unsurprising. It is not rare to meet someone who is constantly working, who has a negative workplace environment, or who places their career as their priority. The relevance of this finding is the connection with the individuals' willingness to change jobs to improve their work-life integration. Participants were dissatisfied with the amount of work they were performing without receiving the recognition they expected, and with the negative impact they were perceiving in their lives. Individuals work for not only money, but also for the feeling of accomplishment and self-worth that it comes with work. Financial and non-financial recognition are powerful tools to improve employees' performance and retention (Luthans, 2000). Some participants mentioned that if they received a higher pay or more recognition for their work and efforts, they were more likely to stay. Employers who fail in identifying this need and what kind of recognition is valued by their employees, are likely to lose their talents.

Millennials are making it clear that they value happiness more than money (Levit & Licina, 2011), but this study found evidence that this preference is not restricted to the young generations. Perhaps these trends may change individuals' thresholds to work-life conflict. In the past, it was common for people to expect to be working in one job until retirement, while today, more people expect to work in meaningful jobs, contribute to society, and also be able to enjoy life (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). If this is true, individuals may be less tolerant of jobs that impede their enjoyment of life, their time spent with their loved ones, and the time necessary to take care of all their work life responsibilities. Future research should explore differences in individuals' levels of tolerance to work-life conflict over time and investigate the trends in the thresholds of work-life conflict that lead people to quit their jobs. There may be differences across genders, generations, occupations, family configurations, and other variables.

In looking at how participants experienced work-life conflict, the study found many problematic intersections of work and life. Specifically, participants discussed work consuming their lives, health problems that affected life and work, disagreements they had with their partners about work, the impact of changes in their work or life that increased work-life conflict, the complex interplay of money and work, and how problems happened at the same time. These themes were highly intertwined, emerging from both work and life, and interfered in both domains. For instance, many participants reported experiencing mental or physical health problems related to their work-life conflict which interfered in their abilities to accomplish both work and life activities. This corresponds with findings from previous studies that discuss the relationship between health problems and work-life conflict (e.g., Lallukka et al., 2014). Participants experienced mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, as well as physical health problems, such as eating disorders and sleeping disorders. Some of these problems were diagnosed by doctors and linked to the stress participants were experiencing. Having a health problem increased perceptions of work-life conflict because it interfered with individuals' abilities to perform their work duties and life activities. The health problem was not only a "life" problem, but also a "work" problem, because people cannot separate from their health; it impacts all domains.

The results of this study suggest that the boundaries between work and life were more permeable from work to life than on the other way around. The work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) suggests that individuals are border crossers that move between the personal and professional domains during the day, interact with border keepers (e.g., family members in the personal domain; coworkers in the professional domain), and carry over pieces of each domain through its boundaries. The boundaries can be more or less flexible, expanding or contracting

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accordingly. The present findings suggest that work more frequently invaded life than the reverse. Participants often tried or desired to have a stronger separation and leave work at work, but most failed to do so. This could be a result of employees who are so strongly identified with the organization that they cannot separate themselves from work (Deetz, 1992). Individuals had no power to change their organizations' policies or their supervisors' demands. Afraid of losing their jobs or getting reprimands, participants worked overtime as a routine. Some scholars argue that organizations control employees' lives through unobtrusive control, where organizational values are inculcated subtly and persuasively, influencing employees' behaviors (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Also, participants reported that they needed the income of their jobs. Failing to accomplish the expected tasks and working the necessary number of hours posed a risk to maintaining their gainful employment. On the other hand, participants' personal lives were being suppressed during the time available after work. Participants often had to prioritize *life work* (i.e., the things they had to do, unpaid work) over *life fun* (i.e., the enjoyable things they wanted to do) in their time outside of work.

Technology also played an important role in this boundary issue. Having prompt access to work information from mobile phones and computers made it easier for individuals to accomplish their work tasks anytime and anywhere. Many employers encouraged and expected participants to remain connected to work after leaving the workplace. That way, technology helped work to bleed into personal life. However, technology also helped individuals remain connected with their personal lives during the work hours. Golden (2013) found that organizations often determine rules of acceptable personal use of technology and organizational resources in the workplace. When working from home, most individuals do not have equivalent policies and use their home internet or personal telephone for work purposes, for instance. She

argued that there is still much controversy about whether the use of technology helps to mitigate work-life conflict, or if it contributes to increased organizational control over employees. Today, 95% of Americans have a mobile phone of some kind, 77% of which are smartphones (Pew Research Center, 2017a). Access to mobile phones is starting earlier than ever. In 2016, children were getting their first mobile phone when they are 10.3 years old, on average (Influence Central, n.d.). Increased access to mobile and smartphones has facilitated and increased the contact between parents and children during the day. Kids can text their parents from school or on their way home, which brings personal life into the workplace.

The increasing use of social media also contributes to the movement of personal life into the work. Pew Research Center asked Americans why they use social media at work. They found that 34% of workers use social media to take a mental break from work, 27% to connect with friends and family during work, and 24% to make professional connections (Olmstead, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016). In 2005, only 5% of adult Americans (18 and older) used at least one form of social media, whereas in 2016, it had increased to 69% (Pew Research Center, 2017b). For instance, almost one in seven (68%) of adult Americans have a Facebook account, and 76% of the them visit their feed daily (Pew Research Center, 2017b). Other popular social media sites include Instagram (28% of adult Americans have an account), Pinterest (26%), LinkedIn (25%), and Twitter (21%). Social media use grew across age groups, races, sex, income, education, and in rural, urban, and suburban areas (Pew Research Center, 2017b). Workers also use social media for job related purposes, such as connecting with peers and experts in their industry and to gather information they need to do their jobs (Olmstead et al., 2016). With organizations increasingly joining social media as well, using corporate profiles as tools of marketing, employee

recruitment, and interaction with various stakeholders, the lines that separate what is a personal or a professional space become even blurrier.

Participants talked about how technology helped work to "invade" their homes, but did not mention using technology to keep them connected to their personal lives during work time. It may be that they did not perceive this happening, or did not perceive this as an "invasion" or conflict. Technology is helping to blur the lines between work and home and because technology is becoming more pervasive, it is possible that people may simply need to adapt to and accept this highly integrated life. It might even change how individuals conceptualize work-life conflict, if it comes to a point that both domains are so interconnected that it is hard to define where one ends and the other begins. This can be a fruitful topic for future research, as technology tends to continue to expand and be even more present in all aspects of people's everyday life.

Struggling to juggle work and life responsibilities is not merely the result of personal incompetence, but also a symptom of societal and corporate cultures that expect individuals to treat work as their priority. As participants shared their experiences with work-life conflict, it became clearer that they had limited control of the situation. They could make some choices and decisions, but were limited in other ways. As mentioned by participants, the culture of overwork is everywhere: it is in the coworkers' look of disapproval when one takes time off and in the unspoken criticism of family members when one quit their job without another one lined up. The culture of overwork associated with toxic work environment can have disastrous consequences. For instance, three out of 22 participants in this study considered suicide amid work-life conflict. Some aspects in the American life make it difficult for individuals to make decisions about alleviating or reducing their work-life balance. Some choices simply do not exist. For instance, because FMLA grants protected time off, but not pay, it essentially gives individuals the option

between taking care of their health or receiving a pay check. Some people cannot afford to take unpaid time off to take care of their own or other's wellbeing. Employers and policy makers need to be aware of these challenges when designing work-life friendly policies and take accountability for helping manage work-life conflict as well.

Experiencing Problematic Integration

This study also investigated how individuals experience problematic integration (PI) in relation to their work-life conflict. Participants' reports of their work-life conflict experiences were explained by PI theory, demonstrating a new possible application of this theory. Feelings of divergence, ambivalence, ambiguity, and impossibility were present in participants' narratives. Participants mentioned divergence the most, in that their expectations about work and life were unlikely to be become reality. Many participants perceived that they were unlikely to be happy in their jobs, and likely to continue to be unhappy in their work-life integration. Many also experienced ambiguity, where probabilities and outcomes are unknown. Participants were uncertain about what to do, whether quitting would be a good solution to their problems, whether they would have less work-life conflict in a new job, or if their life would ever be better.

Some participants also experienced ambivalence. They perceived they had two negative, mutually exclusive alternatives from which to choose, such as staying in a bad job or hurting their careers with a job change. Ambivalence also occurred when participants reported it was hard for them to leave the job, although they wanted to leave. These contradictory feelings demonstrate that work was an important part of the participants' lives, and had positive aspects as well. Feelings of impossibility actually brought more certainty to participants. Some of them realized their work-life conflict was never going to improve if they were to remain at that

position. Instead of only bringing sadness, the increased certainty of impossibility prompted some participants to quit their jobs.

This study reveals that work-life conflict creates internal turmoil for participants in the form of divergence, ambivalence, ambiguity, and impossibility. The interface of work and life created cognitive discomfort for participants. To relive this discomfort, individuals talk with others and/or change how they think about the issues to resolve the problematic integration. They also need to work to manage the consequences of the discomfort. In using PI theory, this study uncovers how participants experienced the turmoil associated by work-life conflict.

Communicating During Work-Life Conflict

This study also explored how communication with social network members helped individuals manage problematic integration emerging from work-life conflict as well as how these conversations influenced their decision to quit their jobs. First, the study identified the social network members with whom participants communicated, including family members, spouses, friends, and coworkers. Participants contacted social network members to vent, talk through their work-life conflict challenges, made plans for quitting their jobs, and informed them of participants' decision to quit. In return, participants perceived receiving emotional, instrumental, informational, unconditional, and no support from their social network members. Finally, the study demonstrated how communication with social network members was influential in the participants' decision to remain or quit their jobs, as it influenced perceptions of PI.

The participants in this study trusted and shared personal information with family, friends, and peer coworkers. Most participants avoided talking with their supervisors because they were afraid it could jeopardize their jobs or they perceived a lack of receptivity from

supervisors. Supervisors not only have a higher hierarchical level and power position, but they often are responsible for the implementation of work-life policies and work-life accommodations (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Employees may want to address their issues and concerns with their supervisors, but they must be strategic to avoid negative consequences to their job or reputation (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016; Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002). Previous researchers found that supportive supervisors can help employees manage their work-life conflict (e.g., Goh et al., 2015; Major et al., 2008). When employees perceive their supervisors are not open to feedback, they avoid bringing up their work-life issues, which likely decreases their job satisfaction and productivity. Supervisors should be aware and be more open to listen to their subordinates, as this can help them find more effective coping strategies.

Additionally, examining the support received by participants, it is possible to distinguish some differences between strong and weak ties. Family members and friends are most commonly perceived as strong ties, as these relationships tend to be long lasting, stronger, and independent of context (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Coworkers often fall on the weak ties category because the interaction is often more superficial, context based, and does not include a lot of self-disclosure (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Sometimes, support received from someone who could be considered as a strong tie, such as the participant's mother, was not considered relevant or valuable because the person did not have enough credibility (e.g., mother did not understand what participant was going through). At the same time, some coworkers and more distant friends mentioned by participants, probably weak ties, were considered valued and trusted sources of information when they had experience and credibility on the subject. This is further supported by previous studies that found that coworkers are essential to new employees' socialization (Miller & Jablin, 1991) and to reduce role ambiguity (Matthews, Bulger, Barnes-Farrell, 2009), This

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further confirms findings of previous researchers who highlighted the importance of weak ties (e.g., Phua, 2013; Trepte, Dienlin, & Reinecke, 2015). It is not only important to establish relationships with close social network members, but also with those more distant. Many relationships are strongly dependent on the context and the situation, but are still valuable. Interacting with weak ties exposes individuals to a wider variety of experiences, information, and knowledge that they probably would not have access through only their close ties.

The findings of this study also provide helpful insight on the influence of communication with social network members on how participants managed their PI related to work-life conflict. When individuals communicate, they not only share ideas, but build their realities and make meaning out of their experiences (Miller, 2005). Receiving support and affirmation helped participants be more confident of their choices and move further on their decisions. Sometimes all they needed was someone to hear their complaints, someone to tell them that things would be okay. The benefits of social support and supportive communication have been studied and reported in many areas, from health communication (e.g., Gray, 2014; Tanis, 2008) to family communication (e.g., Edwards, 2006; 2008; Mikkelson et al., 2011). This study further confirms that work-life conflict can be soothed with social support. Researchers should continue to investigate the helpfulness and effectiveness of social support for work-life conflict. Perhaps, participating in social support groups could be a successful coping strategy for those who struggle with work-life conflict. Organizations and counselors could provide individuals who struggle with work-life conflict with social support groups as a coping strategy.

Additionally, the influence of social support may be related to when it was provided, in relation to the stage of decision-making process that participants were in. For instance, if individuals receive support that helps to increase their PI in the beginning of the decision-making

process, it might be that they give up on the idea of quitting. Whereas, if they receive conflicting support when they already have a more structured decision-making process, the advice may not be as relevant or influential to change their minds. Researchers should continue to investigate the helpfulness and effectiveness of social support for work-life conflict, as it appears to be a productive area of research with important implications.

Curiously, most participants did not hear discouraging advice from their social network members. Only a few participants said that they encountered others who did not encourage them. Some reported that social network members helped them think thoroughly about their decision, considering what was at stake. But none of the participants reported being advised not to quit or having someone criticize their decision. Perhaps, participants purposefully preferred to talk with the social network members whom they anticipated would be supportive, and avoided talking with those who would challenge their choice, as suggested in Tan and Kramer's (2012) study. It might also be that individuals who received contrary advice were convinced not to quit and preferred not participating in this study, although they could have. Future research should continue to investigate how individuals communicate with social network members in the process of leaving a job because of work-life conflict, to increase the understanding on why they communicate with certain individuals and not others, and how this influences their experiences.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Despite the efforts to recruit a diverse sample of participants, they were not as diverse as anticipated. The sample included mainly highly educated individuals, mostly White and Hispanic/Latino, mostly heterosexual, and primarily young adults (18 out of the 22 participants were 25 to 35 years old). The experiences of these individuals are likely to be different than of those with a different educational background and

socio-economic status, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, alternative family arrangements, and in other age groups. Future researchers need to increase their efforts to recruit more diverse populations, giving voice to those who are not often included in research.

Another limitation of the study was identified during the interviews and data analysis, because some choice of words in the interview guide may have influenced how participants talked about their experiences. In the interview guide (Appendix D), the term "personal life" was used to ask participants about their life outside of work, and the term "career" was used to ask them about the importance they attribute to their professional life. This choice of words may have influenced how participants answered the questions. Some participants may consider that personal life is their life outside of work, while others may perceive that it refers to their social or romantic lives. Probe questions in the interview guide aimed to minimize this possible confusion, directly asking participants to talk about their activities outside of work. Similarly, when asked about the importance of their careers, some participants may have perceived that a career is a certain type of job that implies consecutive progress with many years of dedication to training and service, whereas others may have considered that their career is their professional path, regardless of what kind of job they have. Words carry denotative and connotative meanings that may vary from person to person and depending on the context. As we acknowledge the limitations of language, it is important to recognize that it may have influenced how participants explained their experiences.

There were also limitations regarding the timing of the interviews. One of the criteria for recruitment was that participants should have had their experience in the last five years, to avoid situations where participants could not clearly remember the events. Most of participants had no problem remembering the sequence of events and conversations with social network members.

However, participants who experienced the phenomenon a few years ago had a different perspective than those who were experiencing it at the time of the interview. Some participants were in the middle of the decision and the chaos of work-life conflict. They were processing the information and considering a myriad of variables while they tried to tell their story to the interviewer. Those who had passed the decision phase and were moving on with their work and lives had more clarity of what happened, because they had had more time to process the events, and elaborated a narrative to tell their story to others. This is similar to Duck's resurrection processes in his relationship dissolution model, where after a break-up, individuals make sense of their past relationship in light of their new position as a single person and construct a future in which "everything will be different" (Rollie & Duck, 2006, p. 236). Participants did the same thing, reflected about their previous job, and reframed their experiences in light of their new position.

Future Research

This work can be expanded in many ways, in addition to the ones already mentioned in this chapter. For instance, the decision-making process that participants went through in quitting was mentioned in the results, but was not explored in depth. The results suggest that communication with social network members influenced participants' decisions, but other aspects relevant to the decision-making process were not captured. Researchers should continue to investigate how individuals experience the process of leaving a job due to work-life conflict. This could be done by exploring in more depth how individuals make decisions on this topic, the steps they take, and the elements that influence the process. The current study identified that feedback from social network members is relevant in the decision-making process. It may also be helpful to compare those individuals who are considering to and deciding to quit due to work-

life conflict with those who have other reasons to resign. It might be that people go through a different process when deciding to quit for different reasons. Social exchange theory might be helpful to investigate how people make decisions about leaving or remaining at their jobs amid work-life conflict. Social exchange theory explains that individuals make decisions based on how they evaluate their current situation, their possible alternatives, their standards of what to expect in a given situation (Emerson, 1976). Applying this theory to work-life conflict can bring additional insights into how individuals make decisions related to it.

Also, the work-life interrelationship literature is vast when it comes to exploring conflict, its sources and outcomes, coping strategies, influential factors, and the like. However, because mutual benefit of work and life is considered positive, there is not a lot of research focused on this interrelationship. This could be a fruitful area of future research. Investigating the positive effects of work and life and how they positively influence each other can reveal good practices that are being used by individuals and organizations.

Finally, the knowledge accumulated in academia about work-life conflict needs to be shared with those who most need it. The work-life literature is so vast and rich, yet the popular press continues to reinforce myths and feed counterproductive conversations (Graff, 2007; Kuperberg & Stone, 2008; Metz, 2011; Vavrus, 2007). The gap between academia and "real life" must be bridged, so that more productive conversations take place, struggling individuals can be helped, and employers and policy makers are taking part in the debate. Researchers can make a powerful positive contribution to the society in attending to this call.

Conclusion

This study brings some contributions to the work-life literature. First, it sheds light on an understudied phenomenon, when individuals strongly consider quitting their jobs because of

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work-life conflict. Second, it explored a new application of PI theory. The main concepts of PI

theory help explain the participants' experiences with work-life conflict. Third, by connecting

these two subjects, work-life conflict and PI, this study demonstrated that communication with

social network members influenced how participants experience PI, which further influenced

their decision about quitting or remaining at their jobs. Hopefully, this study will also inspire

other researchers to continue exploring these issues in their future studies and to share their

knowledge with those outside academia.

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Appendix A

Recruiting Scrips

For Facebook Groups:

Hello, my name is Deborah Teixeira. I am doing a study about work-life balance for my master's thesis. I am looking for participants who decided to or strongly considered quitting their job to have a better work-life balance. If you've experienced this in the last 5 years and are over 18 years of age, you are invited to participate in an interview for about 45 minutes to talk about your experience. All information is confidential. Participants will have a chance to win a $30 Amazon gift card.

If you are interested in participating, or know someone who might be interested, please contact me via private message, or email me at ddecillo@islander.tamucc.edu. You are welcome to share this message with others who might be interested.

For CRTNET and PI's Facebook page:

Hello, my name is Deborah Teixeira. I am doing a study about work-life balance for my master's thesis. I am looking for participants who decided to or strongly considered quitting their job to have a better work-life balance. If you've experienced this in the last 5 years and are over 18 years of age, you are invited to participate in an interview for about 45 minutes to talk about your experience. All information is confidential. Participants will have a chance to win a $30 Amazon gift card.

If you are interested in participating, or know someone who might be interested, please contact me at ddecillo@islander.tamucc.edu. You are welcome to share this message with others who might be interested.

For visiting TAMUCC classes:

Hello, my name is Deborah Teixeira. I am doing a study about work-life balance for my master's thesis. I am looking for participants who decided to or strongly considered quitting their job to have a better work-life balance. If you've experienced this in the last 5 years and are over 18 years of age, you are invited to participate in an interview for about 45 minutes to talk about your experience. All information is confidential. Participants will have a chance to win a $30 Amazon gift card.

Here is a flyer with the study information and my contact information. If you are interested in participating, or know someone who might be interested, please contact me at ddecillo@islander.tamucc.edu. You are welcome to share this information with others who might be interested.

Recruiting Flyer

Work-Life Balance Study

Have you decided to or strongly considered quitting your job to have better work-life balance in the last 5 years?
If so, you are invited to participate in this research study. Participants will have a chance to win a $30 Amazon gift card.
All information is confidential.
Must be over 18 years of age to participate.
If you are interested or have questions, please contact Deborah Teixeira:
ddecillo@islander.tamucc.edu

Appendix B

Consent Form

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying how people make decisions about their work-life balance, such as quitting their jobs. The purpose of this study is to understand how communication with social network members (such as family, friends, and other people) influence how people make such decisions, and how this process influences one's identity. You were selected to be a possible participant because you may have gone through this decision-making process.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview and talk about your personal and professional experience related to the decision to leave a job to find better work-life balance.

The interview will take place at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC). If you are unable to meet at TAMU-CC, you may participate in a telephone or skype interview. The interview will take about 45 minutes, and will be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, this study may help other individuals, organizations, and researchers, deal with the challenges of balancing work and personal life.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi being affected.

Will I be compensated?

You will be enrolled in a drawing to win a $30 gift card. The drawing will occur by the end of the study. You will be contacted at the end of the study if you won the gift card.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Deborah Teixeira will have access to the records.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Deborah Teixeira will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept until transcribed, and then erased. Your name and other identifiers will be removed during the transcription.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Deborah Teixeira at ddecillo@islander.tamucc.edu.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Caroline Lutz, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or caroline.lutz@tamucc.edu

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study. You also certify that you are 18 years of age or older by signing this form.

☐ **I agree to have my interview audio-recorded.**

Signature of Participant:_____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

1) What is your age? _____

2) What is your gender?
☐ Female   ☐ Other: _____
☐ Male   ☐ Prefer not to answer

3) What is your ethnicity?
☐ Asian / Pacific Islander   ☐ Native American or American Indian
☐ Black or African American   ☐ White
☐ Hispanic or Latino   ☐ Other _____

4) What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*
☐ No schooling completed   ☐ Associate degree
☐ Nursery school to 8th grade   ☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Some high school, no diploma   ☐ Master's degree
☐ High school graduate, diploma or the   ☐ Professional degree
     equivalent (for example: GED)
☐ Some college credit, no degree   ☐ Doctorate degree
☐ Trade/technical/vocational training   ☐ Other _____

5) What is your marital status?
☐ Single (never married)   ☐ Divorced
☐ Domestic partner   ☐ Remarried
☐ Married   ☐ Widowed
☐ Separated   ☐ Other _____

6) Do you have children?
☐ Yes, younger than 18   ☐ Yes, both younger and older than 18
☐ Yes, older than 18   ☐ No

7) In which state do you live? _____

☐ I would like to review my interview transcript. Please e-mail it to _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Hi! My name is Deborah Teixeira, I am a master's student at the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, and I will be your interviewer today. I am working on a research project that focuses on how individuals communicate with other people when they are considering to leave their job to find a better work-life balance. To participate in this interview, you must: A) be at least 18 years of age, and B) have quitted OR strongly considered quitting a job to find better work-life balance in the past 5 (five) years. Does this describe you?

[If participant says yes, proceed. If participant says no, inquire on the aspect that does not describe them. If they do not meet the criteria for the study, inform them that they do not meet the criteria and thank them for volunteering to participate.]

Before we start the interview, I want to take you through the informed consent form and procedures for this study, so that you clearly understand your rights today. Let's do that first.

Now, I would like for you to take a few minutes to answer a few demographic questions.

[Upon permission, audio recording starts here.]

I would like to begin by asking some questions about your personal and professional experiences from the period when you were considering leaving the job to find better work-life balance. We know that people have different experiences, so there is no right or wrong answer, I just want to understand your personal and professional experiences during that time, and how you

communicated about it. You might have experienced this situation more than once and in different jobs, so I will ask you to please keep in mind one specific job to reflect on today.

1. Keeping in mind the job you decided to or strongly considered quitting, describe a regular work day for you in that job.

    a. What kind of work was involved in the job?

    b. How long were you working there?

    c. How many hours per week did you work on average?

    d. What, if at all, was most stressful at work?

    e. How important is having a career to you?

2. Now, thinking about your personal life, describe what you would count as your personal life during that time.

    a. How did you spend your personal time away from work?

    b. What things did you have to do?

    c. What things did you want to do?

    d. What, if at all, was most stressful?

    e. How important is/was to you being a […]? [Complete according to their answers (e.g., husband/wife, parent, worker, player, etc.)]

3. How, if at all, did your work interfere in your personal life? Please explain.

    a. How did you feel about it?

    b. How did you manage those feelings?

    c. Did you talk with others about it? Who?

4. How, if at all, did your personal life interfered in your work? Please explain.

    a. How did you feel about it?

      b. How did you manage those feelings?

      c. Did you talk with others about it? Who?

Now, let's talk about when you decided to leave this job.

5. When did you initially considered leaving the job? Why?

      a. What was the threshold/trigger?

      b. How did that process evolve?

      c. How long did you reflect about it before discussing with someone else?

6. When you started considering leaving the job, with whom, if at all, did you talk about it?

      a. Tell me about your conversations.

      b. How, if at all, did that conversation influence your decision?

      c. In the process of making the decision to leave the job, who would you say was most influential? Why/How?

      [Repeat probe questions for each person/party mentioned]

7. How did your decision to quit/not quit evolve?

      a. How did you ultimately reach a decision?

      b. How long did it take to decide?

      c. What factors were most important?

      d. How do you feel about your decision now?

8. Is there anything else you think we should know?

Thank you very much for your time and participation! I'd like to remind you that you are enrolled in the drawing to win a $30 gift card. I will let you know the result of the drawing once I complete all the interviews. One last thing, if you know someone that you think might be

interested in participating in this study, please feel free to share this flyer and ask them to contact

me [hand them the flyer].