

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG DUAL-CAREER COUPLES WITHOUT CHILDREN: A  
QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## **Abstract**

Dual-career professional couples are becoming common in many countries. In North America, previous generations of dual-career professional couples were likely to have children, but today many such couples forego parenthood. Increased attention in management literature has been given to work-life balance of dual-career professional couples with children, but there is a paucity of qualitative research on work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children. Given current social transformations, evolving work values, career aspirations, and changing family structures, more investigation into this demographic group is needed.

This study sets out to examine how individuals in dual-career professional couples without children understand and experience work-life balance. This qualitative study draws on interview data collected from 21 couples to explore the following research questions: 1) How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance? 2) What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children? 3) How do dual-career professional couples without children experience work-life balance? and 4) How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?

This study adds to contemporary academic literature by exploring the experiences of professional dual-career couples without children, within an interpretive ontology. This study also challenges the call in management scholarship to develop one clear definition of work-life balance. It indicates that work-life balance is a subjective construct that differs from individual to individual and from couple to couple, even those who share many similarities. Finally, this study demonstrates that work-life balance in professional dual-career couples is a social-relational process.

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## **Dedications**

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The dual-career professional couples are becoming increasingly common in many countries around the globe (Masterson & Hoobler, 2015). “Recent demographic trends in industrialized countries have resulted in dual-income households largely replacing the traditional male breadwinner model across all generational groups while among professionals and managers dual careers are rapidly becoming the new norm” (Clarke, 2015, p. 564). In the scholarly literature, a dual-career professional couple is defined as a union in which both partners have a professional career requiring a high level of involvement and investment of time, and with future possibilities of advancement (Kundu et al., 2016).

Although in previous generations dual-career professional couples in North America (i.e. Canada and the United States) were more likely to have children, during the past decade family structures have changed; today many such couples forego having children (Carroll, 2018; Tocchioni, 2018). Management researchers have noted the decreasing number of traditional nuclear families in the past decade (i.e., working father, stay-at-home mother, and children) (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015), the dramatic increase of women entering and staying in the workforce (Powell, 2018), the rise of dual-career professional couples, particularly couples without children, (Holmes, 2015), and the consequent need to better comprehend the challenges dual-career professional couples face in balancing work and other aspects of life (Silberstein, 2014).

Family structure in North America has changed significantly (Milan & Bohnert, 2011), and as women today attain the same level of education as men, if not higher (Kelly & Kelly, 2017), and as the social roles of both genders are evolving, traditional family models have been

steadily replaced by more egalitarian partnerships (Pessin, 2018). According to Pessin (2018), many North Americans are marrying later or choosing to cohabit. Many of those couples also remain, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, without children (Settle & Brumley, 2014; Wang & Parker, 2014).

Terjesen, Vinnicombe, and Freeman (2007) also observe that dual-career professional couples have become the norm for Generation Y, the cohort that now dominates the workforce. Although findings have been mixed, there is some evidence of differences between Generation Y and previous generations in terms of work values and career aspirations (Macky, Gardner, Forsyth, Cennamo, & Gardner, 2008). The Generation Y cohort is believed to have been educated in an environment where they have been encouraged to pursue career success irrespective of gender or status and where there is an expectation of gender equity and mutual support (Ng & Wiesner, 2007). Many members of this cohort have demanding jobs, and those in dual-professional career relationships face additional challenges managing their careers as a couple as well as their non-work interests and responsibilities (Sok, Blomme, & Tromp, 2014).

Given these social transformations, as well as evolving work values, career aspirations, and changing family structures, more investigation into this particular demographic group is needed. Mindful of the need to explore work-life balance in the context of new and diverse family structures (Kelliher, Richardson, & Boiarintseva, 2018 'forthcoming'), this study sets out to understand how individuals in dual-career professional couples without children understand, interpret, and experience work-life balance both from an individual as well as a couple point of view.

## **1.1 Family Structure: What is a Couple?**

Two generations ago, the typical North American family consisted of a father, a mother,

and three or four children (Bales & Parsons, 2014). By contrast, contemporary family arrangements in North America are more fluid and encompass greater variation. For example, marriage and reproduction rates are declining, while the number of adults who have never been married is unprecedentedly high (Dribe et al., 2017). North Americans are marrying later and increasingly choosing to cohabit without having children (Daugherty & Copen, 2016). For example, according to the 2016 Canadian census, from 2011 to 2016 the number of couples in Canada without children rose faster (+7.2%) than the number of couples with children (+2.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Several factors have contributed to this shift. First, because educational, employment, and career opportunities have expanded for women, they can now more readily choose between motherhood and other activities, fundamentally altering patterns of reproduction (Bering, Pflibsen, Eno, & Radhakrishnan, 2018). One such change has been a substantial delay in childbearing among highly educated (i.e., university educated) women in North America (Mills, Rindfuss, McDonald, & Te Velde, 2011). Second, in addition to competing with education and employment aspirations, parenthood has increasingly become a matter of personal preference. This makes voluntary childlessness or delayed parenthood real options (Johnstone & Lee, 2016). Third, limited housing and economic uncertainty further contribute to the shift (Zavisca & Gerber, 2016). For example in North America, mortgage lenders require large (as high as 25%) down payments when purchasing a house (Dettling & Kearney, 2014). Under these circumstances, it is more difficult for young North Americans to purchase a house, and this leads to postponing parenthood or eschewing it altogether (Dettling & Kearney, 2014). A growing number of studies have also linked economic uncertainty (unemployment, temporary contracts, and an unstable labour market) and the concomitant inability to make long-term binding

decisions to deferred parenthood (Bailey & Hershbein, 2018; Nolin & Ziker, 2016).

Formerly, researchers defined couples through the lens of marriage, i.e. the legal status of a couple's partnership that is bound by a social contract and implies a sense of the union's permanence (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979). Yet the changes in social trends have forced policy makers and scholars to consider other configurations of family structures as legitimate as well, for example, unions that do not involve legal recognition (marriage) and ones where the intention to have children is not the primary characteristic of the union (Steinmetz & Sussman, 2013).

For purposes of this study, I borrow from the sociological literature in defining a couple family as two people residing in the same household who share a social, economic, and emotional bond, and who also consider their relationship to be a marriage or marriage-like union (Bales & Parsons, 2014). Such a union is identified by either a registered or de facto marriage (Steinmetz & Sussman, 2013). A couple family can occur with or without children and may or may not include other related individuals. Dual-career professional couples without children encompass all of the above definitions of a couple family with the additional proviso that they do not have either biological or adopted children. Having defined a couple family, I now turn to the two central concepts of this study, namely professional career and work-life balance.

## **1.2 The Professional Careers of Dual-Career Couples**

Given this study's focus on dual-career professional couples, the concept of "career" needs to be discussed, as well as how it is presented and understood in the academic literature as it applies to dual-career professional couples. In the management literature, the term "career" has

generally referred to work positions or a “sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001, p. 3).

When we consider professional careers, we are likely to emphasize their long-term developmental aspects, including the sequence of connections and networks over time (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2009). Professional careers refer to occupations requiring an investment of time to pursue advanced education and obtain specialized knowledge. These factors can reinforce the development of strong professional identity and sense of position in society but can also make it challenging to change fields (Nuttman-Shwartz, 2017). Crossfield, Kinman, and Jones (2005) define a professional career as one that requires a high level of involvement, significant time investment, and future possibilities for advancement. This definition again suggests that career requires an individual to commit time to develop his or her occupation and to sustain ongoing professional relationships, often outside working hours. Other scholars have also stressed the idea that a professional career is associated with an occupation that involves special training or formal education (Gunz & Peiperl, 2007). Individuals with well-developed professional careers typically occupy managerial and administrative positions that emphasize commitment and make heavy demands on the individual. According to Hardill (2002), the pursuit of a career begins early in an individual’s life through the acquisition of economic, cultural, and social capital flowing from the parental choice of school through the selection of university and specific field of study. Silberstein and colleagues (2014) indicate that dual-career professional couples demonstrate a high degree of commitment to their occupations and engage in continuous career development.

Given the definitions presented above, in this study I define a dual-career professional couple as a union in which the following factors are present: Both partners required or still

require an investment of time to pursue advanced education; both partners have occupations that demand a high level of psychological involvement within and outside of working hours, and both partners devote extensive time and effort to maintain their professional networks.

### **1.3 Dual-Career Professional Couples and Work-Life Balance**

Having presented a working definition of a dual-career professional couple, I now discuss work-life balance in a dual-career professional setting. The last two decades have witnessed increasing interest in work-life balance among dual-career professional couples (e.g., Beigi, Wang, & Arthur, 2017; Miano, Salerno, Merenda, & Ciulla, 2015; Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2018).

Past studies on work-life balance of dual-career professional couples explored how these couples managed conflict and how they balanced, facilitated, and integrated their work and family domains. In doing so, the focus of research has been on the inherent stress of juggling work with caring responsibilities of the couple (e.g., Sekaran, 1985, 1989). More recent work has begun to examine how role conflict and role overload affect personal satisfaction, job performance, and career development (e.g., Crossfield, Kinman, & Jones, 2005; Kaur & Kumar, 2014; Wilson, Baumann, Matta, Ilies, & Kossek, 2018). This particular research interest may be driven by changing gender expectations, such as the assumption that male and female roles in the home and work spheres have become more fluid and equitable. Researchers also agree that the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples has important individual and organizational implications (Giardini & Kabst, 2008; Perrigino, Dunford, & Wilson, 2018), which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two (Literature Review).

Recent research has emphasized the importance of the employer's response to work-life



issues faced by their employees. Studies have claimed that employees who react favourably to their organization's efforts to support work-life balance show greater pride in their organization, higher overall job satisfaction, a willingness to recommend the organization as a place to work, and a reduced inclination to leave the organization (Appelbaum, Murray, Bélanger, Giles, & Lapointe, 2013; Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014; McGinnity & Russell, 2015). Many companies now offer extensive work-life balance programs, usually with an emphasis on balancing work with child-rearing obligations (Pahuja, 2015). This emphasis may not be surprising, because earlier studies focused on how dual-career professional couples managed child-rearing responsibilities. For example, numerous inquiries have assessed how women in dual-career professional couples with high-status jobs reconcile tensions between work and child-rearing (e.g., McDonald & Jeanes, 2012; Seierstad & Kirton, 2015; Silbermann, 2015). Others have investigated how men in dual-career professional couples perceive connections between work and raising children (e.g., Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Hardy et al., 2018). Despite the evidence that there is much more to the lives of dual-career professional couples than caring responsibilities, this remains the focus of contemporary research even today (Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming').

Although management scholars have regarded the term “work-life” as distinct from “work-family” (Fider, Fox, & Wilson, 2014; Wheatley, 2012, 2013), most studies on dual-career professional couples conflate the two. Given that family structure is diversifying, there is a need to expand our understanding of work-life balance outside the child-care domain. It is imperative, for example, that we consider how dual-career professional couples without children pursue work-life balance in how they manage their leisure activities, educational pursuits, and obligations to extended family in the context of demanding occupations and high-commitment

careers.

#### **1.4 Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions**

Despite the increased interest in the issue of work-life balance and dual-career professional couples since the year 2000, the vast majority of the literature on both of these topics adopts a positivist paradigm (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, & Bell, 2011). The underlying ontological assumptions of a positivist paradigm revolve around the externality of the world with a single objective reality to any research phenomenon or situation regardless of the researcher's perspective or belief (Hamlin, 2015). Thus, positivists conduct research by identifying a clear research topic, constructing appropriate hypotheses, and adopting a suitable research methodology (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001). They also maintain a clear distinction between science and personal experience and between fact and the value of judgment. It is important in positivist research to seek objectivity and use consistently rational and logical approaches to research (Carson et al., 2001). Statistical and mathematical techniques are central to positivist research, which adheres to specifically structured research techniques to uncover single and objective reality (Carson et al., 2001). The goal of positivist researchers is to make time- and context-free generalizations.

The majority of the research conducted in the past on work-life balance is survey-based (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Casper, DeHauw, Wayne, & Greenhaus, 2014; Chang, McDonald, & Burton, 2010). Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) argue “that the current literature on work-family has favoured quantitative methods and overlooked qualitative research approaches” (p. 400). While several quantitative studies conducted since 2000 have attempted to examine dual-career professional couples' work-life balance, the results of this work have

largely failed to describe how members of dual-career professional couples without children subjectively understand and experience the intersections between the work and non-work spheres of their lives. Hence, to further our understanding of the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children, this study adopts a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term, covering a wide variety of interpretive techniques that often draw on the combination of observations, interviews, and documents to describe and understand the actual meanings people attach to the studied phenomenon, human interactions, and processes that are meaningful to members of society (Gephart & Richardson, 2008). Qualitative research addresses questions about how social experience is created and given meaning, and produces representations of the world that make it visible (Gephart, 2004).

Qualitative research uses an interpretive, naturalistic approach to explore its subject matter, and often phenomena are studied in their natural environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This allows the researcher to see and understand the context within which decisions and actions take place. The goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the participant, also known as the emic perspective (Myers, 2013). In this way, qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and the participant, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Aligning with qualitative methodologies, the interpretivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology in which there are multiple realities, as well as a subjectivist epistemology in which knowledge is co-created by the researcher, the participant, and a naturalistic (that is, in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Walsh & Downe, 2006). One of the primary motivations for using a qualitative approach through an interpretivist lens for this study is the

belief that through conversations, we gain more insight into the thoughts and motivations of participants. As a result, this study aims for an emic perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that grants access to a fuller spectrum of experiences of work-life balance among dual-career professional couples without children. Furthermore, I ground this study in a social constructionism that is concerned with stressing the importance of social interactions in the creation of knowledge (Kim, 2001). Social constructionism recognizes that knowledge is produced through social interaction and is a shared rather than an individual experience (Kim, 2001).

## **1.5 Research Questions**

My research questions stem from the intersection of literature on careers, dual-career professional couples, and work-life balance, which form the conceptual framework for the study and its theoretical underpinnings. I explore four research questions:

1. How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance?
2. What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children?
3. How do dual-career professional couples without children experience their work-life balance?
4. How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?

## **1.6 Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to contribute to the existing management literature on dual-career professional couples in two main ways: by addressing the paucity of research of this particular

demographic group and by adopting a dynamic and interpersonal perspective to develop the study's research questions.

#### *1.6.1 The Paucity of Research on the Work-Life Balance of Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children*

Since Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) drew attention to the dual-career couple construct, interest in work-family conflict among dual-career professional couples has developed and grown (e.g., Hoser, 2012; Käsälä & Oinas, 2015; Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2018). As mentioned before, earlier studies had concentrated on the division of household labour and childcare, effectively creating a blind spot where couples without children are concerned.

While the idea of dual-career professional couples with children aspiring for work-life balance has become commonplace, Walker (2010) points out that dual-career professional couples without children may also experience a lack of work-life balance. Likewise, Notkin (2014) observes that when it comes to work-life balance, the “life” side of the equation has often been synonymous with parenting. Workplace culture has regarded childcare as the primary commitment outside of work. She also asserts that the ways non-parents spend their personal time is typically viewed as less important than the time parents spend with their children. Thus, Notkin's (2014) first point is that it is often assumed that the work-life balance dilemma does not apply to people without children because they must have more personal time. Her second point is that employers commonly do not pay sufficient attention to work-life balance issues of employees without children.

According to Wright (2016), a founder of the NotMom Summit,<sup>1</sup> these two perceptions have created a common expectation in the workplace that employees without children can and will, when asked, step in for their colleagues who are parents. The more employees without children oblige, the more management comes to expect these employees to sacrifice their personal time, which leads to employees without children feeling less valued than their colleagues with parental responsibilities (Wright, 2016).

Given the themes I have discussed, it is imperative to include the demographic of dual-career professional couples without children in scholarly research in an effort to understand and support them in their pursuit of work-life balance.

### *1.6.2 Adopting Qualitative Methodology*

Most research on dual-career professional couples with children has been rooted in theoretical and methodological individualism, meaning that the analysis has tended to focus on the individual rather than the couple and or incorporating other social relationships. In doing so, the relational influences of significant others on an individual's experience of work-life balance have largely been overlooked (Ali, Malik, Pereira, & Al Ariss, 2017). Baskerville Watkins and colleagues (2012) note that the persistent focus on individuals is surprising because individuals function in, and are influenced by, social systems. Furthermore, family systems theory articulates the importance of studying individuals' attitudes and behaviours in dyads and system contexts (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2012). Management researchers have generally agreed that since the career lives of couples are intertwined, the two partners and their relationships to their careers should be studied in tandem (Lesnard, 2008; Metcalfe, Woodhams, Gaio Santos, & Cabral-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thenotmom.com>

Cardoso, 2008).

I utilize an interpretivist methodology to guide my study. Drawing on social constructivism (Gephart & Richardson, 2008), I aim to see each dual-career professional couple without children as a system comprising two mutually influencing partners. My intention is to learn from their shared experiences of work-life balance and understand the meaning that they assign those experiences, whether as individuals or as a couple (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011).

### **1.7 Significance and Contributions of the Study**

This study makes six contributions to theory and research at the intersection of dual-career professional couples without children and work-life balance. The first contribution of the study is that it responds to recent but unheeded calls to explore the “life” component of work-life balance beyond family obligations (De Janasz, Forret, Haack, & Jonsen, 2013; Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming'; Özbilgin et al., 2011). Kelliher and colleagues (forthcoming) have pointed out that most work-life balance literature orients non-work to the work-family sphere, omitting broader aspects of the non-work sphere. They argue that ‘life’ has been largely viewed as comprising caring activities for dependent children, with the inference that attaining a work-life balance is principally a concern of working parents” (Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming'). In focusing on couples without children, this study necessarily moves beyond the current emphasis on parental obligations.

Second, this exploration engages the work of Özbilgin and colleagues (2011), who observe that most work-life balance literature focuses on traditional family units, that is, married couples with children. In other words, while dual-career professional couples without children are an increasing trend in today’s society, they continue to be under-represented in scholarly management literature. A similar limitation has been noted by others in the field as well. For

example, Beigi Shirmohammadi (2017) and Kelliher et al. (forthcoming) argue that caring for children and other members of the family remains a central aspect of the work-life focus research to date. Kelliher and colleagues (forthcoming) suggest that “very little is known about the work-life balance concerns of those without dependent children, who may wish to balance work with other activities which are important to them” (p. 2). “This might include other caring activities (e.g. elder or disabled care, caring for pets), pursuing further education, non-work-related training, hobbies, and exercise, maintaining and recovering health, or engaging in religious or community activities” (Kelliher et al., 2018, p. 2 'forthcoming').

Third, this study acknowledges the relational nature of both careers and work-life balance. In doing so, it offers another perspective on work-life balance among dual-career professional couples without children than previous literature, which has largely adopted a narrow focus on individual partners as the sole unit of analysis (e.g., Barnett, 1998; Baskerville Watkins et al., 2012).

The fourth contribution is a response to the call for more qualitative inquiries into work-life balance. In their recent study, Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) state that “despite a proliferation of work-family literature over the past three decades, studies employing quantitative methodologies significantly outweigh those adopting qualitative approaches” (p. 382). They argue that this lack of “methodological diversity” in the field “deprives researchers of the potential contributions of qualitative research” (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017, p. 383). Recognizing the value of qualitative research, this study is an attempt to redress this imbalance.

In addition to calling for more qualitative studies, Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) also encourage scholars to turn their attention to diverse cultural/national samples in order to enrich our knowledge of work-life balance. According to them, the majority of contemporary



qualitative research on work-life balance continues to be primarily based on European samples, while North American studies are dominated by quantitative research. Following their suggestion, this study offers qualitative findings based on a North American sample.

The fifth contribution builds on the previous point. Although a vast body of literature pertains to dual-career professional couples and work-family balance, little of the literature helps us understand couples' experiences from an emic perspective. My study offers such an approach by providing an insider view of the work-life balance experiences of dual-career professional couples without children. This angle complements the etic perspective that currently dominates the literature on dual-career professional couples and work-family balance by helping us understand how individuals attribute meaning to social experiences.

The sixth contribution is the practical relevance of the findings for organizations that employ members of dual-career professional couples without children. Despite the increasing diversity in family structure and personal responsibilities of employees, most organizations' work-life balance policies cater to the needs of employees with children, while inadvertently paying less attention to the work-life balance needs of those without (Gloor, Li, Lim, & Feierabend, 2018).

## **1.8 Boundaries and Parameters of the Study**

In qualitative research, boundaries establish the theoretical and conceptual scope of the study, as all theories and conceptual frameworks are constrained and bounded by specific assumptions. These assumptions include what a researcher brings to bear on a topic or issue and explicit restrictions regarding time and space. The boundaries of my study are limited to investigating the work-life balance experiences of dual-career professional couples without children using a qualitative methodology. Given the qualitative nature of the study and its focus

on couples' subjective experiences of work-life balance, the study's theoretical perspective is guided by the tradition of social constructionism situated within an interpretivist paradigm.

In summary, Chapter One sets out the foundation of my dissertation by examining the importance of investigating the work-life balance experiences of dual-career professional couples without children. It then identifies the research problem in this regard and lays out the research questions that guide this study. It concludes by outlining the potential contributions this study can make to the existing work-life balance literature.

In the following chapter, I provide an overview of the literature on work-life balance and dual-career professional couples developed in diverse disciplines including management, sociology, and family studies. This chapter presents the main themes in this literature and also highlights some of the gaps in research and how these gaps have been dealt with in light of the aims of this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **2.0**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Discussions of qualitative methodologies often caution researchers against reviewing the previous literature to avoid committing themselves to a particular theory and allow relevant constructs to emerge naturally from their data (Patton, 2005). However, others have encouraged the opposite, citing the need for researchers to contextualize and focus their analysis within the available literature (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 2000; Wertz et al., 2011). In this study, the literature review provides a basis for developing the research questions and

interview protocol, and comparing the phenomena in the literature with those that emerged from the study's data (Patton, 2005).

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first discusses the construct of the “dual-career professional couple” and situates the definition of the term used in this study within those proposed by earlier research. This section also examines theoretical models presented in previous studies to explain dual-career couple arrangements. It concludes with the opportunities and challenges associated with dual-career partnerships. The second section distills the literature on work-life balance and the difficulty of adequately defining the concept. The third section builds on points made in Chapter One (Introduction) by presenting past trends and future directions in the research on dual-career professional couples. In the fourth section, I give special attention to gaps in the literature that point to under-researched theoretical and methodological concerns and the need to develop a theoretical basis for the interpretations and experiences of work-life balance among dual-career professional couples without children.

## **2.1 Dual-Career Professional Couples**

Research on dual-career professional couples owes much to the seminal work of Robert and Rhonda Rapoport (1976), who defined careers as “jobs which are highly salient personally, have a developmental sequence, and require a high degree of commitment” (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969, p. 63). Although dual-career professional couples were rare at the time of the Rapoports' research, a number of researchers have since proposed various other definitions of the construct. Some studies emphasized the high career orientation and high partnership orientation among dual-career professional couples. Boehnke (2007) defined dual-career professional couples as couples with or without children in which both partners are highly

educated (with the university or comparable degrees), who work full-time in a challenging position and have lived together for at least five years. Holmes (2015) describes dual-career professional couples as partnerships wherein both participants pursue a professional career, without necessarily working full-time. Past research also specifies that dual-career couples include those with professional, managerial, or administrative occupations (Känsälä, Mäkelä, & Suutari, 2015). Although each of these definitions includes slightly different criteria, all concur that dual-career professional couples are well-educated couples who are highly committed to their jobs and show respect for and interest in their partner's career.

According to Kundu and colleagues (2016), career demands are intensified in dual-career households. Scholars suggest that the demographic of dual-career professional couples will always require focused attention because career salience, strategies, and preferences of one partner inevitably affect those of the other, which in turn affect both partners' lives (Kundu et al., 2016). In other words, in dual-career professional couples, both partners pursue self-development while simultaneously being committed to their relationship and home life.

Adding further nuance to the relational picture of careers, Arthur and Parker (2004) have claimed that the concept of career has long been recognized as having both an objective and a subjective dimension. The objective dimension involves external views of one's career, such as the status of a person's occupation or position or their observed pace of career progression. The subjective dimension stems from the personal interpretation of work-related experiences. This is a private understanding of ongoing work experiences as interpreted through the individual career actor. The subjective aspect of career operates at a subconscious level, and is thus linked to people's perceptions, feelings, and unfolding identities (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). The subjective career also emerges from personal stories, and from the unique way individuals

interpret them (Utley & Robertson, 2015). However, subjective careers do not operate in a vacuum of self-discovery; they shape and are in turn shaped by larger social arrangements. Subjective careers are interdependent with the relationships in which people are embedded. One significant relationship for many is the one they share with their partner, who ideally serves as a source of both career support and personal development (Arthur & Parker, 2004). In summary, both objective and subjective careers are socially interconnected, which suggests that careers are in and of themselves relational phenomena. Therefore, my study examines dual-career professional couples, defined as couples in which both partners have built a professional career and in which the demands of their careers will, in all likelihood, affect their partner's career as well as other aspects of their life as a couple.

### *2.1.1 Opportunities and Challenges Associated with Dual-Career Professional Couple Partnerships*

Scholarship has indicated that life in a dual-career couple offers numerous advantages, but at the same time creates several sources of conflict and stress (Silberstein, 2014). The advantages of dual-career couple partnerships include optimized household resources and increased financial security. Another advantage of the dual-career relationship is that both partners may operate outside the restrictions that exist within the traditional family structure, thus experiencing greater gender equality, personal growth, higher levels of autonomy, and mutual respect (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Boehnke, 2007).

Aside from the financial benefits of this partnerships, dual-career couples also report personal benefits. Studies have suggested that individuals in dual-career couples enjoy having a partner with whom they can share the challenges and frustrations of work (Clarke, 2015). And

contrary to what many once believed, both men and women in dual-career partnerships report higher levels of self-esteem because of their lifestyle (Medved, 2016). Having a professional career appears to afford both men and women a sense of accomplishment and competence (Gilbert, 2013).

Despite these opportunities, however, the dual-career lifestyle also precipitates a unique set of challenges, many of which relate to socialization and role expectations, work role conflicts, and family role conflicts (Silberstein, 2014). Challenges arising from coping with two careers in one household are evident. The result of trying to juggle two careers may lead each individual to be less ambitious in terms of his or her own career advancement (Gilbert, 2014). Either partner may make compromises for the sake of the other's career, and the net result may be that each ends up with less than they hoped for in terms of career advancement. The home environment may be a special challenge to the dual-career couple, as two people try to simultaneously meet the demands of their careers and build a family life together.

In addition, many couples have difficulty resolving role expectations, since they may have been socialized to adopt different roles from the ones they exercise in their lives (Moser, 2012). According to the media, a woman who tries to combine career and family is soon reminded that she is flaunting social norms (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 2014). The qualities associated with the role of wife-mother (being nurturing, emotional, and responsive) are seen to be incompatible with those associated with career success (independence, rationality, and assertiveness) (Moser, 2012). The man, too, may struggle to reconcile his understanding of masculine and feminine roles with his lived reality (Gilbert, 2014). For the most part, men are not socialized to fill roles associated with homemaking. Even if a man has the skills, he may perceive that devoting a great deal of time and emotional energy to domestic activities may

negatively affect his career, particularly if he is competing with other men who do not have similar family roles (Ranson, 2012).

Given that the challenges of dual-career professional couples mostly relate to work-role and family-role conflicts and that recent research points to the difficulties dual-career professional couples globally have in finding a suitable balance between work and life (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016), in the next section I review scholarly definitions of work-life balance, setting the stage for a deeper analysis of the concept as it applies to dual-career professional couples in this study.

## **2.2 Work-Life Balance**

### *2.2.1 Difficulties Involved in Defining Work-Life Balance*

Literature abounds on the topic of work-life balance, including multiple definitions of this term. Researchers have struggled to find consensus on what is meant by “balance” and with the implications of establishing a definition (Casper, Vaziri, Wayne, DeHauw, & Greenhaus, 2018). In addition, the terms “work-life balance” and “work-family balance” are frequently used interchangeably, without a clear distinction being made between the two.

Kirchmeyer (2000), an oft-cited author in the management field, has suggested that “those who write about work-life initiatives do not identify routinely what they mean by this term” (p. 81). Guest (2002) also suggested that in much of the debate about work-life balance, language has been employed loosely and imprecisely, and future research must examine concepts of work and life more carefully. Another study noted that “the term ‘work-life balance’ remains problematic” (Lewis, Rapoport, & Gambles, 2003, p. 829) because it over-generalizes the roles played in the non-work domain and oversimplifies the division of spheres. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) pointed out that “the definitions of balance are not entirely consistent

with one another and that the measurement of balance is problematic” (p. 511), Voydanoff (2005) noted how the inconsistent use of the concept of “balance in previous research creates confusion in the literature” (p. 825). Casper and colleagues (2018) state that this lack of consensus on the definition of work-life balance constrains scholars’ ability to investigate the phenomenon in greater detail.

However, one could also argue that a universal definition of work-life balance is untenable, because any definition is embedded in ontological and ideological assumptions. Reiter (2007), for example, has argued that a more appropriate way to define work-life balance would be to first acknowledge the ideology underpinning the definition, and then formulate a definition from the ideological perspective that is best suited to the situation in question. According to Reiter (2007), proponents of different definitions generally provide the logic behind their definition of work-life balance to showcase their rationale, however, some definitions seem more acceptable to particular readers than do others. Reiter explains this phenomenon as that “more acceptable definitions” (p. 274) are likely more aligned with the reader’s values than others. Reiter (2007) further suggests that definitions of work-life balance can be divided into categories based on whether they are applied globally or individually, on a case-by-case basis. “Idealism refers to the extent to which a definition infers that with the right conditions, the desired outcome can always be achieved, versus definitions that accept that this cannot always be the case” (Reiter, 2007, p. 274). When these two characteristics are divided, they yield a 2×2 matrix of ethical ideologies: situationists, absolutists, subjectivists, and exceptionists (Reiter, 2007). For the purposes of this dissertation, on the issue of formulating definitions of work-life balance, I contrast the absolutist position (most often employed in the literature) with the situationist position, which I utilize for this particular study.



Definitions framed from an absolutist perspective accept that rules can prescribe a “right” formula for balance. An example of this is Greenhaus et al.’s (2003) definition of work-family balance, which is characterized by equal time, equal satisfaction, equal involvement in each of the work and home spheres. This definition suggests that individuals in professional occupations, regardless of age, years of experience, personal health and fitness, external stressors, and other social influencers, achieve balance according to the same rule.

Situationist definitions, on the other hand, imply that many different forms of balance are possible. Definitions framed from a situationist position focus on a “fitting” definition of balance for a person that depends on personal context. This closely relates to an interpretivist position, which is founded on the ontological belief that reality is fluid. Moreover, the situationist position suggests that a “fitting” definition of balance also includes an individual’s significant others, resources, and desires, which in turn affirms the interpretivist understanding of reality as socially constructed. Therefore, according to a situationist notion of balance, people can be grouped according to common values and situational variables, such as family structure, life stage, gender, career, or income level, with varying definitions of work-life balance that apply to different segments. Reiter (2007) concludes that situationists would argue balance is not intrinsically valuable. Instead, it is a state that gives rise to forms of satisfaction that are of value to the individual and his or her stakeholders.

In line with the epistemological and ontological assumptions of this study, namely the subjective nature of individuals’ experiences, I adopt Reiter’s (2007) situationist definition of work-life balance: “balance is achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains to a level consistent with the salience of each role for the individual and respective stakeholders” (p. 277). Allowing for terminological variation introduces the possibility of a hierarchy of roles, but in the

spirit of situationism, a hierarchy is not seen to be necessary or desirable for balance. This factor, too, is based on the subjective values of a given individual. In other words, the roles occupied by an individual do not need to be ranked high to low in priority. The priorities of roles change depending on personal circumstances and the overall context.

In addition to defining “balance”, it is vital to address the controversies surrounding what is meant by “life”. Most of the previous research on work-life balance has examined specific areas of conflict or enrichment between the work and family spheres (Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, & Sweet, 2015) and has focused on the family in the domain of “life”. In other words, most work-life balance research examines a specific work-life balance issue: work-family conflict. This occurs when work and family pressures occur simultaneously and the pressures in one domain (for example, work) make it difficult to deal with the pressures in another domain (for example, family) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Most previous research into work-family conflict has sought to identify and test antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; King et al., 2012).

Further analysis of the literature also shows that even concepts of “family” in the work-family construct have tended to be narrow in outlook. In particular, they typically excluded relatives beyond the traditional nuclear family unit, thereby limiting research on work-life balance to conventional configurations of the family (Sturges & Guest, 2004).

In their review, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) identified three commonly used concepts of work-family balance: 1) “the absence of work-family conflict”; 2) “high involvement across multiple roles”; and 3) “high effectiveness and satisfaction across multiple roles” (p. 172). They proposed that work-family balance should be defined “as an overall appraisal of the extent to which individuals’ effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are consistent with

their life values at a given point in time” (p. 174).

Given that this dissertation’s sample population consists of dual-career couples without children, current concepts of work-life balance revolving around parental and familial responsibilities are simply not applicable. The study by Kalliath and Brough (2008) assist in addressing this dilemma. Their analyses of the literature have resulted in extending the “life” sphere beyond the “family” component. The authors argue that previous definitions and measures of work-life balance provide limited value for both the theoretical advancement of the construct and for practical human resource interventions. They present six hallmarks of work-life balance: (1) multiple roles; (2) equity across multiple roles; (3) satisfaction between multiple roles; (4) fulfillment of role salience between multiple roles; (5) a relationship between conflict and facilitation; and (6) perceived control between multiple roles (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). In their review of the literature, Kalliath and Brough (2008) concluded that any assessment of work-life balance should include individual preferences of current role salience (such as an individual’s preference to spend more or less time in work and non-work activities). They also acknowledged that effective balance also leads to positive growth and development within the work and/or non-work domains. Thus, individual work/life priorities can voluntarily change to enable development in non-work activities (private study, extended travel, volunteering) and/or growth at work (intensifying efforts to gain recognition or a promotion) (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Kamenou (2008) has likewise argued in favour of a broader, more diverse approach to the “life” component of the work-life balance equation.

Kalliath and Brough (2008) have defined work-life balance as “the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life priorities” (p. 326). I adopt this definition for the current study with the

caveat that individuals' priorities be understood as socially constructed, namely the result of partners' socialization and communications in a dual-career couple setting, which follows the concept of "linked lives" described in Chapter One.

In summary, for the purposes of this study, I implement the following definition of work-life balance: *"the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities, while achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains to a level consistent with the salience of each role for the individual and respective stakeholders"*.

The principal rationale for the adaptation of this definition is that along with giving voice to the subjective and relational influences on this construct, this definition addresses the need to include "non-family" roles in the work-life balance equation (De Janasz et al., 2013). Most importantly, this definition assumes the principle of compatibility among the roles, thereby adopting the expansion hypothesis, which will be described in more detail in the next section.

### *2.2.2 Overview of Previous Research in Work-Life Balance*

The issue of work-life balance is a well-established concern for individuals and for researchers. Both groups have long debated whether managing several areas of life simultaneously is detrimental or advantageous to women and men (DePasquale et al., 2017). Two competing theories have been proposed: the "scarcity" and "expansion" hypotheses (Marshall & Barnett, 1993). The "scarcity hypothesis" holds that individuals have limited time and energy, and that adding extra roles and responsibilities necessarily creates tensions between competing demands, a sense of overload, and inter-role conflicts (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The "expansion hypothesis" argues that the rewards that accrue with multiple roles (such as greater self-esteem and recognition) offset the costs (Marks, 1977; Marshall &

Barnett, 1993). The findings on this dilemma have been conflicting. While some studies have supported the “expansion hypothesis” (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005; Barnett, Davidson, & Marshall, 1991), others have suggested that women and men with multiple roles experience role overload and conflict (Gordon, Whelan-Berry, & Hamilton, 2007; Gregory, 2009; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

The research has suggested that numerous factors can contribute to work-life stress or to work-life benefits. The scarcity hypothesis suggests that the workload involved in multiple roles would be an important predictor of stress (Muhr, Pedersen, & Alvesson, 2013). Some have found that a greater workload, as measured by demands at home or at work, hours spent at work or in childcare or other domestic tasks, or by the presence of young children, contributes to greater role strain (van Veldhoven & Beijer, 2012). Others have found that the quality of one’s experiences in work or parenting roles is also predictive of role overload and strain (Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013; Mattingly, 2015). The expansion hypothesis has suggested that resources related to work and family roles are important and contribute to greater advantages and fewer strains (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). Researchers have examined the impact of resources such as income, social support, and the division of labour within the family (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011).

Studies indicate that other factors may also play a part in predicting work-life strains and gains. This is particularly important in the context of dual-career professional couples, who, as I established earlier, are known for their considerable investment in their careers. According to previous studies, the level of commitment to the role may be important in predicting work-strains. Marks (1977) suggested that individuals who were overcommitted to one particular role were more likely to experience role stress than were individuals who were equally committed to

multiple roles. Mansor et al. (2015), however, suggest that career women experience minimized role conflict because they know that they are committed to their work role. Women who work but who do not see themselves in careers do not have this advantage. On the other hand, early research undertaken by Baruch, Biener and Barnett (1986) found that employed women with more education, who we might expect to be more committed to their work roles, experience more work-family conflict than do less educated/less committed working women. Seierstad and Kirton (2015) found that extensive time commitment to work was associated with greater work-life conflict for both men and women.

Some early work suggested that sex-role attitudes influence how individuals experience multiple roles. Individuals with traditional attitudes appeared more likely to experience stress, whereas individuals with egalitarian attitudes appeared more likely to experience role gratification (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Marshall & Barnett, 1993). In a dual-career family, the man's attitude towards his partner's employment may also be important, at least to his own well-being (Silberstein, 2014).

### **2.3 Work-Life Balance and Dual-Career Couples: Past Trends**

Since Rapoport and Rapoport's early work (1969, 1976), interest in dual-career couples has increased considerably in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, family studies, and organizational behaviour (Fellows, Chiu, Hill, & Hawkins, 2016; Miano et al., 2015). Prior to the 1980s, research on dual-career professional couples was conducted from a sociological perspective and focused on the family aspect of dual-career couples' lives (e.g., Thomas, Albrecht, & White, 1984). The problems examined and solutions proposed usually centered on adjustments that the couple, rather than the employer, could make to manage the demands of their multiple roles with respect to work-life balance (Sekaran, 1983).

This earlier wave of research was conducted before women constituted a significant percentage of the paid workforce. It was thus assumed that the roles of husbands and wives were equated with the work and home/family domains, respectively, and the two spheres were seen as separate and usually mutually exclusive. The studies investigated dual-career couples' personality variables, role conflicts, marital quality, and coping mechanisms (Aldous, 1978; Bailyn, 1970; Garnets & Pleck, 1979).

Since the 1980s, studies of dual-career couples shifted to an organizational perspective, re-centering the focus from the strategies of couples to those of organizational processes aimed at addressing the dual-career couples' work-life balance challenges (Crossfield et al., 2005; Farris & Haque, 2008; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Newgren, Kellogg, & Gardner, 1987). This research typically argued that the husband's work role was central and limited his ability to share family duties with his wife. This, in turn, pressured the wife to limit her occupational aspirations, participation, and attainment (Loerch, Russell, & Rush, 1989). The research emphasized the advantages and tradeoffs of the dual-career couple lifestyle rather than the difficulties that might arise (Cameron, 1988).

In the early 1980s, studies began to address the tensions and conflicts that dual-career couples encounter in their professional and family lives (Gilbert & Rachlin, 1987). Using the theoretical framework of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload, many researchers explored sources and manifestations of stress, and its impact on satisfaction and performance at work and at home (e.g., Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Numerous studies investigated men's and women's division of roles in dual-career couples and found role conflict to occur when work and family life interfere with each other (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979), causing stress for both partners, especially for couples with

children (Lewis & Cooper, 1987). The studies largely concluded that the partners tended to function according to their traditional roles and that employers tended to endorse traditional gender roles, resulting in marriage difficulties (Tryon & Tryon, 1982).

Around the same time, the first qualitative studies of dual-career couples began to emerge. Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative research suggested that studying couples as a unit rather than as individual actors could lend new insight into the relational nature of careers and overall life. O'Neil and Kinsella-Shaw (1987) examined normative dilemmas in careers and marriage-family relationships, and used an interpretivist lens to investigate how dual-couples' careers are established and terminated in light of social interactions between the partners. However, the majority of the studies conducted along these lines retained an approach grounded in individualism, i.e. studying each partner in the couple as an independent actor (Moen & Yu, 2000).

By the end of the 1980s, research into dual-career couples had coalesced around a common theme: individuals in dual-career couples were experiencing conflict and were faced with a number of challenges as they attempted to successfully integrate their work and family roles (Gilbert & Rachlin, 1987).

## **2.4 Work-Life Balance and Dual-Career Couples: Current Trends and Future Directions**

Due to the influx of women into professional career fields since the 1990s, we have been able to observe the shift in research to dual-career professional couples. Research has begun to focus on how dual-career professional couples manage role conflict and role overload and the ways in which these problems impact personal satisfaction and performance, particularly at work (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005; Elloy & Smith, 2003). The focus of today's studies is mainly



on mothers in dual-career professional couples (Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming'). Research has found that even when women are employed, they perform approximately 80 percent of the household chores and childcare duties, and that the careers of husbands tend to be prioritized over those of wives (Perales, Baxter, & Tai, 2015).

Researchers have recently shifted their attention to fathers, showing that they have become more involved in caring for preschoolers and school-age children when their wives are working (Ranson, 2012). Fathers are changing more diapers, cooking more meals, and reprioritizing the demands of work to accommodate more family responsibilities (Offer & Schneider, 2011). Men also offer increased emotional support to their working female spouses (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005).

In general, research has now concluded that dual-career professional couples allocate and divide family and work responsibilities to create a sense of balance in their lives (e.g., Gatrell et al., 2013; Munn & Chaudhuri, 2015; Pausch, Reimann, Abendroth, & Diewald, 2015). Although achieving this is a challenge for most working parents, those employed in professional and managerial jobs face particular hurdles because of the increase in working hours they have witnessed over the past three decades (Stone & Hernandez, 2013).

In the above review, I identified significant gaps in the literature. One concerns the composition of families in the study samples. The conventional nuclear family has been and continues to be the focus of research on dual-career couples even when scholarly assumptions about family composition no longer reflect reality. For example, the number of couples without children is increasing at a higher rate than the number of couples with children in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). We still lack knowledge about couples who do not have parental responsibilities or who have family responsibilities other than bearing and raising children. In the

last 40 years, studies have largely been limited to how well mothers and fathers manage their conflicting roles while maintaining their careers. It is imperative we begin to consider other family arrangements and demographic groups in our research. Studies that acknowledge changing family norms will broaden our knowledge and lend significant insight into our understandings of dual-career professional couples' work-life balance.

## **2.5 Work-Life Balance and Dual-Career Professional Couples Without Children**

As noted above, the most widely discussed topic with respect to work-life balance has been the conflict between work and family. In focusing on families with children, these studies have tended to imply that workers without partners or children do not encounter difficulties with work-life balance, or at least not to the extent that should warrant employers' concerns. The emerging pattern in this research is that individuals without children are penalized with longer working hours and less flexibility in comparison with their colleagues with children (Munsch, 2016). Recent research has found that individuals without children bear the brunt of our "long hours" culture; about 40 percent of the working hours of women without children consist of unpaid overtime hours, compared with just 26 percent among men without children of the same age (Martin & Kendig, 2013). At the same time, only 17 percent of working parents report unpaid overtime (Martin & Kendig, 2013). On the other hand, women without children earn, on average, 14 percent more than those juggling motherhood and career, a situation dubbed the "motherhood penalty" by sociologists (Benard & Correll, 2015). Employment experts have argued that while the challenges faced by working parents are being acknowledged, the extra burden being placed on individuals without children goes unchecked (Lingard & Francis, 2009).

For decades, top companies have been competing to become family-and child-friendly, offering a host of benefits and flexible work options aimed at attracting and retaining parents.

But as employers promote flexible and part-time work arrangements for parents, non-parents are left working longer hours and, in many cases, picking up the slack (Beauregard, 2014). Casper, Weltman, and Kwesiga (2007) argue that when employees without children are expected to work longer hours yet receive the same rewards from employers as parents with children, this may lead to perceived inequality and reduced organizational commitment.

Recent research from the Centre of Work-Life Policy on Generation X, shows that 61 percent of workers without children feel that their colleagues with children are given more latitude with flexible work arrangements (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). While the participants in this study sympathized with and recognized the challenges facing their colleagues who are parents, they nonetheless wished their lives outside the office could be equally respected. Ryan and Kossek (2008) have reported that some of the interviewees lamented the difficulty of caring for a dog or getting to the gym in a workplace culture where children provided the only legitimate reason to leave the office at a reasonable hour.

While scholarship has largely ignored the issue of work-life balance for dual-career couples without children, some studies have begun to explore the work-life balance of singles without children. Hamilton, Gordon, and Whelan-Berry (2006) examined the work-life conflict of never-married women without children. The findings indicated that this group does experience conflict, specifically work-to-life conflict, and often at similar levels to those of other working women. The findings also suggested that work-life benefits typically provided by organizations are frequently regarded as less important and used less often by never-married women without children than by other working women (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006).

Medved (2014) pointed out a practical impetus for examining the issue of career interference among employees without children specifically: many companies in *Fortune*

magazine's list of "100 Best Companies to Work For" have embraced broader policies and programs aimed at work-life balance. The numbers of childless employees have been increasing, especially among female managers (Wood & Newton, 2006). Instituting human resource policies that potentially neglect or even disadvantage employees without children risks backlash (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Not only has the definition of family leave policies grown more flexible, but practices such as allowing employees paid volunteer time or open-use sabbaticals are becoming more commonplace (Morris, Heames, & McMillan, 2011). Despite the presence of these progressive practices, however, the organizational research literature, although beginning to adopt the term "work-life" over "work-family", has not sufficiently explained or assessed the implications of this broader concept.

## **2.6 Work-Life Balance and Dual-Career Professional Couples: Gaps and Problems in the Research Literature**

Several noteworthy issues emerge from this exploration of the research on work-life balance and dual-career couples. For this study, it is necessary to address in particular the theoretical and methodological inadequacies evident in the existing literature.

### *2.6.1 Theoretical Issues*

The first and perhaps most important gap in the literature is a paucity of research on the non-work domain outside the family. It is necessary to clarify what the non-work domain consists of to investigate how it affects dual-career couples.

Until now, the work-life balance literature has primarily emphasized familial obligations and how they are managed alongside work responsibilities. Whereas work has generally been

well defined (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2013), there is far less consensus about what non-work/life comprises. Non-work may refer to activities and responsibilities within the family domain, and this aspect of the definition is thoroughly addressed in existing studies, but non-work may also refer to activities and responsibilities outside an individual's family situation. This facet of non-work/life has been clearly neglected. Non-work generally appears to be regarded as synonymous with leisure and "spare time" when couples or individuals do not have children (Cooper, Quick, & Schabracq, 2015). The non-work and life component of work-life balance equation may, however, involve activities similar to those of the work domain, and other responsibilities (such as household duties, caregiving, and social obligations) suggesting that these activities should not be viewed simply as leisure or spare time (Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming'; Taylor, 2002).

A second gap relates to the changing nature of what constitutes work and non-work. For example, since various flexible work arrangements are now available in some organizational contexts, such as on-site food preparation facilities, gyms and doctors' offices, boundaries between work and non-work are fading. Personal activities may be brought into some workplaces, and some working hours may be spent on personal activities (Tarver, 2013). Working the standard "nine-to-five" is no longer the norm for all professionals and many work additional hours and/or non-standard hours (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). These changes are especially relevant to dual-career couples whose family structure does not include children. While professional dual-career couples with children need to allocate time to family, couples without parental responsibilities may be expected to integrate their work/non-work spheres to meet employers' expectations, and even to cover for colleagues with children. Employers may tend to assume that all "non-work" time for couples without children is simply "leisure" time.

Although leisure time is certainly a vital facet of an individual's life, it is not the only aspect of life outside of work for couples without children. For example, couples without children are about as likely as other segments of the population to be involved in various kinds of community groups. Not surprisingly, they are less likely to be involved in volunteer activities connected with schools and educational organizations, and activities for children and youth (Brummelhuis & Van Der Lippe, 2010). However, this lower level of involvement appears to be offset by greater levels of involvement in other kinds of volunteerism, including with animal welfare groups, business groups, and health groups such as hospital auxiliaries (Brummelhuis & Van Der Lippe, 2010).

De Janasz et al. (2013) considered these issues and asked whether a family should remain the primary unit of analysis in social life. They called for future studies to refine our understanding by examining work and non-family issues. However, this call remains largely unheeded. Moreover, as I have stated in the previous section, the majority of the studies on work-life balance domain have retained an approach grounded in theoretical and methodological individualism, thereby developing hypotheses about and investigating the work-family stressors and well-being of individual workers (Moen & Yu, 2000).

### *2.6.2 Methodological Issues*

The first methodological gap in the literature on work-life balance and dual-career partnerships concerns the samples used in the research, which consist mostly of dual-career couples with children. This point is one of several indications that available studies on this topic lack a focus on heterogeneity. Casper et al. (2007) further noted that along with excluding families that are not typical nuclear families, reported samples have also tended to preclude

diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. The extant literature has also been criticised for focusing on heterosexual couples, thereby prioritizing a heteronormative view of the family, ignoring LGBTQ couples (Languilaire & Carey, 2017).

The second methodological gap in the literature on work-life balance and dual-career partnerships concerns the fact that in most of the research, the employee is regarded as the sole unit of analysis. This is surprising, as most academics and researchers have agreed that employees function in social systems (including families, friends, sports, and communities) and that their experiences can affect others in their social systems (Barnett, 1998). Moen and Yu (2000) elaborated on Barnett's (1998) concern that the full social context is neglected. They added that social scientists in the past have adopted the discourse of balance, conflict, and strain by investigating work/family stressors that pertain to individual workers. They argue that, in the case of dual-earner families, the focus should be on couple-level lines of adaptation and how the lines shift or remain constant through life, which is consistent with the interests and concerns raised by Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002).

The authors mentioned in this section call our attention to the lack of research at the couple level and urge scholarship to move away from individual-level analysis in work-life balance research. Despite the growing numbers of dual-career couples and the heightened interest in the interface between family and work, little has been done to address the issue of work-life balance in dual-career couples.

Finally, it is worth considering how theoretical orientations and the operationalization of their related constructs in empirical research have evolved in response to, or at least parallel with, the increasingly higher profile of work-life balance issues more broadly in society (Chang et al., 2010). In their critical review, Chang et al. (2010) showed that interest in the topic

exploded after 2000. Still, most studies have remained rooted in positivist and quantitative approaches. In the 245 papers reviewed by Chang et al. (2010), only 22.4 percent employed a qualitative methodology. In their review, Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) concur with this finding, attesting that there continues to be only “a limited number of qualitative endeavours” (p. 382) in work-life balance research. Rectifying this is essential to better answering exploratory questions.

The majority of work-life balance research has continued to reduce “life” to the traditional nuclear family unit; diversity is not addressed and key factors are examined in an individualist manner that lacks social complexity (Özbilgin et al., 2011). Emslie and Hunt (2009) have further reported that although several quantitative studies attempt to examine work-life balance, they largely failed to show how dual-career couples understand and negotiate the intersections between work and non-work activities. It is now time to answer this call and examine work-life balance in dual-career couples without children from an interpretivist perspective, acknowledging the relational nature of this phenomenon.



## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to explore, analyze, and most importantly, theorize the work-life balance experiences and contexts of dual-career professional couples without children. This chapter outlines the research methodology followed in this study. It begins with an explanation of the theoretical framework chosen for this study and then explains the study's design, participants, data-collection methods, and analytical procedures employed to explore the following four research questions:

1. How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance?
2. What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children?
3. How do dual-career professional couples without children experience their work-life balance?
4. How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

Crotty (1998) defines the theoretical framework underlying a study's research design as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology" (p. 3) and argues that different theoretical research perspectives connect to particular epistemological and ontological stances. These epistemological and ontological stances inform the research process and govern the theoretical basis of the study. In turn, theoretical bases are implicit in research questions and inform the

researcher's choice of methodology, which then informs the choice of research methods employed.

### *3.1.1 Social Constructionism*

Social constructionism is concerned with how each individual is shaped by his or her experiences and interactions (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004). Given that this study is concerned with the meanings and experiences that inform work-life balance, social constructionism offers a particularly relevant theoretical basis. First, it assumes that much of human life occurs in response to social and interpersonal influences. Second, it engages directly with the idea that perceptions and experiences of reality are socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, knowledge is contextualized within relationships rather than being a product or possession of the individual (Burr, 2003). Thus, social constructionism allows one to move from an individualistic to a relational perspective, stepping into a space shared with others, a space where knowledge, understanding, and multiple perspectives are created and recreated. By situating this study within social constructionism, I aimed to explore couples' understandings and experiences of work-life balance as a socially constructed process.

Several key assumptions underlie social constructionism. Epistemologically, it views knowledge as created, rather than pre-existing and thus "waiting" to be discovered. It also assumes a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge of any given phenomenon (Kham, 2016). It challenges the notion that knowledge is based on objective, unbiased observations, and calls into question dominant positivist approaches in work-life balance research. Finally, it assumes that socially constructed and negotiated views of the world can assume a variety of forms and lead to associated patterns of action that vary from one individual to another.

Given the underlying assumptions of social constructionism, I have assumed that couples' perceptions and experiences of work-life balance occur through regular interactions between the partners in the course of their daily life. From this perspective then, couples would be understood to experience work-life balance as a product, not of objective observation of the world, but of the social process and interactions in which they are engaged.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

Social constructionism favours a qualitative research approach (Walker, 2015) because it is particularly useful for examining the ways experience is created and imbued with meaning (Gephart, 2004). Qualitative research is an “umbrella term, covering a wide variety of interpretive techniques” (Gephart & Richardson, 2008, p. 30) that often draws on a combination of observations, interviews, and documents to express meanings and human interactions. Qualitative research utilizes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to explore the subject at hand and often examines phenomena in their natural environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This allows the researcher to understand the broader contexts of subjective experiences. Thus qualitative researchers emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and participant, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this sense, the qualitative design I used allowed couples to openly express feelings about work, life, and personal perceptions of work-life balance, the primary foci of this study.

### **3.3 Overall Research Design**

Research design refers to the strategy whereby a researcher chooses to integrate different components of the study in a coherent and logical way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and

Tisdell (2016) maintain that although the qualitative paradigm offers a generalized framework for the study of meaning, its tangible expressions are mediated through particular activities organized within a selected theoretical perspective. The research design of this qualitative study incorporated an analysis of data collected from a series of semi-structured interviews that sought to elicit the meanings participants attach to work-life balance both individually and as a couple, supplemented with personal examples from their experiences managing work-life balance.

The next sections outline this study's methods concerning ethics approval, sample selection, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The intention of the sections is to render the research process more transparent and accessible. However, it must be noted that although the research process is here being presented in a linear fashion, the process I used was largely iterative, moving back and forth between data collection and analysis.

### **3.4 Ethics Approval**

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines (see Appendix A for Certificate of Ethics Approval).

### **3.5 Sample Selection**

#### *3.5.1 Sample Criteria*

To address the research questions of this study, recruitment needed to meet the following primary inclusion criteria: Subjects must be dual-career heterosexual couples without children, employed in professional occupations across North America.

### 3.5.2 *Sampling Techniques*

Sampling techniques refer to how participants of a research study are chosen from the wider population (Ratner, 2008). I have employed a sequence of three sampling techniques for this study: purposeful, theoretical, and snowball sampling.

*3.5.2.1 Purposeful sampling.* Purposeful sampling requires identifying populations and settings prior to data collection (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). In accordance with Schatzman and Strauss (1973) and Patton (2005), my initial sample selection was driven by the parameters of the research questions, which stipulated the couples' relationship status (married or cohabiting as a common law couple), professional occupations, and no children as starting points. Thompson (1999) refers to data collected via purposeful sampling as "tentative theoretical jumping-off points from which to begin theory development" (p. 816). I reached out to personal contacts whom I knew met the criteria. This initial stage of sampling yielded four couples. The recruitment of further participants beyond personal contacts is described in greater detail in the section "Participant Recruitment".

*3.5.2.2 Theoretical sampling.* In analyzing the first few interviews, theoretical themes such as career centrality, importance of family, life stage, etc. began to emerge. I then adopted theoretical sampling to expand the sample. Glaser (1978) defines theoretical sampling as the process of data collection whereby the researcher collects, codes, and analyzes the data and decides the next collection and theoretical steps. While the original sample of four couples represented a younger population cluster (25–34 years old), interviews suggested that the career and life stages of each partner may influence the couple's understandings and experiences of

work-life-balance. To further investigate this possibility, I began looking for couples in mid-to-late career and life stages.

In interviews with the fifth couple, it became evident that work-life balance can be influenced by the career and/or family orientation of the respective participant, hence influencing the couple's overall experience of work-life balance. Both partners described themselves as being extremely career oriented inasmuch as they identified with their work roles and saw them as crucial to their lives. The participants also suggested that having a similar orientation as their partner lent greater alignment to their mutual understandings of work-life balance. This finding suggested that partners with opposing career and family orientations may understand work-life differently. While it was not feasible to identify this characteristic in the prospective sample ahead of time, this was something I kept in mind throughout the recruitment process.

*3.5.2.3 Snowball sampling.* While still relying on theoretical sampling, I asked study participants to suggest additional participants from among their acquaintances who would fit the sampling criteria. Snowball sampling is arguably the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research (Noy, 2008) and is sometimes used as the main sampling technique. However, in this study it was used as an auxiliary means, employed to enrich sampling clusters and help me access additional participants when other contact avenues had been exhausted.

While snowball sampling has been criticized for yielding sample groups that are overly homogeneous (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017), given the parameters and objectives of the study, I believed it to be the most appropriate method. In addition, couples' concerns about being judged for their decision to remain childless meant that many were hesitant to participate in the research (Debest & Mazuy, 2014). Using the snowball technique, I was able to mitigate any

anxiety since couples were more willing to participate if they had a friend or colleague who had also been interviewed and could vouch for the study.

### **3.6 Participant Recruitment**

I invited participation in the study via an email that outlined the purpose of the study. The email also included demographic and informed consent forms that defined the ethical considerations of the study, touching on matters of confidentiality and voluntary withdrawal, among others (see Appendix B). The four couples that responded positively initially were personal contacts. These couples suggested a further 10 couples and provided me with their contact information for recruitment.

In order to recruit more couples for the study, I distributed a call for participation on the “NotMom”<sup>2</sup> website and the “Confessions of a Childfree Woman”<sup>3</sup> Facebook page. As articulated on its website, its mission is to spotlight the unique perspectives, legacies, and dimensions of a woman’s life without motherhood through blogs, events, and social networks. Because the website is a forum for mothers without children, I felt it would be an appropriate source of additional sample recruits. The “Confessions of Childfree Woman” Facebook page is administered by Marcia Drut-Davis, a “childfree” author who has written about her decision not to have children. As the page has thousands of followers who do not have children, I deemed it a useful venue from which to distribute a call for participation in the study. The “NotMom” website yielded seven couples as prospective participants, while six couples from the “Confessions of Childfree Woman” Facebook page contacted me to take part in the study.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thenotmom.com>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/childfreereflections/>

It is important to note, however, that not every interested couple met the criteria for sample selection. Two couples indicated that one of the partners had children who, although not residing with the couple, required certain forms of parental care from one or both of the participants. These couples, therefore, could not be considered “without children”. In another three couples, only one partner was willing to be interviewed, which was problematic because the study focused on couples’ interpretations of work-life balance. Another couple was eliminated from the pool because the husband had been unemployed for the previous decade, therefore the couple did not meet the professional dual-career couple criteria.

### **3.7 Final Sample**

The final sample consisted of 21 couples (42 participants). Ten couples were between 25 and 40 years of age and in the early to middle stages of their professional careers. Six couples were between 40 and 55 years of age and were in the middle to late stages of their careers. The remaining five couples were between 55 and 70 years of age and were in the late stages of their career.

All of the participants were employed at the time of being interviewed. Their occupations included professions such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, architects, veterinarians, accountants, managers in various industries (human resources, marketing, finance), and information technology specialists.

Data saturation occurs when further collection of more data would not yield any new information on the subject being investigated or reveal any additional themes (Denzin & Lincoln,



2011). Originally, I proposed a sample size of 15 couples, but 19 were needed before data saturation was achieved. The last two couples were interviewed to confirm that data saturation had been reached. Demographic information about the participants can be found in Appendix D. Further details about the final sample can be found in Appendix E. The demographic data sheet is presented in the Appendix C.

### **3.8 Data Collection – Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing is a vital research method for gathering information on people's attitudes, opinions, and life experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The aim is to engage phenomena from the vantage point of how and why, rather than how much or how many, which would be the typical focus of quantitative studies (Bischof, Comi, & Eppler, 2011). In qualitative interviews, the researcher allows data to emerge from the interviewees' accounts and inductively reconstructs clusters of meaning and actions (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Given the inductive nature of this study, I used interviews to collect the data.

#### *3.8.1 Interview Formats*

In qualitative research, interviews can range from a structured (or close-ended) to an unstructured (or ethnographic) format. Structured interviews consist of a list of predetermined questions that allow for little or no variation nor for follow-up questions when certain responses warrant elaboration (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Such interviews are relatively quick and easy to administer and may be useful if clarification of certain questions is required (Dörfler & Eden, 2014). A structured method of data collection would not have been useful for this study since the aim here was to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of dual-career professional

couples' experiences of work-life balance. This required exploring themes that were important to the couples, rather than those determined by the existing literature.

Research indicates that no interview is ever truly unstructured. However, some are so unstructured that they are roughly equivalent to guided conversations (Gephart & Richardson, 2008). They stem from anthropological ethnography, in which data is gathered through observing participants and taking field notes, as researchers either observe from the sidelines or directly participate in the activities of those they are studying (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). During this process, the investigator identifies one or more key informants to interview on an ongoing basis and takes short notes while observing and questioning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Key informants are selected for their knowledge, their role in a setting, and their willingness and ability to serve as translators, teachers, mentors, or commentators for the researcher (Gephart, 2004). The interviewer elicits information about the meaning by observing behaviours, interactions, artifacts, and rituals, with questions emerging over time as the investigator continues to learn about the setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While unstructured interviews provide deep, insightful information about the research subject, this format would also not benefit my study. Given the methodology of ethnography and the personal nature of my research questions, this would require me to be immersed in the lives of my participants to observe their daily lives in both professional and personal settings, which would not be possible due to time constraints and the unlikely willingness of subjects to allow me to do so.

### *3.8.2 Interview Guide*

Following Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, and Kangasniemi's (2016) framework for conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews, I developed an interview guide (rather than specific

interviews questions) to ensure that the sequence of topics was consistent and to allow participants to bring up additional ones (see Appendix F for the full interview guide). The interview guide was driven by both the research questions and emerging themes in the literature. Its format was loose and flexible, which allowed for natural dialogue during the interview and the opportunity for me to alter the order of questions or easily transition from one question to another. I intended it to generate answers from participants that were spontaneous, in-depth, unique, and vivid (Baumbusch, 2010; Dearnley, 2005). For example, to answer the first research question (“How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance?”) the line of inquiry addressing this research question was designed to elicit themes couples associated with defining work-life balance. Such questions included: How do you define work-life balance? How do you think your partner would answer this question? What about for you as a couple?

To address the second research question (What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children?), participants were asked to describe their life outside of their work domain. I also asked them to identify and rank what impacted their work-life balance as a couple. Such questions included: Please tell me about your work/home life. What do you do outside of work? What factors outside of work impact your work-life balance? Which factors do you feel have the strongest impact on your work-life balance as a couple and why? Moreover, I invited participants to elaborate on these factors by following questions up with “Why?” and “How?” In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I noted that antecedents of work-life balance are a dominant theme in the literature. However, the findings of previous studies largely pertain to dual-career professional couples with children, as research on dual-career professional couples without children remains scarce. Thus, my aim was

to identify important factors by asking participants to describe what they felt affected their work-life balance and how or why this was the case.

The third research question (“How do dual-career professional couples without children experience their work-life balance?”) examined the outcomes of work-life balance experiences of research participants. The themes I explored addressed work-life conflict and work-life enrichment, or a combination thereof, at different stages of couples’ lives. Questions in this portion of the interview included: How do you feel about your work-life balance? Do you feel in control of your work-life balance? Do you experience conflict when it comes to your work-life balance? Do you feel your work enriches your personal life and vice versa?

Finally, the fourth research question (“How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?”) focused on tactics couples used to manage their preferred level of work-life balance. As in the case of the first research question, the literature on management strategies for work-life balance is vast and multifaceted. However, comparatively little is known about management tactics of dual-career professional couples without children (see Chapter Two, Literature Review). To explore this research question, interviewees were asked to share their management strategies. Questions in this portion of the interview included: How do you manage your work-life balance as a couple? Please give me examples of management tactics you use. Have you found certain strategies for yourself to maintain your work-life balance? What about as a couple? Do you think you have to make a conscious effort to manage your work-life balance as a couple?

### *3.8.3 Conducting the Interviews*

Data was collected through face-to-face and Skype interviews. The face-to-face

interviews (24 participants/12 couples from the Greater Toronto Area) took place in a private office in downtown Toronto or participants' offices after work. Skype interviews were conducted with the remaining 18 participants (nine couples) whose geographical locations prevented in-person interviews.

Sullivan (2012) states that digital technologies have multiple potential possibilities for data collection in social research. As Markham (2005) suggests, "a researcher's reach is potentially global, data collection is economical, and transcribing is no more difficult than cutting and pasting" (p. 255). Sullivan (2012) further proposes that the benefits of using Skype and other online communication programs outweigh the drawbacks, especially in lieu of in-person interviews. With a web camera, the level of interaction achieved is comparable to an onsite equivalent in terms of nonverbal and social cues (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). Furthermore, Skype encourages interviewees with time and place limitations to participate in research if in-person interviews are difficult to arrange (Janghorban et al., 2014).

Both the in-person and Skype interviews were approximately 1 - 1.5 hours in length. They were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was allocated a pseudonym that was identified at the beginning of each session and recorded before the start of the interview. During the transcription process, any identifying information was removed. In addition, written permission was obtained to record interviews via an informed-consent form, and participants were told they could request the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

### **3.9 Individual and Couple Interview Formats**

#### *3.9.1 Individual Interviews*

One of the necessary choices in my study was whether to interview members of dual-career professional couples individually or as a couple. There are several advantages to conducting individual interviews. First, they enable the researcher to gain deep insights into the respondents' personal perspectives (Brinkmann, 2014). In the context of this study, interviewing the members of each couple separately also enabled each partner to be the sole focus of the interview, creating space for them to elaborate on various topics more fully. In such a context, participants may be less likely to hold back or alter information that could negatively affect their relationship with their partner. Therefore, one advantage of separate interviews is that participants were better able to express their own views than they would have been if interviewed jointly (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2014). The concern is that when interviewed together, interviewees may be hesitant to contradict one another, or they might defer to the other on certain topics. This does not necessarily mean that a participant was doing something without his or her partner's knowledge or consent; it merely recognizes that people's experiences are not identical to those of their partners and that capturing these unique perspectives might be easier in separate interviews (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011).

Potential disadvantages of interviewing partners separately involve participants' concerns about the researcher breaching confidentiality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In other words, participants could become concerned about the interviewer sharing information that they may not want their partner to know. Therefore, maintaining confidentiality concerning the content of interviews is imperative.

A second concern is that data contamination could occur when interviewing members of a couple separately. Warin, Solomon, and Lewis (2007) cautioned that partners may discuss the interview beforehand to coordinate stories. This can be mitigated by the researcher cautioning

the interviewees to refrain from such discussions with their partners, as Fennell (2008) did. Participants who had been interviewed first were asked not to tell their partner what had happened in their interview for fear of influencing their partners' answers.

### *3.9.2 Joint (Couple) Interviews*

Bell and Campbell (2014) state that participants may feel more comfortable when being interviewed in pairs, as members can provide support to each other during difficult discussions. Other researchers have reported that in some cases, conducting joint interviews allowed couples to help each other remember particular details of the researched phenomenon (Sakellariou, Boniface, & Brown, 2013). Finally, joint interviews can highlight disparities and areas of tension within the couple on certain topics (Bell & Campbell, 2014).

On the other hand, couple interviews can be challenging to analyze (Mellor, Slaymaker, & Cleland, 2013). They can enable individuals to blend their perspectives and present themselves in agreement on the topic, which can have the benefit of reducing conflict (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, couple interviews can take longer because more time is required for responses because multiple people are participating (Mellor et al., 2013).

### *3.9.3 Use of Individual Interviews*

Given the advantages and disadvantages of both individual and joint interviews, my preferred mode for this study was to interview each partner separately, while still using the dyad as the unit of analysis. Conducting individual interviews enabled each participant to discuss work-life balance from his or her own perspective, without having to consider the reaction of the

other, especially when voicing criticism or bringing up sensitive topics (Morris, 2001). However, because the unit of study was a dyad with a relationship and joint history, the partner was still “virtually” present in the interview space. As Schutz (1970) described, “the existence of others is no more questionable to us than the existence of an outer world. . . . We are simply born into a world with others” (p. 163). Schultz continues, “for even in the natural standpoint, a man experiences his neighbors even when the latter are not at all present in the bodily sense” (Schutz, 1970, p. 170). Separate interviews also enabled me to examine the overlap and contrast between the interpretation each member of the couple had of their work-life balance, providing a more “we/I-oriented perspective” (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010, p. 1644). Most importantly, this interviewing strategy provided the ability to capture the individual’s subjective version of work-life balance within the dyad without relinquishing either the dyadic or the individual perspective.

Another concern with conducting joint interviews included the potential for self-censoring, which occurs when one partner withholds certain observations, instead conforming to the opinions of a “self-appointed” expert (the other partner). As Jowett and O’Toole (2006) point out, there is also the possibility for one partner exaggerating his/her account to impress the other partner or the researcher, or for “peace makers” to steer discussions toward enforced mutual agreement. Each of these scenarios can undermine the need to illuminate contrasting opinions and experiences.

Practically speaking, one consideration guiding my decision to interview couples separately was the reportedly lower response rates recorded in joint couple interviewing (Kim, 2001). Given the sensitive topic of this study and in line with previous research (Kim, 2001), I suspected that I would face resistance to participation from male partners. Previous research also notes that arranging joint interviews can be a logistically complicated process (Gephart, 2004).



Finally, joint interviews are also labour intensive and costly for the researcher, given the extra planning involved and increased transcription time.

### **3.10 Transcription**

I transcribed each of the interviews myself in order to ensure that I was deeply embedded in the data. As part of this process, I read all transcripts twice to allow myself to be fully immersed in them prior to the analysis. “Immersion usually involves ‘repeated reading’ of the data, and reading the data in an active way, searching for meanings, patterns and so on” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16). During this phase, I took notes and marked ideas for first-order coding.

### **3.11 Data Analysis**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) have observed that qualitative data analysis is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process that does not move forward in a linear, orderly fashion. This was, indeed, the case for this study.

#### *3.11.1 First-Order Themes*

Following Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton’s (2013) suggestion, a diverse range of informant codes and categories emerged in the first phase of this study. Keeping with the suggested protocol for analyzing qualitative data (Gioia et al., 2013), in this first phase I aimed to adhere to participants’ terms, making little attempt to distill categories. This phase resulted in 134 codes. “Codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst, and refer to the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). According to Gioia and colleagues (2013), it is not unusual at this stage for the researcher to have the sense of being lost or overwhelmed in the data. However, as these authors suggested, “You gotta get lost before you

can get found” (p. 20).

In this study, I did the first-order coding manually. I worked systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each item and identifying anything noteworthy that could serve as a basis for repeated patterns (themes) across the data set. Some of the codes that emerged were: “spending time with extended family”, “volunteering”, “responsibilities for pets”, “fluidity of work-life balance”, “division of domestic chores according to gender roles”, and “making rules to obtain balance”. Once the list of first-order codes was completed, I transferred the codes to NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tool, where I conducted the remaining phases of analysis.

*3.10.1.1 NVivo in qualitative research.* Research suggests that the primary function of CAQDAS is to assist researchers with collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Fielding, Fielding, & Hughes, 2013). Moreover, studies claim that the use of such programs has both increased the legitimacy of qualitative research and addressed criticisms about its rigour (Fisher, 2017). In general, CAQDAS programs are useful for organizing, categorizing, and searching data, particularly when this involves the cumbersome process of managing large quantities of text.

Despite the rise in use of CAQDAS programs, their reception in the academic community has been mixed. Some argue that their association of numbers with coding encourages inappropriate replications of quantitative techniques or creates an artificial distance between researcher and the data (Zamawe, 2015). This can lead to an oversimplification of the data because qualitative aspects have been removed from it (Fisher, 2017). Furthermore, there is an implicit assumption that interaction with the data is somehow more “natural” when paper and pencil are used (Bergin, 2011). However, the fact remains that computers, even the most basic

word-processing software, have become an unavoidable component of research. In addition, some scholars have criticized the typically generic formats of software tools out of concern that such rigid interfaces prevent a more flexible or customized approach to data organization (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014; Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016).

While there is merit to these concerns, others have argued that CAQDAS programs merely facilitate the collection and organization of the data. Even when utilizing software tools, researchers must actively interpret, conceptualize, and examine relationships as well as document decisions and develop theories (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004). NVivo and similar programs are not responsible for the difficult work of analysis (Bringer et al., 2004) and researchers must decide how to employ them in service of a study. In line with this, utilizing NVivo assisted me in managing sizable amounts of information and alleviated “the drudgery of handling qualitative data” (Lee & Esterhuizen, 2000, p. 237).

### *3.11.2 Second-Order Themes*

In the second phase of data analysis, I sorted codes into potential subthemes within NVivo and collated the relevant coded data extracts within these subthemes. This has been described as a process of distilling germane categories into a more manageable number, which in the case of this study amounted to 34 (Gioia et al., 2013). I then utilized “mind maps” to sort codes into categories of subthemes. At this stage, I formed subthemes from several initial codes such as “subjective nature of work-life balance”, “organizational factors”, “personal factors”, and “cyclical nature of work-life balance”. I merged codes that conveyed similar or identical ideas, for example, “spending time with parents” and “spending time with siblings” were consolidated into “spending time with extended family”.

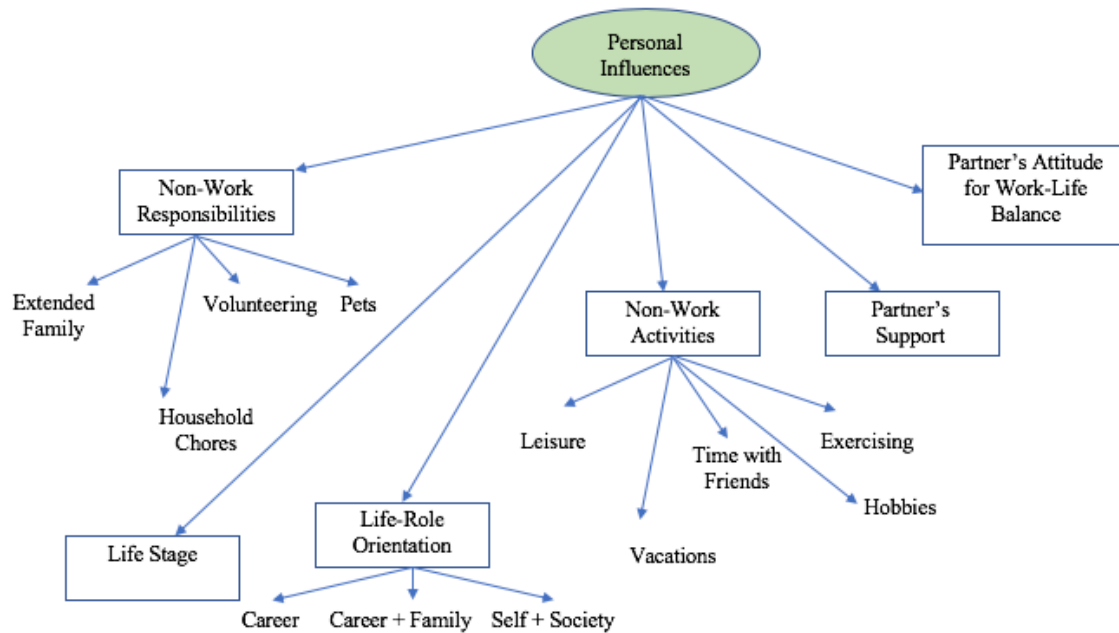
In accordance with Gioia and colleagues (2013), this exercise led to the formation of

additional interview questions that informed subsequent interviews. I engaged topics that were increasingly focused on concepts and tentative relationships that emerged from previously conducted interviews. Some examples of this include questions pertaining to the degree of congruence between the life and career stages of both partners in the couple, the meanings they attached to work-life balance management strategies, and the degree of alignment between partners' ideas of and desires for work-life balance.

### *3.11.3 Aggregate Dimensions*

In the final stage of analysis, I reviewed the subthemes I had identified previously as second-order themes. This exercise involved refining those subthemes and organizing them under four themes guided by the research questions: “couples’ definitions of work-life balance and contextual influences on this definition”, “couples’ experiences of work-life balance”, and “couples’ management of work-life balance”. During this stage, some of the subthemes were eliminated, as there was insufficient support for them in the data set. Other subthemes were broken down to form two to three distinct subthemes. For example, I broke down the “influences” subtheme into three subthemes: “social influences”, “organizational influences”, and “personal influences”. The node tree presented in Figure 1 below demonstrates how I analyzed personal influences on work-life balance. I used six distinct categories to describe these influences, each focusing on significant impacts on couples’ work-life balance and their interpretations of it. In addition, some of these six categories were further broken down into subcategories of influences on couples’ work-life balance. These will be discussed further in the findings chapters (Chapters 4,5, and 6) of this dissertation.

Figure 1: Node Tree: Personal Influences on Work-Life Balance



The aim of this exercise was to ensure that the data within the themes and subthemes cohered meaningfully, while maintaining clear and identifiable distinctions between subthemes and themes. As I continued to collect data, I defined and further refined the subthemes and themes and analyzed the data within them.

### 3.12 Evaluating the Rigour of the Study

A significant issue in scientific research is the ability to demonstrate that “the research presented is intellectually accurate, thorough and trustworthy, for without rigour, research is meaningless” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 13). Since the rise of qualitative research in the organizational sciences, the question of what constitutes rigour and how it should be appraised has become a matter of debate (Alasuutari, 2010). Although some question the use of criteria to establish rigour (e.g. Bochner, 2000), Tracy (2010) points out that criteria in

themselves are useful inasmuch as they provide guidelines for researchers to learn, practice, and perfect their efforts and criteria, thus providing a path to expertise.

Sandberg (2005) suggests that while criteria are necessary for justifying knowledge produced within interpretive approaches, those adopted from positivist research should be rejected. Instead, Sandberg proposes that truth claims are in fact made possible in qualitative inquiry by using criteria consistent with the basic assumptions underlying a particular research paradigm. Sandberg introduces three criteria for evaluating qualitative research: communicative, pragmatic, and transgressive validity.

#### *3.12.1 Communicative Validity*

In the beginning stages of research, communicative validity can be achieved by establishing a community of interpretation. Specifically, the production of knowledge presupposes an understanding between the researcher and research participants about what they are doing. In this study, I described the purpose of the research in the initial email sent to prospective participants. I then provided a detailed description of the study's purpose in person prior to the commencement of the interview. In addition, I used dialogue in the interviews to convey my openness towards the research subject and to establish communicative validity.

#### *3.12.2 Pragmatic Validity*

Sandberg (2005) suggests that although communicative validity enables researchers to check the coherence of their interpretation, it does not pay sufficient attention to potential discrepancies between participants' words and actions. To achieve pragmatic validity, I occasionally checked information obtained in interviews by intentionally misinterpreting the participants' statements during the interviews to observe their reaction and allow for further

elaboration of the misinterpreted statement.

Moreover, member checks were performed with 11 participants. This technique involves testing interpretations and conclusions drawn by the researcher with participants from whom the data were originally obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Member checks were done a few weeks after the interviews and allowed participants to correct errors and challenge interpretations they saw as inaccurate. They also provided an opportunity for respondents to volunteer additional information. Finally, this technique allowed participants to assess and confirm the adequacy of the data and preliminary results.

In addition, I regularly discussed the data with my supervisors, comparing and contrasting the interpretation of the findings to ensure further pragmatic validity.

### *3.12.3 Transgressive Validity*

Unlike communicative and pragmatic validity, which encourage the researcher to search primarily for consistent interpretations of lived experiences, transgressive validity helps researchers become aware of their taken-for-granted frameworks (Sandberg, 2005). To establish transgressive validity after the initial first-order coding, I began the second round of first-order coding by searching for difference and contradictions in the data. This crosschecking allowed for the most accurate interpretation of work-life balance perceptions of the participants.

### *3.12.4 Reliability*

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the exact replicability of the processes used and results. Given the diverse paradigms of qualitative research, however, this definition of reliability has been challenged as epistemologically problematic (Lewis, 2009). Hence, the essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with consistency. One strategy to ensure

reliability is the phenomenological epoche, which aims to ensure that the researcher withholds personal theories and prejudices when interpreting lived experiences. In this study, I was cautious in applying my own theories and prejudices in order to remain as open as possible to the lived experiences of the participants. I took field notes throughout each interview and kept a reflexive journal to contribute to the rigour of the study.

### **3.13 Summary**

In this chapter, I have explained the rationale for choosing a qualitative design for the current study and described how the design accomplished the research goals. I further elaborated on the appropriateness of the study design and the data collection and analysis. Finally, I concluded by demonstrating the rigour of the data and procedures addressing the quality and trustworthiness of the study. In the next three chapters, I present the findings of the study.



## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **4.0 RESULTS: RESEARCH QUESTIONS ONE AND TWO**

The results section of my dissertation consists of three chapters that report the findings of the research questions. In this chapter, I present the findings pertaining to the first two research questions: (1) How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance? And (2) What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children? However, it is important to note that prior to addressing the research questions, the first section of this chapter categorizes the couples who comprise the sample base of this dissertation into four types in terms of their career and/or family orientations as identified in the data analysis. Next, I present several definitions of the work-life balance as articulated by the couples, highlighting the differences and similarities between these definitions. I conclude the chapter by examining the main contextual factors that participants identified as shaping their definitions of the work-life balance.

#### **4.1 Categories of Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children**

When asked to discuss work-life balance, participants' responses gravitated toward several dominant themes. While categorization of couples was not my intent nor did I have a research question pertaining to different categories of couples, career and/or family orientation surfaced as a key influence on couples' understanding and experience of work-life balance in the early stages of data collection. Specifically, participants often qualified their explanations of work-life balance with career or family roles that were important to them as individuals and as a couple. For example, when Rachel was asked to define how she balanced work and life, she set the stage for her definition by identifying the significance of her family orientation:

*I am a caring person by nature, I love taking care of my husband. I enjoy doing things at home and making sure everything is tidy and the house smells nice all the time, therefore work-life balance for us would be having ability to attend to things outside of work. (Rachel, 36, Doctor)*

Similarly, participants often talked about their partner's career and/or family orientation to compare or contrast their own understanding of work-life balance with that of their partner. During analysis it became evident that a participant's preference for career and/or family roles, as well as the importance ascribed to those roles, framed couples' mutual definitions of work-life balance. The way each partner construed his or her orientation had substantial implications for their behaviour inside and outside the family, as both partners sought to act in ways that fulfilled and reaffirmed their career and/or family orientations (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012). At the same time, it is important to note that definitions of work-life balance among participants varied. Participants themselves proposed that how a couple defined work-life balance differed from those of other couples because of the unique combination of both partners' career and family orientations. In other words, several participants explained that the definition of work-life balance depended on which role (work or family) held a higher priority for partners within the couple. Based on this prioritization, work-life balance definitions differed between couples as well as within couples.

In the following sections, I lay out the four categories of dual-career couples without children based on the career and/or family orientations of the participants: careerist, conventional, non-conventional, and egalitarian. In two of the categories (conventional, non-conventional), partners' orientations differed from one another. In the other two (careerist, egalitarian), partners shared similar orientations. Five couples were careerist, five were conventional, four were non-conventional, and six were egalitarian. (See Table 1 below for an overview of the types).

Table 1: Couples' Types – Demographic Information<sup>4</sup>

### Careerist Couples

Couple	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Location
1.	Joseph	Male	55	Civil Engineer	New Jersey, USA
	Sabrina	Female	53	University Professor	
2.	Rick	Male	39	University Professor	Chicago, USA
	Courtney	Female	38	University Professor	
3.	John	Male	69	Manager of Finance	Orlando, USA
	<u>Marikee</u>	Female	67	School Principal	
4.	Timothy	Male	34	Ph.D. Candidate	Waterloo, Canada
	Diana	Female	32	Civil Engineer	
5.	Ryan	Male	64	Space Engineer	Orlando, USA
	Julie	Female	58	Finance Director	

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<sup>4</sup> Participants' names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

### Conventional Couples

<b>Couple</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>1.</b>	David	Male	33	Financial Analyst	Toronto, Canada
	Monica	Female	30	Human Resources Manager	
<b>2.</b>	Patrick	Male	45	Procurement Manager	Toronto, Canada
	Jamila	Female	40	Human Resources Manager	
<b>3.</b>	Frank	Male	31	Marketing Manager	Ann Arber, USA
	Lory	Female	29	Social Worker	
<b>4.</b>	Christian	Male	33	Pilot	Toronto, Canada
	Wendy	Female	36	Teacher	
<b>5.</b>	Robert	Male	43	Doctor	Toronto, Canada
	Terry	Female	42	Doctor	

### Non-Conventional Couples

Couple	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Location
1.	Tamir	Male	37	Computer Programmer	Toronto, Canada
	Debra	Female	35	Lawyer	
2.	Kevin	Male	35	Engineer	Philadelphia, USA
	<u>Bianna</u>	Female	31	Teacher	
3.	Collin	Male	67	Investment Manager	Toronto, Canada
	Viktoria	Female	62	Director of Sales	
4.	Daniel	Male	47	IT Specialist	New York, USA
	Whitney	Female	44	Higher Education Director	

### Egalitarian Couples

Couple	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Location
1.	Sergio	Male	38	Architect	Fort McMurray, Canada
	Rachel	Female	36	Doctor	
2.	Evan	Male	35	Ph.D. Candidate	New York, USA
	Rachel	Female	30	Ph.D. Candidate	
3.	Sam	Male	48	Architect	Toronto, Canada
	Faith	Female	33	Lawyer	
4.	Chris	Male	43	Doctor	Toronto, Canada
	Alessia	Female	42	Doctor	
5.	Bryan	Male	47	Veterinarian	Toronto, Canada
	Leena	Female	45	Accountant	
6.	Curtin	Male	35	Human Resources Manager	Toronto, Canada
	Samantha	Female	33	Accountant	
7.	Noah	Male	55	Lawyer	Toronto, Canada
	Tatyana	Female	56	University Professor	

#### 4.1.1 Careerist Couples

In this category, both partners agreed on the importance of career, individually and as a couple. The comments of one couple provide a useful example of a careerist couple:

*Having my career is very important to me. We don't have children, so nothing is stopping me from indulging in my work. I am a workaholic and I thrive on professional success. (Sabrina, 53, University Professor)*

Her husband:

*Work keeps you challenged, it keeps you on your toes. I cannot imagine the day I will have to stop. We both are very devoted to our careers and that makes us a good match. (Joseph, 55, Civil Engineer)*

From Sabrina's and Joseph's accounts, we can observe that partners in careerists couples fulfilled their role expectations by focusing on work and devoting much time and commitment to professional activities that upheld their self-perceptions and how they wanted to be viewed by others in their social circle. Devotion to career was the main similarity between all of the participants in the careerist category. In other words, when speaking of work-life balance, participants would discuss their work commitments more often than any other facet of their daily lives.

#### 4.1.2 Conventional Couples

In conventional couples, the female partners exhibited a strong family orientation while the male partners displayed a strong career orientation. Historically, this type of couple has been referred to as "traditional", with the female partner staying at home and assuming the role of primary caregiver while the male partner maintained full-time employment. However, with the rise of dual-career couples, there has been a call in the literature to update our understanding of

traditional families. In light of this, I refer to this category of couple as “conventional” in that the couple’s career/family orientation aligned with a conservative gender ideology concerning male and female roles outside and inside the home. At the same time, both partners were gainfully employed and were economic providers for the family. Unlike the traditional couples discussed in the literature, some female partners of conventional couples in my sample earned substantially more than their partners yet defined their orientation predominantly in terms of emotionally and/or physically tending to their family’s needs.

Women in conventional couples emphasized care in their preferred family orientation and engaged in behaviours such as home organization, elder care, and meal preparation in addition to work responsibilities. To accommodate their family orientation, women stressed the importance of seeking employment opportunities at family-supportive establishments where they were not obliged to take work home or work outside of business hours. Monica explained:

*I need to make sure that David has dinner when he comes home. He works hard and I don’t want him to feel neglected. It is not that I don’t work hard, but he comes first for me. (Monica, 30, Human Resource Manager)*

In comparison, men in conventional couples reported being significantly less engaged in home-centric and caregiving activities and, instead, focussed on work activities. Several male participants spoke about seeking out extra hours or promotions at work to better provide for their families and fulfill their career orientation. Monica’s husband David explained:

*I leave for work at 6 am and get home around 8 pm. This is how my life is organized. Monica takes great care of me, but I earn the bacon. So it evens out for our little unit as we call it. (David, 33, Financial Analyst)*

From Monica’s and David’s accounts we can observe that the female partners in conventional couples attended to the emotional and physical support of their marriage partners and families, while the male partners focused on career-based opportunities. It is worth noting



that couples who belonged to the conventional category were also the couples who spoke about the importance of religion in their household more than any other couples in the sample. For instance, Monica shared:

*We practice Judaism. David [Monica's husband] and I attend Shul [house of worship] on [a] regular basis and spend considerable amount of time with our peers there. As a woman in Jewish culture, you are the sacred keeper of peace and happiness in the family. While men work outside [the home] and provide, women are expected to bring calmness and comfort. I very much align with this philosophy. (Monica, 30, Human Resources Manager)*

For these couples their understanding of gender roles and work-life balance was partially impacted by their religious practice that identifies and prescribes roles for both men and women. This once again demonstrates the relational nature of human experiences, in this case understanding and accepting one's externally prescribed role in society and the family as well as work-life balance.

#### *4.1.3 Non-conventional Couples*

Like conventional couples, partners in non-conventional relationships had opposing orientations. However, in this category, women were very career oriented, whereas men exhibited a strong family orientation. Similarly to Masterson and Hoobler's (2015) sample, men in this category were the family's primary caregiver and took the lead on household duties (cleaning, cooking, vacation planning, etc.) in addition to their work responsibilities. They reported being more likely to seek employment with family-friendly organizations that supported their desire to spend time with family and attend to non-work-related responsibilities and leisure activities. In comparison, women in this category played a secondary role in household tasks, concentrating instead on work-related activities. Debra explained:

*Since Tamir and I met, it was agreed that he will take the lead at home. I work much longer hours than he does. If I need anything done at home, I will call*

*Tamir and it is unspoken rule that it will be done by him. I make money, he makes sure we are comfortable at home. (Debra, 35, Lawyer)*

Her husband, Tamir, elaborated:

*I cook, clean, plan our dates. She doesn't have time for it. I am sure she does not want to be involved in household chores. I know when to buy groceries and when to get our dry cleaning. Believe it or not, she doesn't know where we do our dry cleaning [chuckles]. (Tamir, 37, Computer Programmer)*

As we see from Debra's and Tamir's accounts, the norms of non-conventional couples, unlike conventional couples, do not align with conservative gender roles inside and outside of the home. However, couples in this category emphasized that having opposing orientations allowed for clearly identified roles and expectations between the partners, which is also true of conventional couples. Like conventional couples, there was a similarity among the non-conventional couples in the sample. Namely, all of the participants in this category spoke about the roles their mothers had played in their household during their childhood. All four women described having strong mothers whom they considered to be the head of the household in comparison to their fathers.

Bianna, for example, remembered:

*Mom was always on the run. She was working two jobs, making sure we were well provided for. Dad was not as successful as she was professionally, so when it came to taking us to appointments or simply taking care of every day chores, he was primarily the one doing that. (Bianna, 31, Teacher)*

Another participant, Whitney, shared her memories of her mother:

*We always knew mom ran the show. When decisions had to be made, she had the last word. While she was not always working, she would find ways to make extra money if we needed something. At the end of the day, she was the main provider as my dad did not make as much as we needed to live comfortably. (Whitney, 44, Higher Education Director)*

Men also reflected on their upbringing and their mothers' roles in the household. The common thread in their descriptions was that their mothers were strong-willed and ambitious in

their professional pursuits. They accepted driven women as the norm, and their choice of partner reflected this, as described by Kevin:

*My mom is the most ambitious woman I know. She never settled for anything. Always wanted better jobs, better money and taught us that stalling in the career is equated to failure. So, when I met Bianna, she reminded me of my mom. She is also very ambitious and driven and I love that about her. I am ok playing a supporting role just like my father did.*

Given the accounts above, we can once again observe the importance of others' influence on one's perception of life processes. All of the participants demonstrated how being brought up in a family with a strong mother impacted the choices they made in organizing their own work and non-work lives.

While this was the least-represented category in the sample (four couples), it is important to note that this category has garnered attention among scholars who suggest that the number of non-conventional couples will increase in the future (Masterson & Hoobler, 2015).

#### *4.1.4 Egalitarian Couples*

The partners in this group were equally oriented toward career and family. Masterson and Hoobler (2015) suggest that in such relationships, career and family are equally important for both partners. Overall, studies conducted in the past on dual-career couples with children claim that the egalitarian couple type is a response, on the one hand, to men's increasing involvement in day-to-day family care and on the other, to women's greater commitment to their career and the financial success of the family, all the while adhering to family roles (Haas & O'Brien, 2010). According to Masterson and Hoobler (2015), this couple structure supports the idea that men who have a strong family orientation do not necessarily let go of their career orientation. Similarly, women concentrating on their career may simultaneously retain a family orientation. Previous research defined egalitarian couples as equally responsible for household labour,

parenting, emotional work, and earning a living; equally valuing each other's role as a breadwinner; and equal in power (Ishizuka, 2018). It is important to note that for this study I label this category as egalitarian in the sense that couples were equally orientated to work and family, not necessarily because their relationship was egalitarian as per the above definition.

Seven couples in my sample were egalitarian couples in the sense of having equally strong career and family orientations. At home both partners embraced a family orientation, attempting to divide household chores and non-work responsibilities fairly, including, but not limited to, providing care to extended family. At work, both partners strove for professional success, accepting promotions, training opportunities, and challenges that enabled them to further their careers. For example, Evan and Rachel, both enrolled in PhD programs, summarized the philosophy of an egalitarian couple. Rachel provided insight into their family orientation:

*There is no "male" versus "female" chores in our home. We tend to our house together pretty equally. There are obviously some things I do more than he does, like cooking, but it is not because of gender, but because I love it more than he does. (Rachel, 30, PhD Candidate)*

Evan, on the other hand, described the couple's career orientation:

*Both of us are nearing our dissertation defense and we are very competitive. We work very hard and sometimes it is unhealthy. But we are very career-oriented. We want to be in a good university after graduation. So, when we are at the office, career is all that matters to tell you the truth. At home, it is different. At home, we are husband and wife. We try to disengage from work and spend time on nurturing our relationship. (Evan, 35, Ph.D. Candidate)*

Given Rachel's and Evan's descriptions, we can infer that egalitarian couples in my sample reflected the societal shift in gender equality, as their dual family and career orientations can be perceived as gender neutral. However, in contrast to previous research that suggests that egalitarian couples experience less clarity regarding role responsibilities (Masterson & Hoobler, 2015), the couples studied here seemed to agree that such a dual orientation (emphasizing

equally both orientations) for both partners aided them in establishing clear role divisions both at home and at work, ultimately contributing positively to their work-life balance.

It is worth noting that compared to other couple categories, there were similarities between egalitarian participants. The majority of them attributed a high level of importance to their passions or interests outside of work. They described enjoying adventures or pursuing new hobbies more often than participants belonging to the other groups in the sample. Bryan explained:

*Just like organizations need to diversify jobs to keep employees happy, people need to diversify their lives. I love learning new things. I find new lectures online about subjects I know nothing about. I pick up classes on a regular basis to learn new cuisines or new wines. I love life and I want to do everything I can and learn everything I can while I am still able. (Bryan, 47, Veterinarian)*

Bryan exemplifies the attitude egalitarian couples showcased regarding fulfilling more than work ambitions in their lives, which had an impact on their perception of work-life balance that differed from other groups in this study.

In summary, the ways dual-career professional couples without children defined work-life balance varied depending on whether partners were oriented to career and/or family. Data analysis also suggested variations between partners when partners had opposing orientations. In the next section, I present several definitions of work-life balance as expressed by the couples, highlighting similarities and differences based on the categorizations delineated above

## **4.2 Defining Work-Life Balance**

Although the couples who took part in this study often used the same terminology to describe work-life balance, the meaning they attached to the words they used varied based on the preferred career and/or family orientation(s) of the couple. Even within a couple, partners

defined work-life balance differently despite using similar terms. For instance, both would define work-life balance using the term “flexibility”, however, what flexibility meant differed between the partners. For one it would mean the ability to choose when to attend to various life domains and for the other it would mean the ability to forgo participation in one domain if another required attention. This was particularly evident in the case of couples with opposing orientations.

Virtually all couples interviewed defined work-life balance as entailing flexibility, autonomy, and control. The ability to allocate equal amounts of time to various life spheres was presented as another aspect of work-life balance by some couples. Others suggested that work-life balance involved achieving a sense of satisfaction with all domains in their shared lives regardless of the time allocated to the different domains and without needing to make sacrifices in any of them. Finally, most couples defined work-life balance as a sense of cohesion between both partners in the relationship, that is, a shared feeling of alignment between their understandings of work-life balance.

#### *4.2.1 Flexibility, Autonomy, and Control*

**4.2.1.1. Careerist couples.** Careerist couples defined work-life balance in terms of flexibility, which they described as the ability to satisfy/fulfill their work responsibilities at any time and with minimal interference from the non-work sphere. Both careerist men and women cited examples of flexibility, such as the ability to bring work home and not being restricted by regular work hours or a physical job location to perform their work. Couples in this category also stressed that a crucial element of flexibility was whether their partners demonstrated understanding of the need to manage work responsibilities outside conventional business hours.

Alongside this definition of flexibility, careerist couples also tied autonomy and control to their understandings of work-life balance and viewed these terms as the freedom to make their own decisions regarding how and when they adhered to work and non-work roles without needing to seek permission from others, for example, superiors in the workplace or their significant other. Overall, for careerist couples, work-life balance was represented by the flexibility afforded by their place of employment as well as by their significant others to perform work without unnecessary interruptions from the non-work domain.

**4.2.1.2 Conventional couples.** Conventional couples defined flexibility very differently when describing their work-life balance. For the men, work-life balance was having the ability to address work-related obligations during non-work hours, should the need arise. The women, on the other hand, emphasized that work-life balance was connected to the flexibility and freedom to leave work and attend to other responsibilities during working hours. Reflecting on these different definitions of flexibility, one conventional couple explained:

*Flexibility for me means taking my job out of the office and being able to do work outside of the office's physical location. In other words, I can sit on the patio and speak to clients, I do not have to be there in person and this is work-life balance. (Patrick, 45, Procurement Manager)*

*[The] ability to leave earlier from work without being penalized for it is work-life balance for me. Some things I cannot do after work. We needed to renew our mortgage, I had to leave for a couple of hours to do so. I need to have an ability to do my non-work stuff during the day. (Jamila, 40, Human Resources Management)*

Given Patrick's and Jamila's accounts, we can observe that the key ingredient in their work-life balance was flexibility. We also can observe how the different orientations of partners shape definitions of flexibility. For Patrick, flexibility was the ability to complete work outside of regular work. For Jamila it meant the opposite, specifically, the ability to attend to the non-work domain during work hours. In addition, several women participants in conventional couples said

that this flexibility was especially important for women without children who were often expected to stay longer and work harder and are therefore presumed by their organizations to have no non-work responsibilities. Lory elaborated on this issue:

*Work-life balance is having an ability to leave from work when needed without having a “kid excuse”. Flexibility is not having to legitimize the reason when and how to perform work. (Lory, 30, Social Worker)*

**4.2.1.3 Non-conventional couples.** When asked to define work-life balance, women in non-conventional couples gave very similar answers to careerist women, flexibility being central theme again. The ability to attend to work responsibilities outside of typical working hours predominated in their responses. However, they also indicated that the most important element of work-life balance for them was the flexibility afforded by their significant others. In other words, flexibility for them meant not having to fulfill “typical female” roles at home, as well as having the freedom to pursue professional advancement. Whitney explained:

*Work-life balance for me is not being expected to cook and clean (I am simplifying here) and being given an opportunity to engage in my work. Daniel is very understanding. He never gives me [a] hard time. I feel that I am free to work whenever. He gives me that chance to fulfill myself. (Whitney, 44, Higher Education Director)*

Men in non-conventional couples, on the other hand, described work-life balance in terms of organizational expectations and freedom from the breadwinner ideology. For them, the most vital element of work-life balance was the flexibility to engage in non-work responsibilities during the work day. They stressed the importance of not feeling guilty when allocating time to spheres not ordinarily associated with a particular time, for example, addressing a non-work need during the traditional workday. In general, men in non-conventional couples defined work-life balance as the absence of rigidly differentiated time slots for work and non-work demands, free



of pressures from their employers or their partners to adopt a breadwinner attitude and take on an inflated work load. As Rick said:

*I would define work-life balance as the ability, the feeling that you have the freedom to do things that are not part of your job when you have to do something else. Ability to stop working now, even if it is noon and go do something else. Take a walk, read a book, or whatever pleases you. (Rick, 38, University Professor)*

Kevin commented on perceived organizational expectations regarding men:

*Work-life balance is flexibility. Such as ability to make a choice when to do what without having this expectation hanging over you to constantly perform as a breadwinner. (Kevin, 35, Engineer)*

From both of the accounts above, we can once again infer that defining work-life balance is a relational process rather than an individual endeavor. Namely, men described external forces (in this case, organizational expectations) that they had to comply with when defining work-life balance.

**4.2.1.4 Egalitarian couples.** Finally, egalitarian couples used flexibility to specify that work-life balance meant the ability to fulfill the various roles and obligations of different life spheres. These roles were frequently split between those associated with working hours and those tied to personal commitments, often relegated to evenings and weekends. Couples in this category emphasized that work-life balance was not achieved by simply limiting the number of hours devoted to one's job, but also meant freedom to leave work to manage other responsibilities or attend to other interests. Similarly, their definition of work-life balance included the ability to address work-related obligations during non-work hours should the need arise. As Faith noted:

*Work-life balance is flexibility for me. It is not about dividing work from 9 to 5. I see flexibility in my boss permitting me to work from home or leave in the middle of the day to visit the vet. I like the flexibility because I am able to wear my pajamas and go brush my teeth, have my coffee, and then come back and work or*

*not wait at the hospital for hours in the evening because it is packed with people who work 9 to 5. (Faith, 33, Lawyer)*

Her husband Sam suggested that flexibility also involved satisfying both work and non-work roles without having to perform the demands associated with those roles simultaneously, which would create inter-role conflict. When asked to define work-life balance, he focused on flexibility and explained what that meant to him and his partner as a couple:

*I feel like it is flexibility that we have in our jobs, to do what we need to do, without feeling like we need to take a day off to do stuff. Or worse, hide from our bosses around the corner to call the bank, without feeling guilty or thinking that we cannot do it. (Sam, 48, Architect)*

In line with non-conventional couples, responses from the egalitarian group also point to the relational nature of work-life balance. All participants spoke of the expectations of others, such as their superiors, and the role they played in the formulation of their work-life balance definition.

Egalitarian couples agreed that being in control was a crucial feature of work-life balance. Like flexibility, control had its own set of nuances and definitions. For example, several of these couples described a sense of responsibility for the choices, and their consequences, they made in work and non-work spheres. In their view, work-life balance was synonymous with exercising autonomy and control over their lives, which further translated into freedom of choice. David elaborated:

*When it comes to work-life balance, it is most important that you feel like you are a master of your own domain, being in control. By control I mean that you can sort of set your own schedule and deadlines and manage your own time both at home and at work. For me that would be work-life balance where I can make decisions how to allocate my time. (David, 33, Financial Analyst)*

From the accounts above, we can observe that although all couples defined work-life balance by drawing on themes of flexibility, autonomy, and control, the meanings they attached

to those terms varied greatly based on their career and family orientations. We can also observe how others, be that superiors at work or significant others, had an impact on their definitions because of the expectations placed in them both as individuals as well as a couple. In the next subsection, I present a second definition offered by some of the couples: work-life balance as equal engagement in work and non-work domains.

#### *4.2.2 Equal Engagement in Work and Non-Work Domains*

While there was a consensus among the couples on the importance of flexibility and control, only a few found the notion of equal engagement in work and non-work domains as significant in their definition of work-life balance. No careerist couples, for example, included equal engagement in their definitions of work-life balance. They were adamant that equal engagement in both work and non-work domains would interfere with the pre-eminence of work in their lives. However, couples in the other three categories referred to equal engagement in work and non-work domains in one way or another, defining work-life balance in terms of equal distribution of time and resources between the two domains.

***4.2.2.1 Conventional couples.*** Partners in conventional couples diverged in their definitions of work-life balance when it came to equal engagement in work and non-work domains. No men from conventional couples defined work-life balance using the equal-engagement perspective. However, several women in conventional couples expressed the opinion that work-life balance involved equal engagement in both work and non-work domains. Nonetheless, they qualified their answers by indicating that this was their own definition and did not represent the couple as a unit. As Terry shared:

*I believe being able to engage in different roles without feeling pressures from another role is what work-life balance is. Having said that, Robert would never*

*agree with me, so it is hardly our couple's definition [chuckles]. (Terry, 42, Doctor)*

It is clear that Terry's definition of work-life balance did not correspond to her partner's. The resultant strain between Terry and Robert forced them to assume an individual position in the interviews, thereby distancing themselves from the couple's joint perspective. However, while partners' perspectives diverged, individuals still considered their partner's opinion in forming their individual definition of work-life balance. Hence, we can trace the relational nature of work-life balance even in the case where there was an obvious non-alignment.

**4.2.2.2 Non-conventional couples.** Echoing men in conventional couples, women in non-conventional couples did not refer to the equal engagement theme. Similarly, very few men in non-conventional couples defined work-life balance as involving equal engagement in work and non-work domains. Those who did were hesitant and continuously emphasized that it was in fact an *ideal* scenario, which would not be suitable to the realities of our society in which men are expected to be the breadwinner and prioritize work over non-work activities. When asked to explain this phenomenon, Daniel replied:

*It would be work-life balance if you work fewer hours a day and then can indulge in other things. But maybe it is only possible for women. Men don't have this luxury. So ideally, equal engagement would be my definition. Realistically, I cannot even imagine voicing it to my wife, let alone my boss. (Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

Daniel's account reinforces the relational nature of work-life balance by demonstrating how the perceived expectations of others impacted his definition of work-life balance. In his response he indicates that his definition of work-life balance would be unachievable in reality as it contradicts social norms and the views of others around him, including his spouse and his work superior.

**4.2.2.3 Egalitarian couples.** Partners in egalitarian couples agreed on equal engagement in both domains. When asked to define work-life balance, their responses centered on the word “balance”, which they expressed as giving equal attention to both career and family. Noah’s and Tatyana’s responses provide a good example of such a definition as a couple:

*If we think about the word “balance”, what do we imagine? I imagine the old type of scale they used in the markets with equal weights on each side. This is how I see work-life balance. (Noah, 55, Lawyer)*

*Simply, to have balance is to manage equally work and non-work. (Tatyana, 58, University Professor)*

From the above accounts, we can infer that for this couple, work-life balance meant assigning equal value to both domains of life. It is important to note that, in accordance with previous literature (Greenhaus et al., 2003), couples clarified that equal engagement in work and non-work roles was not merely quantitative, that is, an equivalent allocation of time to every domain in their lives, but was also qualitative, consisting of similar levels of attention, involvement, and emotional energy. More specifically, in their view, work-life balance would allow for equal engagement in social roles at work as well as in non-work domains. Samantha and Curtin highlighted this point:

*I believe work-life balance is the ability to disengage from one role and assume another role without interference. I am a great accountant during the day, but in the evening, I am a caring wife. It is not balance when you cannot stop thinking about your debit/credit. Balance is being present where you are now. And have a somewhat equal distribution between the different roles to stay sane. (Samantha, 33, Accountant)*

*Work-life balance is just that, balance between work and life. 9 to 5 one role, 5 to 9 many other roles. Once the scale tips, it is not work-life balance. (Curtin, 35, Human Resources Manager)*

Given the accounts presented above, we can conclude that these two couples consider equal engagement in different life spheres to be central to work-life balance. Because partners in

egalitarian couples share similar career and family orientations, their definitions of work-life balance tend to complement one another. Moreover, the alignment between the partners further signals their impact on each other's definitions and demonstrates once again the relational nature of work-life balance. In summary, whether there was a consensus or lack of such between partners' definition of work-life balance, none of them were the product of individuals but rather, for all the couples in the sample, a relational endeavor.

#### 4.2.3 *Satisfaction with Both Domains*

Unlike the previous group of couples who defined work-life balance in terms of equal engagement in both work and non-work domains, approximately half the sample suggested that equally distributing time and resources across different domains was not realistic. Couples in all four categories clarified that due to the nature of work and non-work realms, they tended to prioritize one or the other, whether by choice or by circumstance. Many proposed that a more suitable definition of work-life balance should concentrate, not on equal engagement in work and non-work domains, but on a couple's level of satisfaction with both domains of their lives without having to sacrifice either.

**4.2.3.1. Careerist couples.** Careerist couples reported feeling satisfied spending less time attending to the non-work domain in comparison to their work responsibilities. Wendy stated:

*For me work-life balance is not about calculating how many hours I spent on work versus non-work. Most of the time I work more than I do anything else, but I love my job, so I feel content. I don't think it is bad work-life balance when you do what you enjoy even when you slightly overdoing it [chuckles]. (Wendy, 36, Teacher)*

Another participant in a careerist couple offered his perspective:

*Who is to tell me that I have to go home at 5 pm to make sure I engage equally in both domains? If I want to work until 11 pm because I am doing something very interesting or enjoyable, I should be able to do so. Or spend the whole day*

*fishing and not work. As long as I am happy with what I do, it is a great work-life balance. (Rick, 39, University Professor)*

Rick's statement suggests discomfort with defining work-life balance as a purely equal distribution between the domains. He preferred instead to define it as engagement in roles that provided him with the highest level of satisfaction at any given time.

**4.2.3.2. Conventional couples.** Despite having opposing career and family orientations between the partners, participants in this category also stressed the importance of satisfaction within a role as one of the key dimensions of work-life balance. Like careerist couples described above, male participants in conventional couples spoke of indulging in work and receiving the greatest amount of satisfaction from work. In contrast, women in these unions stressed the importance of receiving the most amount of satisfaction from participating in both domains, either simultaneously or on separate occasions. In other words, both partners in conventional couples agreed that work-life balance should not be defined as equal participation. Instead, it should be termed work-life satisfaction based on the individual preferences and desires of each partner in a couple. Monica explained:

*In my opinion, whatever I do at any given time should give me some sense of pleasure or satisfaction. Saying that if I have to spend eight hours at work, I need to spend eight hours doing something non-work related to balance it out is wrong. As long as I get time, again not necessarily equal amounts of time, to meaningfully engage in both roles, I can honestly say it is work-life balance for me. (Monica, 30, Human Resources Manager)*

**4.2.3.3 Non-conventional couples.** Like couples in other categories, Daniel explained that participating in a role that felt most rewarding in the moment was the essence of work-life balance. He likened this to "finding serenity in chaos":

*I always feel under pressure to do everything at the same time. I call this chaos. But when I get time to do what I like, be that business research or groom my dog, I call it serenity. The role that gives me most pleasure at that time. As long as I*

*can do that, I reach work-life balance. (Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

Daniel's description indicates that along with satisfaction, work-life balance entailed cultivating a sense of personal fulfillment, regardless of the role that engendered that feeling or how much time it occupied in his life. Daniel's description can be described as "living in the moment" and indulging himself.

**4.2.3.4 Egalitarian couples.** While more egalitarian couples cited equal engagement as important to work-life balance than did other couples, a few also spoke about satisfaction as an aspect of work-life balance. They explained that the often-unpredictable nature of their jobs prevented them from distributing their time equally between the domains, therefore an alternative form of work-life balance was achieving the highest degree of satisfaction from both domains regardless of how many hours or minutes a task required. Here we once again observe the relational nature of work-life balance, where participants' definition of the construct was impacted by forces beyond their control, in this case expectations associated with their jobs.

#### *4.2.4 Agreement between Partners in a Couple*

The final theme that surfaced when participants were asked to provide a definition of work-life balance involved the degree of agreement between partners as to what work-life balance was. This theme, more than any of the others, reflects the relational nature of work-life balance. Virtually all participants conveyed the importance of congruity between partners in a couple. Although couples from all categories mentioned the importance of agreeing, they diverged in explaining what agreement consisted of, which in turn depended on couples' preferred career and/or family orientations.



**4.2.4.1 Careerist couples.** Careerist couples stressed that work-life balance meant agreement between partners as to the importance of work in relation to other aspects of life. For these couples, both partners had to portray sufficient support for the other without distraction when pursuing career goals and opportunities. Ryan and Julie elaborated:

*Work-life balance is having that silent agreement among us that work comes first. I may be okay working twelve hours a day and be content, unless Julie is on the same page with me, our work-life balance is skewed. Neither I or her have work-life balance unless we support one another wholeheartedly. (Ryan, 64, space engineer)*

Julie added to Ryan's statement:

*For us, work-life balance is not about spending more time together but about both of us being happy pursuing our projects. If Ryan becomes irritated about my work load and vice versa, our work-life balance ultimately suffers. It is his and my attitude towards our busyness that dictates our definition of work-life balance not actual physical involvement in his or my job. (Julie, 58, Finance Director)*

From the quotations above, it is evident that careerist couples defined work-life balance as partners supporting one another's desire to prioritize their careers. To ensure work-life balance, both partners in the couple had to be free to pursue their careers without censure from their partner. Reflecting the relational nature of work-life balance, for careerist couples it was not simply about the quantitative allocation of time, but about agreement between the partners that it was acceptable for either partner to immerse themselves in work if necessary or desired.

**4.2.4.2 Conventional couples.** Like careerist couples, the relational nature of work-life balance was important for conventional couples, and both men and women brought up the matter of agreement between partners. However, unlike careerists, this concept was explained from a "misalignment" perspective by conventional couples. Women in conventional unions often expressed frustration about the definition their partners attached to work-life balance in comparison to theirs. They felt that as a couple, a shared definition of work-life balance was

impossible because their understandings of the concept were too different from that of their husbands, whose main orientation remained career-centered. While women's definition of work-life balance in this category often meant equal engagement in various roles, their husbands' definitions concentrated on continuous prioritization of work over other domains. Even in cases of disagreement, the definition of one partner influenced the definition of the other, once again signalling the relational nature of work-life balance. Lory's definition reflected the idea of misaligned orientations between her and her husband Frank:

*For me, work-life balance is agreeing on something as a couple and following through with it. For example, if you have a weekend getaway scheduled, you should be able to go and disengage from work. For Frank, on the other hand, if something comes up at work, he will cancel the getaway without hesitation. I don't think it is balance when priorities of one take over the priorities for the other. (Lory, 29, Social Worker)*

**4.2.4.3 Non-conventional couples.** Similar differences in definitions of work-life balance were evident in partners in non-conventional couples. In this instance, however, partners did not express the frustration evident in the responses of conventional couples. Several men in this group felt that their perceived deviation from the standard breadwinner role also meant an increased need to adapt to their wife's definition of work-life balance. In particular, they felt that for them individually, work-life balance meant flexibility and equal engagement in both work and non-work domains. However, when attempting to provide a definition for themselves as a couple, they most often reverted to their wife's definition of work-life balance, again demonstrating the relational nature of work-life balance.

Some may argue that such a response reflects a subjective experience rather than an objective definition of work-life balance, yet the male partners in these couples felt that it was difficult to offer an example of the latter without basing it on experiences shared by both partners (relational nature). In other words, although men often retained their personal definitions of

work-life balance, their wife's definition of work-life balance was highly influential when they described their definition as a couple. Collin clarified:

*The couple's work-life balance is a tricky thing. Viktoria and I think about work-life balance very differently. But at the end of the day, when your partner works many more hours than you and continues to work after she gets home, the work-life balance of a couple will belong to her. Simply put, work-life balance for us should be ultimately defined as adaptation to what works for her at the end of the day. (Collin, 67, Investment Manager)*

**4.2.4.4 Egalitarian couples.** Although egalitarian couples shared an emphasis on agreement with careerist couples, the criteria they used to assess it differed. They expressed the value of mutually prioritizing one domain over the other, reflecting the relational theme. Simply put, participants in this category stressed that for work-life balance, both partners should always be aligned when choosing to concentrate on work or non-work domains. As Tatyana explained:

*It is hardly work-life balance when one of you is stuck in the office after midnight and another one is preparing a family meal for tomorrow's gathering. As a couple, you should be involved in doing things together. Being busy together. There are times when you work extra hard, but there should also be times when you are doing non-work chores or leisure together. That should be aligned. Otherwise it's individual work-life balance wrapped in a couple context. (Tatyana, 56, University Professor)*

Given Tatyana's account, we can observe how important the relational nature of work-life balance is for egalitarian couples. We may infer that incongruity between partners when pursuing work or non-work domains signals conflict and creates tension in couples, indicating a lack of work-life balance as a couple.

In summary, whether couples had similar or opposing career and/or family orientations, agreement, alignment, or misalignment between the partners played a crucial role in their definitions of work-life balance. This further demonstrates that the process of formulating a definition of work-life balance is dynamic and plays out on a relational level rather than a strictly

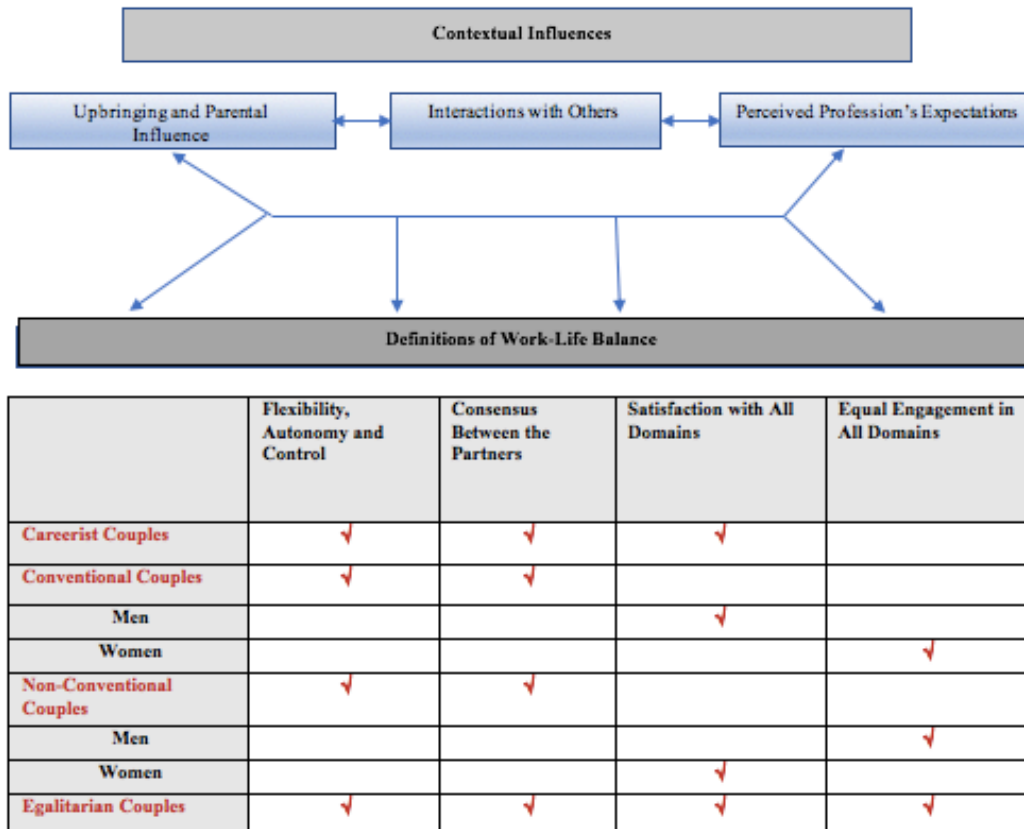
individual one as suggested by the literature. Next, I explore the contextual factors that influence the formation of work-life balance definitions, using couples' accounts.

### **4.3 Influences on Definitions of Work-Life Balance**

Based on participants' explanations, definitions of work-life balance were informed by cues and social contexts encountered in specific circumstances throughout their lives, which further demonstrates the relational nature of work-life balance. Moreover, these same influences appeared to be interdependent as participants regularly described multiple influences in relation to one another. It is important to note that partners in a couple often differed on the factors influencing their work-life balance definitions, especially those who had opposing career or family orientations, namely conventional and non-conventional couples. To best convey this, individual opinions are presented in select portions of the section below.

The influences that shaped definitions of work-life balance as identified by couples can be separated into three categories: upbringing and parental influence, interactions with significant others and other stakeholders, and expectations of professional contexts (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Definitions of Work-Life Balance and their Contextual Influences



#### 4.3.1 Upbringing and Parental Influence

The majority of couples in the sample cited their upbringing and watching their parents negotiate the balance between work and non-work domains to be among the most powerful and enduring factors influencing their definitions of work-life balance. Consequently, both men and women in all categories of couples suggested that their definitions of the balance between work and non-work spheres of life were formed in their early years. For instance, Tamir (in a non-conventional couple) explained that he learned about work-life balance, which he defined as equal engagement in both work and non-work, from his father:

*I was brought up in family of very hard workers and my father definitely worked longer hours than typical 9 to 5. But he also never spoke about his job at home and always made sure to have his weekends for us. As his child, growing up, I felt that was work-life balance, and I still do. (Tamir, 37, Computer Programmer)*

Patrick, who was in a conventional couple and expressed a strong work orientation, also remembered his parents' strategies for organizing work and life. They emphasized the importance of work over other domains, a principle they instilled in him and his siblings:

*This is not an exaggeration, for as long as I can remember my parents have worked seven days a week, minimum 12 hours a day. They do not see it as work anymore. For them, it is a way of life now. They have very little personal time or time off. (Patrick, 45, Procurement Manager)*

Several participants whose parents similarly encouraged a strong work ethic, high performance, perfectionism, and a focus on work also described work-life balance in terms of prioritizing work over non-work domains. Frank, also a member of a conventional couple, explained:

*My parents are very much a WASP family. Their values emphasize hard work, where even during your personal time you are working. Like when I go over to my parents' house on the weekends, they are preparing for their work week. Their weekends are hands-on busy. I grew up knowing that not working at any given time is unacceptable and most importantly non-productive. I find myself defining work-life balance the same way through hard work. (Frank, 31, Marketing Manager)*

Alternatively, Faith (also a member of a conventional couple), who defined work-life balance as equal engagement in both domains, referenced her mother as a professionally successful woman but also an attentive parent, fully present in her children's lives.

*My parents had three children. My mother always stressed the importance of managing everything without letting anything fall off her plate. She would work during the day and be at home when we would return from school. She rarely spoke of her work life. She did it all, as cliché as it sounds. (Faith, 33, Lawyer)*

Other participants in an egalitarian relationship who equated work-life balance with satisfaction with work and non-work domains, recalled growing up in households in which their parents promoted work and family values equally, directing substantial amounts of their energy

to commitments outside of work. These participants recalled spending time with parents and siblings growing up. They provided examples of their parents visibly enjoying their jobs but still prioritizing family over professional commitments. Leena shared:

*Since I can remember, my father rang the bell in the kitchen every evening to gather all of us for dinner. It was sacred family time. We would share stories about our day and talk about school. Parents would tell funny stories about jobs. It was all a big pot of funny work and non-work stuff. (Leena, 45, Accountant)*

Her husband Bryan added:

*Fishing on the weekend with my dad was like church for many people on Sundays – mandatory. My dad was a well-known doctor, so during the week, he would take me to the office regularly and to the hospital. I think he loved his job almost as much as me. (Bryan, 47, Veterinarian)*

These excerpts further demonstrate that upbringing and parental influence continued to significantly shape definitions of work-life balance even to the present for many of the participants (see Figure 2 on page 91). The accounts above also signal that the relational nature of work-life balance extended beyond couples' relationships and included interactions with others in individuals' social circles, in this case with parents growing up.

#### *4.3.2 Interactions with Marriage Partners and Other Stakeholders*

In addition to upbringing, couples indicated that interactions in their interpersonal relationships influenced their definitions of work-life balance. All couples identified at least two individuals who had influenced their definitions of work-life balance either in the past or present, whether spouses, parents, family and friends, or colleagues (see Figure 2 on page 91).

**4.3.2.1 Marriage partners.** As discussed in the previous section, virtually all participants mentioned that the interactions that most influenced their definitions of work-life balance occurred with their marriage partners. For many participants, these ongoing interactions resulted

in the formulation of a shared definition of work-life balance. Daniel, who defined work-life balance as a sense of satisfaction in all domains of life, shared how communicating with his wife about this topic shifted his definition of work-life balance over time. When he and his wife first met, he had viewed work-life balance from the standpoint of equal distribution of time between the various domains of his life. However, over time and through personal examples, his wife “convinced” him that equal distribution did not necessarily mean satisfaction with work-life balance, hence his definition would not be representative of their couple. She was able to reshape Daniel’s definition of work-life balance by emphasizing the value of prioritizing satisfaction in both domains through participating in enjoyable activities regardless of time allocated to those activities. In doing so, she broadened Daniel’s horizons in both domains of his life and reshaped his definition of work-life balance.

Daniel was one of many participants who credited conversations with their spouse in developing a definition of work-life balance. Similarly, Patrick described the transition from being single (and defining work-life balance solely in terms of individual satisfaction in both domains) to being married and reconsidering work-life balance as part of a couple:

*Now that you’re married, there’s another component to work-life balance. Work-life balance is not about me anymore, I need to stop and take the time to do things that make both of us happy. So, if you’re making enough time to do something, the things that actually make you both happy outside of work, I would say you’re successful with the work-life balance. (Patrick, 45, Procurement Manager)*

Bryan, on the other hand, articulated the difficulty of shifting priorities after getting married. Coming from a demanding professional past, his definition of work-life balance prior to marriage was autonomy – the ability to work or attend to the non-work domain at a time chosen solely by him. While this had been feasible prior to his marriage, it proved ineffective now that decisions were often shared. Due to interactions with his partner, who was dissatisfied with his concept of



work-life balance, Bryan shifted his view of work-life balance to one that emphasized an equal distribution of time between work and non-work domains, consequently achieving greater equilibrium with his partner:

*For work-life balance in the marriage, in every decision you must consider the other person. You can no longer work until midnight because you want to watch a game in the middle of the day. Simply because you have another person in the union who will be waiting for you at home. You have to change your priorities and your outlook on work-life balance to include them. (Bryan, 47, Veterinarian)*

The accounts above also demonstrate that work-life balance is a fluid concept. For some of the participants, the views of work-life balance they formed in childhood by observing their parents, shifted later in life because of interactions with their significant other. This finding demonstrates that one's conceptualization of work-life balance may change over time because of who the primary influence is at any given time, whether parents, a spouse, or some other new influence.

**4.3.2.2 Family members and friends.** Childhood memories were not the only parental factors that influenced the participants' concepts of work-life balance; interactions with parents in adulthood also came into play. Chris, who was part of an egalitarian couple, explained:

*Work-life balance is often a topic of discussion at family dinners. I seek my parents' advice in this issue. We discuss their work-life balance experiences and I draw on them in my own reflections. Mom gives me a work-life balance "reality check" almost weekly reminding me of important aspects of life. (Chris, 43, Doctor)*

It is evident that Chris relied on his parents' guidance and advice concerning his definition of work-life balance. He sought to incorporate this into his own understanding and expectations, which aligned with his dual career and family orientation. Moreover, when Chris relayed his parents' guidance to his wife, both were reminded how important it was to be properly balanced as a couple for work-life balance.

For Wendy, conversations with parents further reaffirmed her family orientation and the importance of equally engaging in various life roles, although she and her husband had opposing life orientations and defined work-life balance differently:

*I speak to my mom daily on the phone. First, she would ask me about my students and their progress, but she always concludes with: “What’s for dinner? Christian is coming home after a long flight. Make something nice” or “Do you remember it is your niece’s recital tomorrow?” It is important to always balance properly. (Wendy, 36, Teacher)*

In addition to parental influences, interactions with other family members and friends also shaped participants’ definitions of work-life balance. A few partners of couples with opposing orientations reported relying more on their friends or distant relatives than spouses for advice or guidance on work-life balance. When asked to clarify, some described conflict with their significant others concerning work-life balance and the need to seek others’ perspectives on such matters. Participants sought their friends’ advice regarding their expectations.

*Joe [a friend] and I can fight over drinks as to who has it right or wrong. I believe work-life balance is about enjoying life to the fullest [satisfaction with all the domains], he is all about “there is time to play, but there is time to work hard” [distribution between domains]. I find myself agreeing with him more and more given his career progression. (Timothy, 34, University Professor)*

In this account, Timothy’s friend, whom he perceived as successful, helped him refocus his definition of work-life balance. According to Timothy, this new definition of work-life balance also enabled him to attain a greater degree of alignment with his wife, whose view of the concept resembled that of his friend (see Figure 2 on page 91).

**4.3.2.3 Colleagues.** Finally, approximately half the couples identified their colleagues as a source of influence in forming their definitions of work-life balance. In particular, participants described adjusting their own expectations of work-life balance in response to their colleagues’ experiences. This was especially evident for participants who had recently changed profession or

work place. Through interactions with colleagues, participants could see and interpret expectations surrounding work-life balance through the eyes of others. They were able to foresee what to anticipate as they advanced in their career, which shaped their definitions of work-life balance in the changing contexts of their lives. Robert recalled:

*When I joined the hospital, I am with right now, I was fresh out of medical school. You might know how medical schools are known for their 24/7 “on call” culture. I expected to continue in the same pace. So, my definition was all about trading my life for the profession. However, it was very soon that my colleagues explained to me that as a doctor, I actually have to learn to disengage and rest if I want to be good at what I do. They gave me plenty of advice how to manage work and life. Most importantly, I think it’s them who taught me to love what I do because I don’t have to do it 24/7. (Robert, 43, Doctor)*

What Robert conveyed is reminiscent of previous research on work-life balance, which suggests that social support from influential colleagues can serve as a buffering mechanism that helps employees seek balance between the roles of work and non-work domains (Sublett, 2016). In accordance with this literature, Robert attributed the shift in his view of work-life balance solely to interactions with colleagues.

For Tatyana, interactions with her colleagues reaffirmed the definition of work-life balance she had already held upon entering her work place. She recalled observing one of her colleagues who ruined her health by dedicating every moment to research and publishing:

*While my colleagues were constantly telling me that in order to get tenure, I shall slave my life away. I was determined to remain true to my definition of work-life balance, having a healthy balance between work and non-work. I did not want to end up in the hospital at the end of the day. (Tatyana, 56, University Professor)*

Both accounts suggest that interactions with colleagues significantly influenced participants’ definitions of work-life balance (see Figure 2 on page 91). This factor is closely intertwined with an additional factor, namely professional context and expectations, discussed next.

#### 4.3.3 Perceived Professional Contexts and Expectations

Perceived expectations within professions comprise a third factor that influenced participants' definitions of work-life balance for both individuals and couples. Depending on the circumstances of their career, participants cited both formal and informal criteria that influenced their work-life balance definition, for example, ongoing work demands, hours, expectations, deadlines, and fluctuating schedules.

Although all participants considered the demands in their respective professions to be unrealistic, their definitions of work-life balance differed regarding the degree of autonomy and flexibility built into their positions. For instance, participants employed in legal, medical, and engineering, reported having little autonomy; their profession's conservative nature, reflected in the long hours and high production expected of employees, meant there was limited, or in some cases non-existent, work-life balance (Quack & Schüßler, 2015). As a consequence, they tended to define work-life balance as an equal division between work and non-work domains. They were also inclined to elaborate on their profession's expectations of work-life balance, referencing the need to spend long hours working. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of a "face-time culture" in their workplaces that required them to be physically present for most of the workday. Debra, who described herself as having a strong work orientation and who also equated work-life balance with satisfaction in both domains, clarified how expectations in her profession influenced this conception:

*In law, there could be all-day meetings, which a lawyer needs to be physically present at. There could be all-day of drafting that has to be done at the office in case clients show up. There could be all-day-and-night drafting up until 9 pm and then coming back in the morning at, you know, 7:30, then to do meetings. There are definitely a multitude of these tasks, which all have to be done at the office as this is the expectation from managing partners at most legal firms. (Debra, 35, Lawyer)*

Unlike Debra, who was employed in a profession that is regularly characterized as resistant to change (Sankey, 2010), more than half the participants in other industries, such as marketing, academia, and information technology, defined work-life balance as flexibility and autonomy. Participants referred to having more independence and flexibility at their jobs because of their profession's less stringent expectations in comparison to participants in the previous category. Although the job requirements were equally demanding, the effect of those demands was mitigated by the ability to choose how and when to comply with them. Rick and Sergio explained:

*In academia as a whole, there are typically no expectations for how faculty members spend their day-to-day hours. As long as a professor gets the classroom teaching done, their advising expectations managed, the rest of the time is really up to the faculty member to allocate where they choose, when they choose, on what projects they choose. So, it is really very flexible in academia, which is work-life balance in my mind. (Rick, 39, University Professor)*

*I defined work-life balance as autonomy because in my field, this is what we get. There is no expectation of 9 to 5. We can work from home, from a coffee shop as long as we get the project done. So, I work and do other things at my own discretion. (Sergio, 38, Architect)*

Given the above accounts, it is evident that expectations within a given professional context play an important role in how a couple conceive work-life balance. Couples in industries with limited flexibility and autonomy often defined work-life balance in terms of satisfaction within the domains or equal distribution of time between the domains, whereas participants who described their professions as affording more independence and freedom tended to equate work-life with autonomy and flexibility (see Figure 2 on page 91).

As discussed at the beginning of this section, contextual influences appeared interdependent; on many occasions during the interviews, participants described influences in relation to each other. For instance, when describing their upbringing, participants would also

speak of interactions with their friends in the present. In some cases, they would describe the alignment between their ideas of work-life balance learned in their childhood with their friends' understandings of the concept. In other instances, they would explain how the ideals of their upbringing were called into question by their friends' experiences and expectations, and how, as a result of these incongruences, they reshaped their own definition of work-life balance. Similarly, they often spoke about interactions with their partners when forming their definitions of work-life balance, which then had to be reshaped due to professional expectations and demands, even if at times they were incongruent with definitions arrived at through interactions with partners.

Moreover, couples interviewed attributed different levels of salience to contextual influences in their formulation of work-life balance definitions. Careerist couples most often relied on professional and organizational expectations in their definition. While men in conventional couples agreed with careerists on the importance of professional expectations in defining work-life balance, women spoke of the importance of their upbringing and ongoing interactions with their families in their understanding of work-life balance. Both men and women in non-conventional couples mirrored careerists' responses identifying professional expectations as a primary driver for their definition of work-life balance. Women explained that due to their strong career orientation, forces other than professional expectations were less influential for them. Men, however, spoke of relying on their upbringing and interactions with others to form their definitions, but felt that the societal expectation to be the breadwinner and their employing organizations were the most significant factors in defining their work-life balance. Finally, egalitarian couples spoke of all three influences (upbringing and parental influence, interactions

with significant others and important stakeholders, and expectations of professional contexts) attributing similar levels of importance to them in the formulation of their definitions.

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter presented a proposed categorization of dual-career professional couples without children based on preferred career and/or family orientations. Four different categories of couples were presented: careerist, conventional, non-conventional, and egalitarian. Next it addressed the following research questions: (1) How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance? And (2) What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children?

I have demonstrated that definitions of work-life balance and contextual factors that influenced these definitions varied among the couples. These discrepancies were primarily shaped by a couple's career and/or family orientation(s). The findings in this chapter further demonstrate that although couples employed similar terms to define work-life balance, the meanings they attached to them varied based on their preferred orientation. Moreover, the meanings attached to definitions also varied between the partners of couples with opposing orientations.

The ways these couples defined work-life balance also formed four major groupings: work-life balance as flexibility, autonomy, and control; work-life balance as the ability to equally engage in work and non-work spheres; work-life balance as satisfaction with work and non-work; and work-life balance as agreement between partners, in particular a sense of alignment in partners' conceptions of work-life balance. How couples defined work-life balance was further

impacted by their interaction with one another, parents, colleagues, and friends in combination with their perceptions of professional contexts and expectations.

In conclusion, the debates in the work-life balance literature regarding the difficulty of producing a uniform definition of work-life balance are evolving. Similarly, based on the responses of the couples interviewed, work-life balance is a composite and evolving concept, suggesting that attempts to define it in a singular way are problematic. This idea will be further explored in the final chapter of this dissertation. Having presented the findings that pertain to the first and second research questions in this chapter, in the next chapter, I will focus on the findings for the third research question: “How do dual-career professional couples without children experience their work-life balance?”



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5.0 RESULTS: RESEARCH QUESTION THREE**

This chapter presents the findings concerning the third research question: “How do dual-career professional couples without children experience their work-life balance?” As in the previous chapter, which described definitions of work-life balance, it is important to note that experiences of work-life balance varied between the participating couples. After career and family orientations (see Chapter Four), the primary factors that most shaped the work-life balance of the couples interviewed were the work domain and the responsibilities and activities they undertook in the non-work domain. Many couples specifically cited those responsibilities and activities as influencing their work-life balance before describing those experiences themselves. Reflecting these responses, this chapter is organized into two sections. The first is devoted to describing different dimensions of couples’ non-work domains such as marriage, extended family, household responsibilities, pet ownership, volunteering, friendship, exercising and fitness, and hobbies. Building on this, the second part of the chapter explores how these dimensions contributed to conflicting or enhanced work-life balance in the four categories of couples: careerist, conventional, non-conventional, and egalitarian.

#### **5.1 Dimensions of the Non-Work Domain**

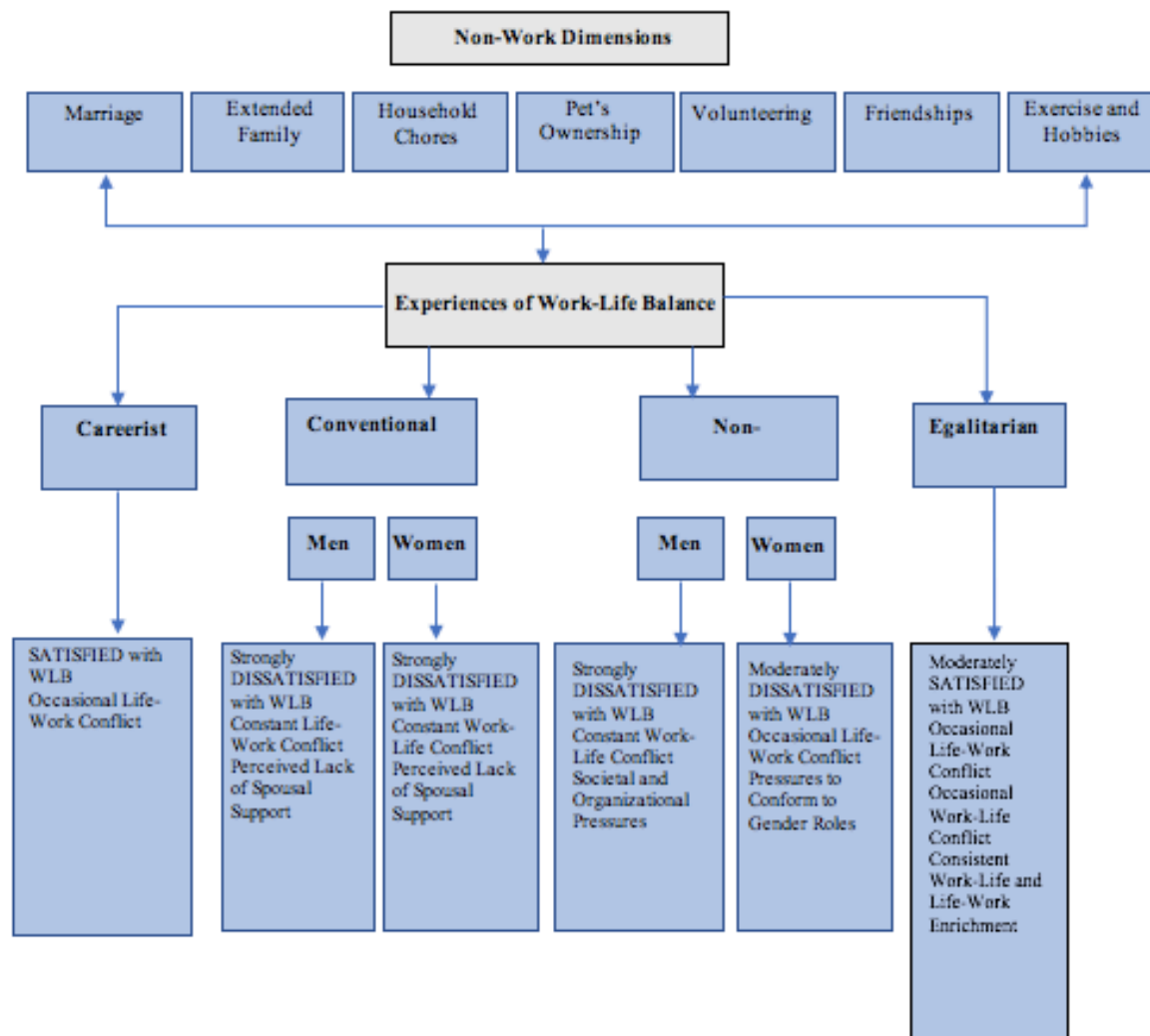
An overwhelming majority of work-life balance research continues to concentrate on how work and non-work domains exert pressures on individuals, creating various degrees of work-life conflict (Bennett, Beehr, & Ivanitskaya, 2017). As stated previously, the same research focuses on dual-career couples with children, suggesting that parental responsibilities exert the most pressure, forcing couples to juggle and negotiate between work and non-work domains

(Young & Schieman, 2018). At the same time, research on dimensions of the non-work domain and their impact on work-life balance of dual-career couples without children is limited (Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming'; Özbilgin et al., 2011). Popular media, on the other hand, is filled with negative stereotypes of people without children, suggesting that they are focused on themselves and have minimal non-work responsibilities in comparison to their colleagues with children (Savage, 2017). Due to this supposed lack of non-work responsibilities, popular media creates the impression that dual-career couples without children do not experience work-life conflict (Carroll, 2015).

Contrary to this depiction, all participants described work as merely one of many factors that influenced their shared experiences of work-life balance, even if it was a crucial aspect of their lives as a couple. Specifically, in addition to the work domain, couples in my sample spoke extensively about the dimensions of the non-work domain that had an impact on their work-life balance. Participants described some of the dimensions of the non-work domain from the perspective of their responsibilities, which entailed areas of life that involved obligations to others – marriage, extended family, household responsibilities, and caring for pets. Others, however, described the non-work domain as a space in which to pursue personal interests, such as volunteering, spending time with friends, health and fitness, and hobbies. These activities too consumed time and energy, thereby having an impact on couples' overall work-life balance. Most couples agreed that dimensions in the non-work domain played an important role in their work-life balance. Those non-work dimensions include: marriage, extended family, household responsibilities, caring for pets, volunteering, friendships, and exercising and hobbies (see Figure 3 for overview of non-work dimensions described by the interviewed couples on page 105). In

order to answer the third research question, it is necessary to first discuss these dimensions and how they variously affected the work-life balance of couples in the different categories.

Figure 3: Non-Work Dimensions and Experiences of Work-Life Balance



### 5.1.1 Marriage

Virtually all couples said that marriage was the most important dimension of their lives outside of work. First, their marital roles were more time consuming than any other non-work

aspect. Second, participants stressed the around-the-clock nature of marital commitments. Curtin described the role of marriage in a couple's life as follows:

*I think marriage is something you cannot set aside. If you get tired of work, you can simply leave it to the next day, you cannot do the same with marriage. You are a part of the union that is constantly on, day and night. For many people like us, it is perhaps the most important role overall. (Curtin, 35, Human Resources Manager)*

His wife Samantha added:

*You get a weekend off from work, but marriage is a constant, no weekends. And more often than not, it is just like work where you need [to] plan ahead and be alert. (Samantha, 33, Accountant)*

From the accounts above we can infer that for this couple, marriage was comparable to work in that it continuously required attention and effort from both partners. Echoing the above quotations, several other participants stressed having to strategize their actions in order to please their partners as a way to sustain their relationship. Others described marriage in terms of fulfilling responsibilities to one another on a daily basis. Participants often cited the need to provide moral and emotional support to their partner for the marriage to function properly. They also brought up the continual need for communication between the partners in their pursuit of common goals. This finding reflects the caring dimension that dominates work-life balance literature (Kelliher et al., 2018 'forthcoming'; Özbilgin et al., 2011), but in this case the caring is for the spouse.

Participating couples spoke about marriage in terms of constant cooperation. They discussed how spouses provided companionship and were a part of day-to-day interactions, which positively influenced how the couple experienced work-life balance. Marriage was also presented as an interpersonal commitment that required forgoing self-interests for the good of the couple. In summary, all participants viewed marriage as a central part of their lives as a couple

and also agreed that it exerted considerable influence on their work-life balance both positively and negatively, which once again reflects the relational nature of work-life balance as described previously. This finding will be discussed in greater detail in the second section of this chapter.

### 5.1.2 Extended Family

Another dimension of the non-work domain that was extensively discussed by participating couples involved the extended family. The majority of participants spoke about devoting themselves emotionally and physically to their families. For some couples, this involved spending time with extended family members and socializing regularly during arranged dinners or outings. For this group, relationships with extended family members were a means of providing and receiving social and emotional support, typified by expressions of encouragement, active listening, reflection, and reassurance. Jamila, for example, shared that although she did not have parental responsibilities, she was, nonetheless, actively involved in caregiving for extended family members:

*I am very close to my siblings and my parents. I probably can go a week without seeing them, or I mean, I have, but I would prefer to see them, you know, once a week or every two weeks. I feel much better when it is more often. (Jamila, 40, Human Resources Manager)*

Jamila's account illustrates that providing social and emotional support to her extended family was reciprocal. Receiving support from her extended family was as important to her as it was to other members of her extended family. Similarly, Bianna described regularly devoting her day off to spending time with her extended family in the form of travelling to visit her mother:

*Mondays is usually a day off for me from work and I'll try to visit my mom, because she lives about 45 minutes away or so. That's kind of a day I dedicate to spending with her. (Bianna, 31, Teacher)*

In addition to social and emotional support, several couples described providing physical support to their aging parents and other elderly family members, which echoes previous findings

on caring discussed earlier in this chapter as well as the relational nature of work-life balance. This included accompanying them to doctor appointments, assisting with household chores, caring for them during illness, and bathing or lifting them if necessary. Couples who gave physical care to extended family members also stressed the increased time commitment associated with such activities as well as what they perceived to be an increased obligation in comparison to the social and emotional support described earlier. Sabrina recalled:

*You live your life working your job, visiting relatively healthy parents from time to time – when, bam! Out of the blue, dad has a stroke. He is partially paralyzed and will need months of therapy. I have to visit him daily to help the nurse with his rehabilitation. That includes massaging him, lifting him for bathing, reading to him, etc. I now spend most of my time after work at his place. (Sabrina 53, University Professor)*

Given the accounts above, we can conclude that extended family played a vital role in couples' non-work lives.

Relationships with extended family members can be classified into two kinds of caregiving activities: mutual social and emotional support and physical care. Both required time and effort on the part of the participants. While couples described social and emotional support as having a positive impact on their work-life balance because of its reciprocal nature, physical care was described as having a negative impact on work-life balance as on most occasions it was one-sided. The impact of extended families on couples' work-life balance will be discussed in greater detail in the second section of this chapter.

### 5.1.3 Household Responsibilities

Another theme concerning the dimensions of the non-work domain involved responsibilities for household duties. When speaking about their non-work lives, most couples

referred to the difficulty of finding time on a consistent basis for household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and maintaining the interior and exterior of the home.

Couples' responses to questions on the impact of household duties on their work-life balance differed depending on what type of couple they were. Conventional couples tended to conform to traditional gender roles, in which women, despite having demanding careers, were expected to be more active in domestic responsibilities. Many female participants in conventional couples reported that meeting their partners' implicit or explicit expectations regarding domestic duties interfered with their ability to follow through on after-hours demands related to their jobs, such as attending meetings or staying at work late. Male partners in the same couples reported being less involved in housekeeping duties typically performed by women. Marikee noted:

*We married in the 70s. When we met, my husband did not know how to turn on the stove. I doubt he does now. It is normal for me to do everything at home. At the end of the day, I am a woman and that's my job. Nothing really changed since then and I doubt it ever will, unless I get fatally sick. (Marikee, 67, School Principal)*

In conventional couples, the division of household duties did not depend on who was the primary breadwinner in the relationship. Even when the female partner earned substantially more money than her husband, she was still largely responsible for domestic tasks. Julie explained:

*When we started our careers, he was making much more money than I was. But it changed after about 10 years of our marriage. I got an opportunity to join a very progressive firm and began making double what he does. But I don't confuse my work role with my house role. At home, I am the wife and therefore should be doing what is good for my family. I do shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry. He does grass mowing. It's just what we are used to. It's normal. (Julie, 58, Finance Director)*

Challenging traditional gender roles, careerist, non-conventional, and egalitarian couples adhered to less traditional gender roles. In these couples, both male and female partners shared

provider and caregiving roles. In contrast to conventional couples, they reported sharing household duties more or less equally. While still time consuming, the burden was distributed between both partners. Lory, a partner in an egalitarian couple, shared an account of the division of duties in her household:

*When it comes to chores around the house, I like to cook and bake and, you know, keep things semi-clean. My husband is definitely more of a cleaning person than I am, therefore he is mainly responsible for those chores. I do shopping, but he would do laundry. (Lory, 29, Psychologist)*

In general, all of the couples agreed that household responsibilities influence their work-life balance. This will be discussed in greater detail in the second section of this chapter.

#### 5.1.4 Caring for Pets

Thirteen couples in the sample had pets and spoke extensively about caring for them as another important dimension of their non-work lives, one that required both time and financial commitments. These participants devoted time to walking, exercising, and socializing with their pets and financial resources for veterinary care, training classes, grooming, food, toys, and boarding when necessary.

In line with current research, couples reported pets as family members whom they confided in, had conversations with, and provided consistent care for (Wilkin, Fairlie, & Ezzedeen, 2016). Monica, who owned two dogs, stated:

*I talk to people now, and they're saying like, I have pets, I'm thinking, oh, guys, that's just like children. They will demand your attention and most definitely have a hit on your wallet. (Monica, 30, Human Resources Manager)*

Couples also considered the bond they shared with their pets as comparable to that of a parent and child, often referring to pets as “fur babies” during the interviews. Couples believed that this particular relationship increased the volume of responsibilities in their lives.



*I don't have kids, so I can't really compare, but I see how my friends treat their pets. They love them for sure, but I devote myself to my pets and go above and beyond. I make sure that I consider my pets when I have to work late. I arrange my travel to have their favourite pet-sitter available. I spend a lot of time planning what is best for them. (Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

This finding further highlights the relational nature of work-life balance that transcends beyond interactions with humans and includes relationship with one's pet/pets.

### 5.1.5 Volunteering

Volunteering was also listed among the personal interests that comprised the non-work domain of couples in this study. Whether volunteering in religious congregations, community service, or working with animals, couples who volunteering demonstrated high levels of altruism and expressed the importance of giving back to ensure their time outside of work helped improve society. Evan, who volunteered in homeless shelters, shared his view:

*There is so much pain and injustice in this world. If we can help at least one individual in their survival, their lives would become better. We should help each other. I find purpose in volunteering that is much greater than purpose from any other thing I do. (Evan, 35, PhD Candidate)*

Similarly, several couples highlighted the considerable amount of time they devoted to organizations that served young people like Big Brothers Big Sisters<sup>5</sup>. Kevin, who along with his partner was the most dedicated supporter of volunteering, stated:

*If you talk to people who haven't had children, oftentimes they're involved in really great things. There are great things that you can be involved in when you don't have the responsibility of caring for a tiny human. It doesn't mean that if you don't have children that you can't be involved in volunteering with them, you can't be involved in – you can be involved in children's lives in a different way than if you were a parent. (Kevin, 35, Engineer)*

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<sup>5</sup> Big Brothers Big Sisters is a non-profit organization whose goal is to help all children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with volunteer mentors (<https://bigbrothersbigsisters.ca>).

In addition to altruistic motivations for volunteering, couples suggested that working alongside likeminded individuals who shared their support for a particular cause provided a way to cultivate strong interpersonal bonds and friendships.

Couples described spending, on average, anywhere from one to three evenings a week volunteering. Three couples described devoting longer periods of time to these activities ranging from entire weekends to several days at a time when certain events were taking place, such as trips with volunteer organizations or larger community gatherings. All of the couples who discussed this non-work dimension of their lives believed that volunteering impacted their work-life balance. Like other dimensions of the non-work domain, volunteering was described as having both positive and negative effects on couples' work-life balance, which I will discuss in more detail in the second section of the chapter.

#### 5.1.6 Friendships

Friendships were also a vital component of couples' non-work lives. More than half of the sample regarded spending time with friends and socializing as extremely important, another indication of the relational nature of work-life balance that is influenced by one's friends and social circle. Alessia spoke at length about the importance of having regular contact with friends, referring to them 19 times during her interview:

*I am super passionate about spending time with my friends. We schedule girls' nights at least once a week. We also speak on the phone daily and stay connected on social media. I want to feel their presence in my life. They are my second family. (Alessia, 42, Doctor)*

Participants described receiving emotional support from their close friends as well as learning new life skills from them. Several participants revealed how spending time with friends changed

their perspective on their life priorities. The value participants attached to friendships was apparent in the interviews. John shared:

*I don't have many friends, but I have a couple of guys who I have known for years now. We have certain rituals we follow. We share a favourite sport team and always find time to watch the game regardless of where we are in the world. We just connect over Skype with beers. (John, 69, Manager of Finance)*

His wife Marikee also commented on the importance of friendship:

*Aside from your family, friends are somewhat a constant in your life. They see you in good times, but they are also there in bad times. I think friends ground me. (Marikee, 67, School Principal)*

When asked to quantify the amount of time participants spent socializing with friends, the responses ranged from few times a month to several times a week. Time spent with friends included physical meetings for dinners and outings, telephone or Skype conversations, and texting. For those couples who identified friendships as a vital element of their non-work domain, allocating time to these relationships on a consistent basis was deemed as extremely important. Furthermore, all participants in this category spoke of the difficulties devoting the desired amounts of time to their friends and acquaintances, which in turn impacted their individual and shared work-life balance most often negatively.

#### *5.1.7 Exercise and Hobbies*

The majority of couples described exercising as an important part of their non-work lives. Those who included this particular activity reported allocating several hours a week to fitness related activities. For some couples, exercising was part of a daily routine, while others described it as something they did only when their work responsibilities did not interfere. Monica explained how she regarded exercise as mandatory for her daily functioning:

*Working out is a big thing, exercise and eating healthy. I sound selfish now, but you need to take care of yourself and make sure that you feel good about yourself*

*so that you can function properly at work. If I don't exercise, I feel like I'm not. (Monica, 30, Human Resources Manager)*

Evan also captured this theme clearly:

*I mostly do outdoor sports, such as hiking, biking, golfing, the whole lot, so it's actually very important to me and it's becoming more important to me to have an ability to have time for these activities. (Evan, 35, Ph.D. Candidate)*

Several participants depicted exercising as a time to bond with their partner. For these couples, exercising was paired with spending quality time as a couple, and thus it served to enhance their relationship, improve communication, and maintain fitness goals. Diana and Timothy said that exercising functioned as a vital ritual in their relationship:

*We run together every day. Rain or shine, this is our time together to reflect on our priorities and spend quiet time together. We don't talk when we run, but we feel the togetherness at that point. (Timothy, 34, Ph.D. Candidate)*

His wife Diana added to his statement:

*This is a ritual we have had since we began dating. I may not wash the dishes from last night, but I will run with Timothy. I need to feel that this area of our life is constant. It gives us a sense of stability. (Diana, 32, Civil Engineer)*

For this couple, exercising was regarded as central to their non-work domain, one that they had protected and sustained over the years.

In addition to exercise, couples listed hobbies as a prominent aspect of their non-work lives. Some described cultivating hobbies as individuals, that is, without their partner. Examples of these hobbies included blogging, attending cooking classes, or learning a new language. Other participants, however, described cultivating joint hobbies as a couple, such as planning future travel by researching new destinations, creating art pieces, populating their wine collections, etc. Sabrina and Joseph described one such mutual pastime:

*We like to travel a lot, so that's one thing that we do as a couple typically, and oftentimes we'll spend a lot of time planning for trips in anticipation. So, we can spend evenings doing that. (Sabrina, 53, University Professor)*

Her husband Joseph elaborated:

*On the personal side, I really enjoy travel. I also brew my own beer, which is sort of on the hobby side, something I really enjoy doing. Sabrina and I would plan to visit countries where I can learn about new types of beer. And also, where we can see something unique. It takes time to research and we love doing that together.*  
(Joseph, 55, Civil Engineer)

The amount of time allocated to hobbies varied considerably among the participating couples. Some articulated the need to work on hobbies daily, while others did so less frequently, perhaps a few hours per month. Regardless of the time and frequency with which participants engaged in exercise and hobbies, all the couples who identified these activities as a part of their non-work domain emphasized their importance in terms of the impact on their work-life balance.

Having presented the most common dimensions of the couples' non-work domains as they described them, in the following section I turn to the third research question: how do these couples experience work-life balance and what dimensions of non-work domain play into their experience?

## **5.2 The Experience of Work-Life Balance of Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children**

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, how the couples in the sample experienced work-life balance varied among the couples. Just as their definitions of work-life balance were impacted by career and/or family orientations, how they experienced work-life balance diverged both between and within couples in accordance with the different levels of importance they ascribed to work and non-work domains. In general, work-life balance ranged from a high degree of balance (in the case of careerist couples with few perceived work-life conflicts) to a low degree of balance (in the cases of conventional and non-conventional couples,

who typically experienced frequent work-life conflicts, albeit for different reasons). Egalitarian couples experienced a moderate degree of work-life balance and typically experienced both conflict between and enrichment in work and non-work domains. Below, I explore in more detail how each couple type explained their experiences of work-life balance and what role the dimensions of the non-work domain described above played in these experiences.

### 5.2.1 *Careerist Couples*

Despite previous research that suggests people with strong work orientations spend significantly more time in their work roles and thereby struggle with work-life balance more than their family-oriented counterparts (e.g. Clark, Michel, Zhdanova, Pui, & Baltes, 2016; Huang & Wang, 2013), careerist couples described feeling generally content with their work-life balance. In addition, when comparing their actual experiences of work-life balance with their definitions of work-life balance (see previous chapter), careerists felt that there was a high degree of alignment between how they envisioned work-life balance and what it actually entailed. In other words, when describing their work-life balance, their responses were accompanied with phrases such as “I enjoy my life as it is”, “I would not change anything about my work-life balance”, and “I am quite balanced”. In general, most of the participants in this category described enjoying their current state of work-life balance.

To substantiate their responses, they emphasized the fulfillment they gleaned from work, which, in their opinion and in line with their career orientation, was an indicator of good work-life balance. Robert stated:

*I love my job. I feel that I do something very important for the community and people I help every day. I get to help children, whom might not have survived if I didn't operate on them. I save lives. This is my ultimate purpose, I think, in life. I feel balanced when I get to help people and do my job well. (Robert, 43, Doctor)*

To explain their satisfaction with their work-life balance, careerist couples highlighted the importance of prioritizing roles. They mutually considered work to be a vital priority when compared with other, non-work roles and activities. Therefore, as long as both partners in careerist couples felt that they were able to participate in the work domain without unnecessary distractions from the non-work domain, they were content with their work-life balance. It should be clarified that these participants acknowledged the value of other life roles (even if only the mere existence of them), for example, those that pertained to their marriage, household, and extended family. However, they ranked these roles as lower in priority than work. As a result, even when participants were unable to attend to non-work tasks due to the demands of their jobs, they did not feel a sense of conflict in their work-life balance.

While non-work dimensions were ranked lower on the priorities list for these couples, when describing their relative lack of work-life conflict, careerist couples spoke extensively about their marriages and the importance of being aligned with their partner in terms of priorities and career orientations. Both men and women in careerist marriages attributed the lack of work-life conflict to their mutual prioritization of work. In particular, they specified that unlike other couples who argued because one partner worked more than the other, this was not the case for them because both members devoted considerably more time to work than any other area of life.

Collin explained:

*I don't have an expectation that when I get home, she will be waiting for me in an apron with dinner on the table. I don't even expect her to be home when I arrive. Each of us have a very busy schedule and she will be home when she is done. At the same time, she does not hold me to any expectation to be home at 5 or 6. We both know we work much more than that. (Collin, 67, Investment Manager)*

His wife Viktoria elaborated:

*I know that I have Collin's support to do what I need to do. I know that when I get home, he will not scold me for being late or spending 10 days on a work trip. We have that common understanding of priorities. (Viktoria, 62, Director of Sales)*

The above quotations are reminiscent of the value of mutual social and emotional support described in the previous section and its effect on couples' work-life balance. These responses illustrate how support and alignment between partners can aid in cultivating a mutually constructed perception of balance within careerist couples, because of the pre-eminence of work over the non-work domain.

Although careerist couples did not experience work-life conflict when they were unable or unwilling to attend to non-work roles, a few couples reported experiencing life-work conflict in rare cases when the non-work domain intersected with their work sphere. Specifically, they experienced elevated tension when unplanned non-work needs interfered with work. Noah provided an example of this:

*About two years ago we were building the house and we had an emergency during the excavation phase. Normally, we had a meeting scheduled with the architect, but at that time I had to leave work and be at the construction site for most of the day. I had to cancel my clients, which I never do. This is the time I really felt that [the] world is sliding from under my feet. I was frustrated because I was not supposed to be dealing with that at that time. I had work commitments. (Noah, 55, Lawyer)*

Two other participants spoke of experiencing life-work conflict at times when unplanned interference from the non-work domain took place. Joseph gave an example:

*I had [an] on-site consultation with clients in the early morning. I woke up to my cat making strange noises. I had to rush her to the emergency as I thought she was suffocating. Sabrina [Joseph's wife] was out of town that day. I felt extremely stressed because I had to cancel my meeting. Those things make me feel unbalanced for sure. (Joseph, 55, Civil Engineer)*

Joseph's wife Sabrina also experienced conflict:

*I remember receiving a phone call from our neighbours that they see some smoke coming from our backyard. I was finishing my paper in the office. Obviously, I*



*had to rush back home just to find out that we didn't put out the fire . . . properly the night before. I had to submit the paper the same day. At the end of the day I had to write to my colleague with apologies asking for [a] one day extension. Sounds silly, but I felt out of place for the whole day then. (Sabrina, 53, University Professor)*

Given the above accounts, we can presume that work-life conflict for careerist couples was unidirectional. In general, careerist couples were content with their work-life balance. While they did not experience work to life conflict when work dominated, life to work conflict did occur when their priorities were thwarted.

### 5.2.2 Conventional Couples

Unlike careerist couples, participants in conventional couples described being dissatisfied with their work-life balance, experiencing consistently high levels of work-life conflict. Furthermore, unlike careerist couples, conventional couples experienced tension between the partners in their work-life balance. Men most often complained about work-life balance brought on by life-work conflict, whereas women experienced work-to-life conflict. This difference can be attributed to divergent life orientations in the partners. Recall that in conventional couples, men exhibited a career orientation, whereas women were family oriented. As a result, the two sexes attached inverse levels of significance to work and non-work roles.

Male partners in conventional couples (like members of careerist couples discussed above) prioritized work over non-work roles most of the time. Men in conventional relationships did not describe instances in which work intruded into the non-work domain as an interference nor as a conflict. As a result, they accorded less priority to work-life balance or had fewer concerns of how their work-life balance was evolving.

In line with the findings from careerist couples' experience of work-life balance, men in conventional couples experienced life-to-work conflict when unplanned necessities from the

non-work domain encroached on the work domain. Unlike careerist couples, however, men in conventional couples experienced life-work conflict more often because of their partner's attitude toward and experience of work-life balance. Another connection to the importance of social and emotional support in attainment of work-life balance as described previously in the literature (Russo, Shteigman, & Carmeli, 2016). In the case of conventional couples, and as described by participants themselves, men lacked social and emotional support from their spouses, which ultimately effected their experience of work-life balance negatively. Robert shared:

*I often feel that Terry is unhappy with how much I work. She consistently complains that I don't spend enough time at home or give her enough attention. I come from work after a long day and I am bombarded with arguments. This drains me even more than work itself. (Robert, 43, Doctor)*

On many occasions during the interviews, men described their wives' disappointments over the lack of their (men's) involvement in the non-work domain. As a result, they felt compelled to engage in non-work activities despite having little desire to do so, which ultimately amounted to a sense of life-work conflict. They thought their partners were coercing them to participate in non-work activities, especially during the work week. David and Frank provided examples:

*Monica loves calling me during the day to discuss various plans for the weekend, shopping lists, upcoming travel. I hate doing this during the day and I constantly tell her about it. She gets very upset claiming that I don't care about our marriage, so I force myself to disengage from work at that time and continue the discussion with her. (David, 33, Financial Analyst)*

*I have a to-do list every week of something I need to do around the house. I try to find time daily at night to do one thing at a time. But I find that Lory gets frustrated with me not doing more. I physically cannot be a handyman every day. At times I do things slower on purpose, so she doesn't throw more repairs or chores my way. I feel that it really interferes with my work. (Frank, 31, Marketing Manager)*

Given David's and Frank's accounts and responses from other participants in this study, men in conventional unions experienced life-work conflict almost daily. This ongoing life-work conflict contributed to their overall dissatisfaction with their work-life balance both individually and as a couple because of the perceived coercion they felt from their spouses to participate in the non-work domain.

Women in conventional couples also reported dissatisfaction with their work-life balance. Unlike their male counterparts, they considered non-work roles to be of equal if not greater importance than their work role. As discussed earlier, when women in conventional marriages were asked to define their work-life balance, the majority wanted equal participation in both domains. However, when describing their experiences of work-life balance, women in this category shared that involvement in both work and non-work domains often created tension and resulted in a low degree of work-life balance. In other words, because they aimed to engage in both domains equally, they often experienced work to life conflict and life to work conflict simultaneously where their work role interfered with their ability to participate in the non-work domain and vice versa. They also specified that the roles that most contributed to a sense of life-work conflict were those pertaining to extended family and household duties, areas they saw themselves as being more involved in than their partners.

The tendency for relationships and duties associated with extended family to be a cause of life-work conflict was particularly evident in women between 40 and 70 years old. The common thread among the participants was the increasing level of responsibility for their own and their husband's aging parents. These women described bearing the caregiver responsibilities for elderly parents, and believed both the obligations and time commitment involved in this role to have significantly increased. Some women compared caregiving duties to having a second

full-time job. It thus negatively impacted work-life balance, both individually and as a couple.

Julie shared:

*It's almost a full-time job. Making sure my mother is happy and not feeling lonely means daily visits. Her never-ending stream of medical issues means weekly, if not more frequent, trips to the doctors. Paying her rent and her aides while keeping an eye on the bottom line means constant vigilance if she is going to have any financial security in the long term. This takes up all of my free time from work. (Julie, 58, Finance Director)*

Whereas the majority of women in conventional marriages had siblings who could potentially offset caregiving responsibilities, they still reported feeling trapped into being sole caregivers. Reflecting on this issue, several participants indicated taking on more of the caregiving duties than their siblings, making them the primary support for their aging parents and relatives. Victoria commented:

*I have two sisters, both of whom are married with three children each. While I have the most demanding job among [the] three of us, well, I think I do, I take full responsibility caring for our mother, who lives with me at the moment. She is 87 years old and she needs me. She cannot function alone anymore. Between the extracurricular activities for children and running errands, my sisters simply have no time to take the responsibility for our mother. It was never discussed. It was assumed naturally that it would be me taking care of her as I don't have any children of my own. (Victoria, 62, Director of Sales)*

It is important to note that because women in the sample had no children, they felt that they were seen by others as having more time to attend to elderly parents. Another participant described the extent of physical caregiving responsibilities in great detail:

*I do a lot for our father. I pay his bills, mow his lawn, and interact with doctors, social workers, and nursing home staff. I arrange his transitions from one institution to another, and I sit with him at each of his appointments. (Marikee, 67, School Principal)*

Such accounts represent one key finding of this study: women in conventional couples without children experienced a decline in work-life balance later in life when they assumed the majority of the responsibility for aging parents or elderly members of their extended families.

Moreover, the results suggest that these women also shared a prevailing sense that they were expected by their families to assume these roles, given their lack of parental responsibilities.

Another important finding involved the persistent gender bias in terms of who cared for aging parents. In conventional couples, the majority of participants who assumed caregiving responsibilities for aging parents, whether their own or those of their partners, were women. When their spouses were asked about caregiving responsibilities, the answers indicated more limited involvement. For instance, Patrick (45), whose mother had recently suffered a stroke, stated that his sisters (also without children) were primarily responsible for caring for her and that his involvement was minimal. In contrast, Courtney expressed concern for future caregiving responsibilities and the need for financial planning for the couple's parents:

*So, it's not necessarily us doing caregiving at the moment although I anticipate that at some point it will be. So, trying to make sure that I have the finances to be able to do that, both for my parents and then also for Rick's parents, as well, to make sure that they have, you know, care, when they're older. Given that care is quite expensive. So that's something that I thought about a lot. (Courtney, 38, University Professor)*

An additional theme among women in conventional couples concerned the influence of household duties on work-life balance. Most women voiced the need to take care of their homes and find time for household chores on a daily basis. Women in this category tended to conform to traditional gender roles, which meant, despite having demanding careers and not having children, they were largely responsible for domestic responsibilities.

It appears that women in conventional couples experienced a high degree of work-life conflict because they bore major responsibilities for duties in the non-work domain, primarily those of caregiving and household work. In addition, it can be argued that for women in conventional couples, inflated levels of responsibility in their non-work domain were intensified by their male partners' lack of involvement in non-work responsibilities due to their strong work

orientation. As a result, both men and women in conventional couples were dissatisfied with their work-life balance, albeit for different reasons.

### 5.2.3 *Non-Conventional Couples*

Like conventional couples, non-conventional couples reported divergent experiences of work-life balance between partners. As described in chapter four of this dissertation, non-conventional couples were composed of a male with a family orientation and a woman with a career orientation. In general, women in non-conventional couples felt content with their work-life balance. Unlike men in conventional relationships who reported having conflicts with their partners about work-life balance, women in non-conventional unions often voiced receiving a lot of support from their partners to pursue their career and dedicate a substantial amount of time to work responsibilities. In addition, due to their partners' increased involvement in the non-work domain, their life-work conflict was likewise mitigated. Some had negotiated agreements with their significant others to clearly delegate various non-work roles, thereby ensuring participants' ability to devote themselves to work during the work week (and often beyond). Debra commented:

*Tamir and I have an agreement that during the week he is dealing with any unplanned home stuff. Most of the time, he wouldn't even call me to discuss if anything. He knows my clients come first during the day. If anything, we discuss issues in the evening. But most of the time he is great at dealing with them.*  
(Debra, 35, Lawyer)

Despite feeling balanced in general, one area of concern pertaining to work-life balance identified by non-conventional women was colleagues' perceptions and opinions about their seeming neglect of non-work responsibilities. Several women in non-conventional couples described feeling enormous pressure from their colleagues with children to reduce their work

involvement. Other participants in this category believed their colleagues felt they did not conform to traditional gender roles because they showed minimal interest in non-work roles typically associated with caring for the family. As a result, women in this category, who were strongly oriented towards career, felt that they had to take on non-work roles more often than they desired in order to conform to their colleagues' expectations, which in turn affected their work-life balance negatively. Alessia provided an example:

*Because I don't participate at lunch talks about children and choose to work instead, I am described as "office crazy" behind my back. I get ridiculed for loving my job and not the frying pans at home, which would be much preferred by my colleagues. (Alessia, 40, Doctor)*

Women in this category also felt pressured to reduce their work involvement to participate in non-work activities put on by their organizations, which impacted their work-life balance negatively as well. Bianna explained:

*I work in education and my organization often sends us to various retreats for bonding purposes. I feel pressured to participate, because if I don't, I might not stay in this position for long. But I find those activities useless. I don't really accomplish anything there except for new meal . . . recipes to prepare for my husband after work. (Bianna, 31, Teacher)*

The experience of men in non-conventional couples differed significantly from those of women. In particular, they reported experiencing constant high levels of work-life conflict, which negatively affected work-life balance. They noted the importance of participating in the non-work domain and their inability to fully attend to this area of life due to organizational attitudes concerning their involvement in non-work roles. In addition to household chores, which often required attention during the work day, men in this group also emphasized volunteering and self-care as central elements of their non-work lives that demanded time and effort on a consistent basis. However, they also reported difficulties navigating both work and non-work roles due to the commonly held expectation that they would be the "ideal worker" at their places

of employment. According to the participants, the myth of the ideal employee, perpetuated by society in general and specifically by their organizations, created intense time pressure and work-life conflict. According to the men in this category, the ideal male employee is fully committed to the organization and free of any responsibilities outside his job. The participants felt this model continued to dominate professional fields for male employees and exerted enormous pressure on men with family orientations to conform. It forced them to ignore their desire to devote time to the non-work domain and impacted their work-life balance in a negative way. As Kevin put it:

*It is very difficult for me to take care of roles outside of work at any given time. While I would love to work out in the morning or take [a] couple of hours during the day to do grocery shopping, it is not possible. My superiors would never understand if I approached them with such requests. So, I try to do everything when I finish work, but at times its 10 pm and my time is very limited. (Kevin, 35, Engineer)*

Tom's comments shed more light on the matter:

*Giving back to the community is very important for me and I try to devote [a] few hours a month to it. But there are times when I plan to go to the shelter even on the weekend, when I get called into work for an emergency. Then I have to change my plans. It is unacceptable to refuse to go into work. (Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

These two accounts illustrate how the inability to attend to non-work roles that are important to men in non-conventional couples had a negative impact on their work-life balance. However, it can also be concluded that this conflict was difficult to resolve because participants attributed it to societal and organizational pressures and expectations. We can further conclude that both conventional and non-conventional couples struggled with work-life balance, albeit for different reasons.

#### 5.2.4 Egalitarian Couples



Members of egalitarian couples were the only participants that described experiencing both work-life conflict and work-life enrichment. In other words, they spoke of both enjoying work-life balance and experiencing tension in their work-life balance at the same time. Both men and women in this group experienced work-life conflict because of time constraints and work-life enrichment because they took on a multitude of different life roles; participation in one role enhanced their experiences in other roles and vice versa. It is vital to note that in terms of percentages, egalitarian couples represented the majority of the sample in this dissertation. Additionally, as in the case of careerist couples, egalitarian couples reported experiencing commensurate levels of work-life balance between the partners.

Both men and women in this category of couple ascribed equal priority to the different roles and domains. Work was described as highly important, but roles associated with the non-work were equally so. In other words, egalitarian couples were content with their work-life balance when they were able to participate in all of their desired roles without making sacrifices in any of the domains. Egalitarian couples explained that work-life conflicts were often caused by insufficient time to participate in all the desired roles. Sergio and Rachel explained:

*I wish we had more time in a day. Then we could fit in more of what we like to do. After work, it would be great to spend time on ourselves, go to the gym, go on dates or go help out at the local pet shelter. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. (Sergio, 38, Architect)*

*Sometimes I have to leave work early to make it to my mother's doctor's appointments or to volunteer at our congregation. I think the conflict manifests itself through a lack of physical time to do it all, not through how much we do. Because mostly everything we do, we enjoy. (Rachel, 36, Doctor)*

Egalitarian couples also spent considerable amounts of time discussing gender role expectations (or rather, the lack thereof) in their relationship. For them, equally dividing responsibilities ameliorated work-life conflict. The majority of egalitarian couples interviewed

adhered to less traditional gender roles; both male and female partners shared providing and caregiving roles and took equal responsibility for the domestic and financial aspects of the relationship. They shared household duties somewhat equitably, which was still time consuming but more balanced between both partners. Couples often attributed their satisfaction with work-life balance to equal division of responsibilities between the partners, which alleviated unnecessary stress on the individual members of the couple. Lory explained the division of duties in their household:

*When it comes to chores around the house, I like to cook and bake and, you know, keep things semi-clean. My husband is definitely more of a cleaning person than I am, therefore he is mainly responsible for those chores. I do shopping, but he would do laundry. (Lory, 29, Psychologist)*

Frank, her husband, added:

*We are easy going when it comes to house chores. We do them when we have time. Sometimes Lory will do this week's cleaning, but I will make sure to do it next time. We are very balanced when it comes to taking care of the house. (Frank, 31, Marketing Manager)*

As these accounts suggest, egalitarian couples not only shared household chores but did so in such a way that even the specific chores each partner assumed blurred the boundary between traditional gender roles which in turn promoted better work-life balance for the couple. According to egalitarian couples, men in these unions generally assumed an equal portion of responsibilities in the home, relieving women of some of the burden of the non-work domain, unlike conventional unions. For members of egalitarian marriages, sharing household tasks minimized their work-life conflict and allowed them to devote more time to other non-work roles, especially the women.

Finally, egalitarian couples spoke about bettering their work-life balance through work-life enrichment, a component that was absent from the responses of couples in other categories.

In conjunction with experiencing insufficient time to attend to their desired non-work roles, these couples explained that participation in one role enhanced their experiences in other roles, thereby reducing the amount of work-life conflict and enhancing their overall work-life balance. About half the participants in egalitarian couples gave examples of how work roles allowed them to develop transferable skills like organizing or negotiating that could be utilized in other areas of their lives. They also articulated how fulfilling non-work roles taught them to be more compassionate and caring in the context of work roles. Samantha drew on her volunteer work with at-risk children and adults to explain:

*Curtin and I spend a lot of time working with children in our community. Our roles include mentoring and guidance of young troubled adults. In my work role, I mentor many new employees in the beginning stages of their career. I feel that my work experience allows me to use my mentoring skills on these kids I work with in the community. On the other hand, these community children taught me compassion. I am able to transfer this into my workplace and perhaps be kinder to these new employees. (Samantha, 33, Accountant)*

Although egalitarian couples at times reported some degree of work-life conflict and dissatisfaction with overall work-life balance, their ability to engage in other roles outside of work afforded them more opportunities to experience work-life enrichment, which they believed enhanced their shared experience of work-life balance as a couple.

### **5.3 Summary**

This chapter addressed the third research question that guides this dissertation: “How do dual-career couples without children experience work-life balance?” Although previous studies on dual-career couples with children tended to equate the non-work domain with parenting (e.g. Emslie, 2009; Gatrell et al., 2013), I have demonstrated that even when parental responsibilities were absent (as was the case in this sample of participants), other dimensions comprised the non-

work domain of couples' lives and required a sizable commitment of time and energy, which affected work-life balance both positively and negatively.

After exploring these non-work dimensions in detail, I presented how the constellation of these elements with career and/or family orientations affected work-life balance for both individuals and couples. I concluded that the degree of work-life balance ranged from high (in the case of careerist couples who experienced only minor life-to-work conflict) to low (as was true of conventional and non-conventional couples who experienced more work-life conflict, albeit for different reasons). In the middle of these two extremes were egalitarian couples who experienced a combination of both conflict and enrichment. Most importantly, I affirmed the relational nature of the work-life balance of couples, showing that this construct should not be examined from a strictly individualist perspective. The participants' accounts indicated that in the context of their relationships, one partner influenced the other's experiences of work-life balance and vice versa. This finding will be further explored in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. Having presented the findings that pertain to the third research question in this chapter, in the final chapter, I will focus on the findings for the fourth research question: "How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?"

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **6.0 RESULTS: RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR**

This chapter addresses the fourth research question of this dissertation: “How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?” Despite considerable diversity among couples interviewed in terms of their career and family orientations and how they defined work-life balance, the strategies they used to manage work-life balance overlapped. While couples used similar strategies, their reasons for doing so differed among the four categories of couples discussed in this dissertation. The objectives for each of the strategies correspond to the overall expectations of work-life balance based on couples’ career and/or family orientations (see Figure 4 on page 132).

For example, one strategy common to all couple types was negotiating. While careerist couples relied on negotiations to protect their work space (i.e., to limit non-work interference in their work domain), reflecting their desire to keep their career at the forefront of their daily lives, conventional couples used this strategy to reach a consensus regarding their participation in one or both domains. Non-conventional couples relied on negotiation to safeguard their preferred work-life balance from forces outside of the marriage (such as organizational or societal pressures), whereas egalitarian couples did so to maximize their participation in both work and non-work realms (reflecting their desire to immerse themselves or engage meaningfully in both). This finding provides further evidence that, much like an interpretivist ontology might suggest, the management of work-life balance is deeply rooted in couples’ subjective expectations and experiences that are in turn situated within contextual factors, particularly their career/family orientations.

Figure 4: Dual-Career Professional Couples' Work-Life Balance Objectives

Couple Category	Objective	Examples of Supporting Quotes
Careerist	Keeping careers at the forefront at all times	<i>Neither of us can truly relax if we have something going on at work. We can only relax when everything is under control. (Timothy, 34, Ph.D. Candidate)</i>
Conventional	Minimizing conflict between partners	<i>I cannot tell you how many times I have to tell Robert to get off the phone and stop working per day. It is exhausting. (Wendy, 36, Teacher)</i>
Non-Conventional	Minimizing conflict with forces outside the couple	<i>My sister wants me to watch my niece, I can't make any promises. My job is unpredictable. I hate disappointing her. (Whitney, 44, Higher Education Director)</i>
Egalitarian	Achieving meaningful immersion in all domains of couples' lives without making substantial sacrifices	<i>I don't want to wake up one day and regret that I didn't do something in my life. We live to the fullest. And we intend to continue doing that. (Bryan, 47, Veterinarian)</i>

This chapter is organized into four sections corresponding to the work-life balance management strategies of the four types of couples. Each section describes the strategies utilized by one couple type as well as their rationale for these strategies, as described by the couples.

## 6.1 Careerist Couples' Work-Life Balance Management Strategies

As noted previously, careerist couples are those who prioritize their careers over the non-work domain of their lives. Careerist couples described a variety of management strategies they used to prevent their non-work life from impinging on their work (see Figures 5 on page 144).

### 6.1.1 Prioritizing

Prioritizing was the strategy most frequently described by careerist couples in their pursuit of work-life balance. Prioritizing has traditionally been understood as ranking elements of the work and non-work domains in terms of importance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). However, careerist couples ascribed a different purpose to prioritization than is identified in work-life balance literature (see Chapter 7, “Discussion”) or by other couples in this study. For careerist couples, it served to rank only non-work activities, with work always holding priority. As Joseph stated:

*Work is always first. You would never hear Sabrina and I discuss if we can push work to go for a walk or visit my sister. You will, however, hear us having discussions trying to decide between [a] family visit or a date. (Joseph, 55, Civil Engineer)*

Sabrina confirmed that as a couple they had already established work as a priority; prioritizing for them meant figuring out what came next after work.

Another careerist couple, Wendy and Christian, suggested that prioritizing non-work activities was essential to manage work-life balance, given their exacting work demands:

*Some things that we have to do outside of work cannot be done by anyone else. For example, I cannot send someone else to attend my niece’s birthday party. Similarly, Rick is not able to miss his brother’s graduation. So, these “must attend” activities we prioritize higher than others, which can be delayed or outsourced. (Wendy, 36, Teacher)*

From the above accounts, it appears that careerist couples used prioritization to secure work as their top priority and determine the importance of their non-work priorities. These non-work activities were ranked in favor of those that required personal attention and thus could not be substituted or outsourced, for example, spending time with extended family or attending celebratory events. This finding challenges the literature on work-life balance, in which prioritization is situated predominately in the work versus non-work debate (Demerouti, Derks, Lieke, & Bakker, 2014). Rather than relying on prioritization to protect the non-work domain,

careerist couples did so to safeguard their work domain from unnecessary interference from non-work responsibilities.

### 6.1.2. *Negotiating*

Negotiating was another management strategy identified by careerist couples in their efforts to achieve satisfactory work-life balance. These couples referred to the need to negotiate the importance of various non-work activities in relation to both themselves and their social circle. Although most careerist partners agreed on the importance of work over the non-work domain, they occasionally disagreed on the importance of specific non-work activities. These disagreements, as illustrated by Julia and Ryan, often revolved around extended family responsibilities or family gatherings. Ryan explained the disagreement:

*Julie is more involved with her family than I am per se. On top of it, she has many relatives that often require us to attend family gatherings. Most of our tiffs happen around deciding how many birthdays we attend this month or how many dinners we have to schedule with her family. That takes professional negotiation to finalize [chuckles] (Ryan, 64, Space Engineer)*

The aim of negotiation, as he described it, was to reach a compromise:

*I often propose [a] “give-and-take” method. I will agree to attend [a] few gatherings a month if she in turn agrees to set date nights in return. That way our non-work activities are balanced in a sense of priorities for us as a couple. (Ryan, 64, Space Engineer)*

During her interview, Julie also expressed the need to negotiate. However, she described negotiating factors outside her marriage, in particular the attention (or lack thereof) she pays to certain non-work activities. Overall, Julie described negotiation as a process of compromise, for example, by promising to attend a family event in the future they could politely decline attending a present event. She also cited instances of negotiating with her employer to work remotely when she was unable to avoid a non-work commitment:



*We had to attend a wedding outside of the city over the weekend while I was closing a major deal at work. The sensitivity of the financial documents required my presence at the office. I had to beg my employer to give me one-time over-the-weekend access to the documentation, so I could ensure [a] smooth transaction and closing. I typically never shy away from going into the office on the weekend, however, this was an exception I needed to find [a] solution for. (Julie, 58, Finance Director)*

The above account further illustrates that even in the event of Julie not being physically at work, she continued to give priority to her work. Furthermore, the example of Julie and Ryan suggests that careerist couples may experience a lack of alignment between partners regarding how much importance they attribute to particular non-work activities. In other words, while work was the top priority of both partners in careerist couples, their top non-work preference differed. For instance, for some participants, spending time with their significant other was ranked the most important after work, whereas for others it was attending to extended family needs.

### 6.1.3 Cooperating

Protecting their work from the encroachment of the non-work domain often required defining each partner's roles in the non-work domain as well as clearly assigning duties to each other as was the case for Rick and Courtney:

*There are only few hours in a day that we both have outside of work. We need to be highly organized to use this time wisely. Courtney and I have a list of responsibilities that we agreed to complete individually in order to maximize our efficiency and not do something twice. (Rick, 39, University Professor)*

Courtney further explained that earlier in their relationship, she and Rick had agreed that they would each take responsibility for different components of their non-work domain to save time and avoid redundancy. They divided responsibilities such that Courtney assumed domestic tasks like food preparation and cleaning and Rick managed household repairs and maintenance.

Another careerist couple, Timothy and Diana, described the importance of a role-or responsibility-based division of tasks, which they accomplished by discussing each partner's expectations and re-evaluating them when needed. Timothy described this strategy thus:

*Having assigned responsibilities makes life more structured. I remember receiving phone calls from Diana at 4 to 5 pm asking me to grab dinner on the way home. This immediately created chaos in my own schedule. I had to leave work earlier and think of where I need to stop. Now we know what we have to do in advance and I am able to plan for it. (Timothy, 34, Ph.D. Candidate)*

Diana took a similar view:

*I know what is expected of me, but more importantly I know what is expected of my husband. I know he will not ask me to find a plumber or get cat food because this is his job. I find it much easier to function when those things are decided upon and agreed upon. (Diana, 32, Civil Engineer)*

This finding demonstrates that although occasionally careerist couples disagreed on how to manage their work-life balance, they also worked together cooperatively. Unlike the compromising strategy, where one or both partners have to give up their interests/position in order for the couple to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution, careerist couples cooperated with each other in the division of tasks and did not have to compromise anything.

#### 6.1.4 Integrating

Some work-life balance scholars have described integration as a way to manage work responsibilities alongside personal and family needs (Jones et al., 2013). In other words, integration is an approach that creates synergies between all areas of life, such as work, home/family, community, personal well-being, health, etc. (Jones et al., 2013). However, for careerist couples, integration involved undertaking work and non-work activities simultaneously, but only as long as non-work activities did not detract from work activities.

Careerist couples recounted instances of bringing work home or discussing work-related developments with their spouses. They also described asking one another for work-related advice and sharing work stories during a meal or while exercising with their spouse. Paradoxically, then, careerist couples such as Ryan and Julie talked about work in non-work settings as a strategy in order to maintain a sense of work-life balance:

*After work Julie and I like to grab a glass of wine and tell each other about our often-crazy day at work. By now she knows every colleague of mine and I am able to tell her stories without providing the context. Same goes for her. We are very involved in each other's "business" so to say. She is a very smart woman, I treasure her advice. (Ryan, 64, Space Engineer)*

As part of this strategy, these couples sought ways to blend their personal and professional lives to maximize the time spent attending to the work domain. Not only did they describe involving their spouses in their work, they also invited them to job-related events when their partner's schedule permitted. Similarly, both men and women in these couples emphasized the importance of being able to continue work activities when they were not in their workplace, for example, ensuring access to work phones or tablets. To gain satisfaction from the non-work domain, partners in careerist couples needed to remain connected to the work domain at all times.

#### *6.1.5 Joint Short-Term and Long-Term Planning*

All careerist couples engaged in short-term planning on daily and weekly bases as a means of achieving satisfactory work-life balance. This included writing lists, prioritizing which activities needed immediate attention and which could be deferred. They also used calendars to manage deadlines, meetings, and appointments in the distant future. The frequent use of lists and calendars reflected careerist couples' continual efforts to safeguard their work by setting boundaries between work and non-work domains, as was the case for Sabrina and Joseph:

*I am [a] meticulous list maker. All of the items on the list are prioritized according to their importance and time sensitivity. I usually make the list in the beginning of the week and send it to Joseph for revisions. Once he is done with it, we are on the same page for the week to come. (Sabrina, 53, University Professor)*

Careerist couples planned out tasks individually when it concerned personal work commitments but maintained that joint planning was necessary to coordinate non-work demands. Some careerist couples described talking about their work and non-work schedules on a daily basis over breakfast. Others reported having such discussions on a weekly basis, typically on Sundays or Mondays. Regardless of how frequently these planning sessions occurred, all careerist couples said that joint planning was an essential component of their strategies for managing work-life balance. Finally, all careerist couples interviewed shared their calendars with each other, further signaling the importance of joint coordination.

Careerist couples also engaged in planning months or even years in advance, often to allow for work trips or vacations. Although work-related trips tended to be non-negotiable, it was important to communicate these events ahead of time to accommodate non-work responsibilities, particularly care of pets. It was important for careerist couples that one of them remain at home if they had pets that needed regular care. Therefore, work trips were frequently included in shared calendars to prevent both partners travelling at the same time. Careerist couples regularly spoke about an inability to take spontaneous vacations because of their demanding work schedules. Instead, they used long-term planning to achieve longer-term work-life balance by ensuring both partners could be away from work at the same time. For both men and women in careerist couples, the primary motivation behind short- and long-term planning was to achieve a sense of control over their work-life balance. Timothy used phrases such as “being in control of the situation, instead of letting the situation control me” and “being the master of my domain”.

Diana, Timothy's wife, also described using long-term planning to manage their work-life balance:

*Sometimes I have 4 to 5 projects at the same time. For me to take a break, I need to set aside time months in advance. Timothy and I usually sit down once a year to book off the weeks we will travel before they get filled with deadlines and work trips. It is easier to do it that way rather than trying to find a common free week, which is impossible, between his and my schedule on short-term notice (Diana, 32, Civil Engineer).*

Diana's account demonstrates a further finding that careerist couples were unlikely to renege on their work commitments to pursue non-work activities. As a result, they employed long-term planning to ensure their work domain was minimally affected by their absence, a finding that echoes careerist couples' preference to prioritize their work over their non-work activities.

#### 6.1.6 Outsourcing and Delegating in the Non-Work Domain

The final work-life balance management strategy discussed by careerist couples was delegating and outsourcing non-work tasks. While these couples were unable to delegate non-work commitments to other family members, they relied heavily on outsourcing household chores like cleaning, shopping, and maintenance work. All careerist couples, for example, employed either part-time or full-time housekeepers, which allowed them to participate in the non-work activities they deemed most important, such as spending non-work time together.

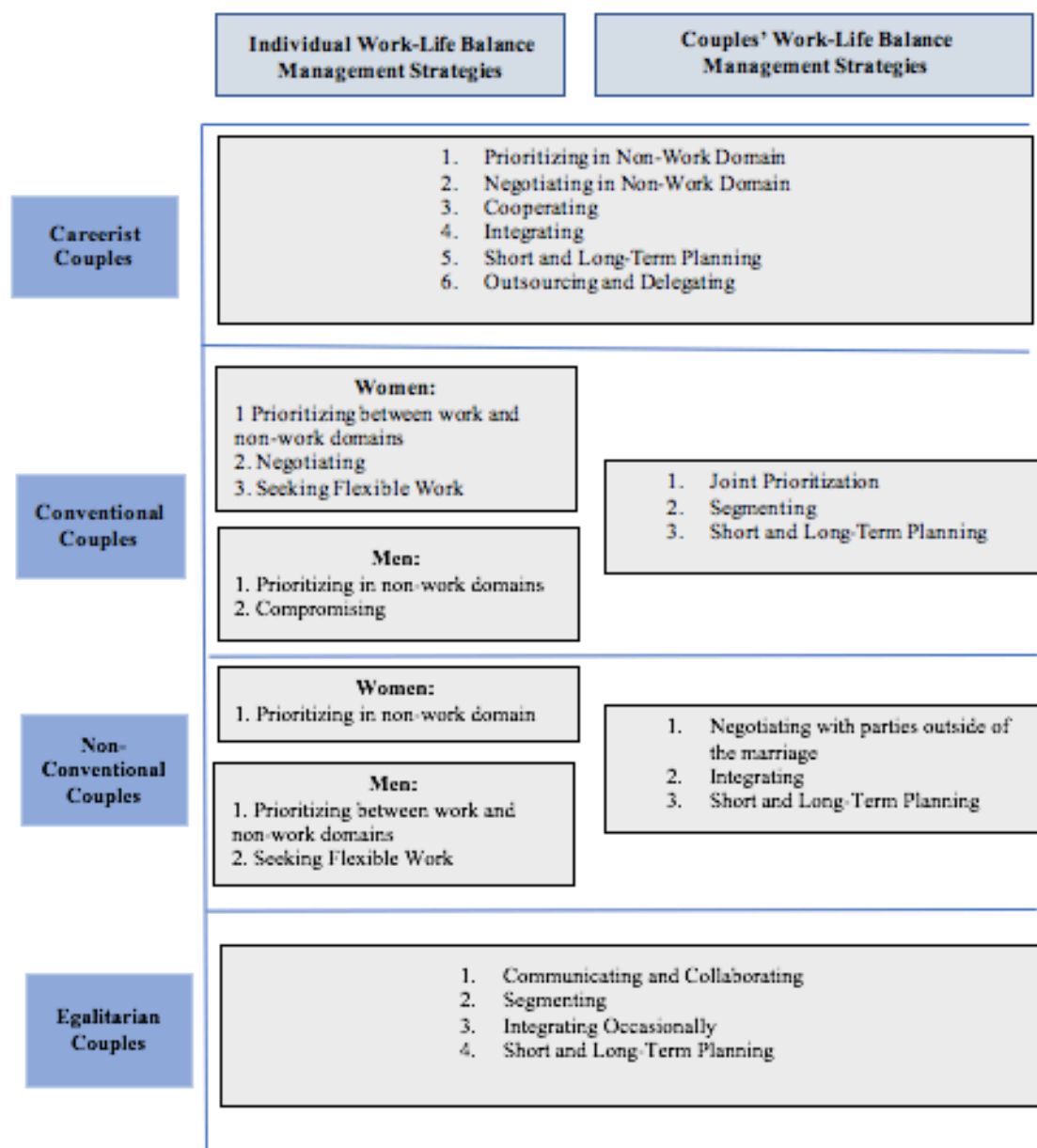
Rick's explanation illustrates this:

*I don't see a reason to kill my evening cleaning or doing laundry. Same as I wouldn't want Courtney to slave over dinner for us. We hired a person who is probably more capable of doing that than us. We can go to the gym instead or grab a cocktail after work, which is a lot more enjoyable in our minds. I am sure Courtney would agree. (Rick, 39, University Professor)*

Rick's account also reflects the careerist couples' tendency to prioritize non-work activities, discussed earlier. Accordingly, Rick valued, or prioritized, going out with his wife over doing

chores at home. It is worth noting though, that this particular strategy was dependent on a couple's financial position. While previously described strategies were employed by all dual-career couples, this particular strategy is not likely to be applicable to dual-career couples in non-professional occupations who have financial constraints.

Figure 5: Work-Life Balance Management Strategies Among Dual-Career Professional Couples Without Children



## 6.2 Conventional Couples' Work-Life Balance Management Strategies

Unlike the five careerist couples discussed above, the five conventional couples in this study did not share a common orientation towards their work and/or non-work lives. Men in these couples reflected the orientation of the careerist couples: seeing work as top priority with limited involvement in non-work activities. Women, on the other hand, sought to achieve a “healthy” balance between work and non-work roles. Because of these differences between partners, conventional couples managed their work-life balance from a place of conflict between the partners. Thus, the overarching desire of conventional couples was to use strategies that enabled them to reduce conflict between each other (see Figure 4 on page 132). The following sections present the work-life balance management strategies described by conventional couples (see Figure 5 on page 140).

### 6.2.1 Prioritizing

Like careerist couples, conventional couples described prioritizing as the most common strategy for achieving satisfactory work-life balance. Unlike careerist couples, however, conventional couples described this strategy as an individual rather than a mutual endeavor. The latter was largely viewed as unfeasible, since each partner ranked work and non-work domains differently. In other words, conventional couples prioritize as individuals rather than as a couple. Further, men only tended to rank items in the non-work domain (see Figure 5 on page 140), retaining work as the top priority at all times, while women prioritized components of both the work and non-work domains, depending on the situation (see Figure 5 on page 140). David highlighted this:

*I try to have my work commitments dealt with before I can start thinking of anything else. The nature of my job demands consistency in my performance, I cannot just get up and go to my brother's house on a moment's notice or catch an*

*unplanned dinner with Monica. If I would, my life would be a chaos. (David, 33, Financial Analyst)*

While men in conventional couples prioritized the work domain, women in conventional couples often described non-work roles as more enjoyable and thus accorded them higher priority. For Monica, David's wife, work was significantly less important to her than the non-work domain:

*Unlike David, I try to set my priorities right. Work is not going to be there for me when I retire. But friends and family will stay. Why would I kill myself for something that has no potential return? (Monica, 30, Human Resources Manager)*

While conventional couples resorted to individual prioritization most of the time, they also used joint prioritization when organizing their non-work responsibilities (see Figure 5 on page 140). Both men and women in this category recalled deciding as a couple how to rank various non-work responsibilities associated with the extended family and the home, as specified by Robert:

*Terry is not able to do many things around the house without my help. Typically, we chat about what has to be done in the week coming up. Some of the things can wait for [a] few weeks, others need to be done asap. It helps to check in with each other to know what is coming up. Same goes about our families. We discuss what we will do in the near future and most importantly when. (Robert, 43, Doctor)*

Robert's account suggests that prioritization in conventional couples most often occurred out of necessity. Unlike careerist couples who described prioritizing both responsibilities and leisure in their non-work domain, conventional couples only prioritized responsibilities as a couple. Leisure activities were prioritized as individuals, as Christian's experience illustrates. Given Christian's and his wife's different preferences for work, their schedules were often too dissimilar to share leisure time together:

*We don't spend much time together during the week. My schedule often changes and is hard to predict. Also, it is important for me to go to the gym as much as*



*possible due to the nature of my job as well as health overall. Wendy doesn't work out too much, so planning our workouts together is not something she would enjoy. We kind of do our own prioritization when it comes to fun stuff. It is different when I have to do something around the house or she does, those ones we talk about for sure. (Christian, 33, Commercial Pilot)*

Based on Christian's experience, we can infer that conventional couples used joint prioritization as a work-life balance management strategy to mutually allocate responsibilities, a tendency that underscores their overarching aim to reduce conflict in the relationship.

### 6.2.2 *Compromising*

The second work-life balance management strategy conventional couples described was compromising. Women in these couples were more likely to voice dissatisfaction with their husbands' preference for work over family, whereas the men were relatively unconcerned about having a different orientation than their wives. Instead, they were more likely to be distressed about the lack of support from their wives for their preferences. On the other hand, women cited recurring conflict stemming from attempts to persuade their partners to align their priorities with their own. Lory provided an example:

*I get so frustrated that every time I plan to do something around the house or run chores together there is always a fight with Frank . . . We are at the negotiation table all the time playing give and take. (Lory, 29, Social Worker)*

Overall, conventional couples were more likely to engage in compromise as a strategy to manage their work-life balance compared to careerist couples. This is significant, given the career orientation of men in conventional couples, which was the same as both partners in careerist couples. Reflecting the career orientation and the importance of safeguarding work from unnecessary non-work interference, men in conventional couples were often in a position of

having to give up their preferred time for work in order to attend to the non-work domain as a way to minimize conflict with their significant other.

All the men in this category tried to accommodate their wives' requests to reduce their involvement with work, at least temporarily, as described by David:

*We get into so many arguments about my late nights at the office and weekend work. Monica asks me to reduce my workload all the time. At some point I just agree and try to spend more time at home or do something together, but that doesn't mean my work is done for me. Those periods of me staying home are short. And we are back to the cycle again. Arguing and negotiating. (David, 33, Financial Analyst)*

While compromise typically involves two parties making concessions to reach an agreement, the quotation from David reflects the finding that in the case of conventional couples, men were more likely to compromise than women (see Figure 5 on page 140).

### 6.2.3 Segmenting

Segmenting was the third most often used strategy by conventional couples. The literature describes segmentation as the intentional effort to separate work and non-work domains (Michel, Bosch, & Rexroth, 2014). Both the men and the women in these couples resorted to this strategy. However, while women described doing so to participate in both work and non-work domains "wholeheartedly", men reported feeling "forced" into segmentation by their partners. Jamila's comments represent the female perspective:

*Maybe I am just not good at multitasking, but I cannot enjoy dinner with friends if I have work on my mind. Same is true the other way around, I try very hard not to think of non-work when I am running around the office during the day. I can really give it all and enjoy it, when I concentrate on the task at hand, be that a friend or worker or wife, etc. (Jamila, 40, Human Resource Manager)*

This comment suggests that segmentation was adopted by women in conventional couples to ensure full immersion in whatever role they were currently in. We can also conclude that they

utilized this strategy on their own initiative. In her account, Jamila repeated the word “I” on multiple occasions, giving the further sense that segmentation was her own decision.

However, the same cannot be said of men in conventional couples, who reported adopting segmentation out of a sense of coercion from their partners. They also stated that segmentation was not an ideal strategy for achieving work-life balance. As a result, men in these couples generally experienced high levels of pressure and dissatisfaction when they had to fully disengage from their work to attend to their non-work roles. As Robert put it:

*Terry [his wife] has this rule that we do not bring our phones to the dinner table. This rule does not apply when I am on call. All of the other times I feel stressed when I cannot look at the phone or email, especially when I am waiting for the lab results for the patient. I feel that I rush to finish at all times to get access to my phone. But Terry insists that it is the only time we get to be together meaningfully, so I abide by the rules. (Robert, 43, Doctor)*

In this example, segmentation was enforced by Terry. Instead of furthering work-life balance, segmentation created conflict in Robert’s view. Finally, the account signifies another instance of compromising. Although Robert did not agree, he adhered to segmentation to ameliorate or avoid conflict with his spouse.

To explore this finding further, I asked women in conventional couples to comment on the idea of them pushing their partners in segmentation. In general, women used strong terms, such as “forcing” their partners into segmentation. As they saw it, if they did not enforce segmentation, their partners would remain engaged in work at all times, leaving them to deal with the non-work domain on their own. Lory provided an example:

*It is especially worrisome when we are out with friends or family and he stares at his phone all evening. It is embarrassing. Lately, I make him leave the phone in the car . . . You can call it forcing, but that’s the only strategy that seems to work for us now. (Lory, 29, Social Worker)*

#### 6.2.4 Short-Term and Long-Term Planning

Unlike careerist couples, in conventional couples typically only one partner was responsible for short-term planning, usually the woman. The majority of men in conventional couples said that their wives were better suited to the task as they were more familiar with the couple's non-work domain. This theme was common for all of the conventional couples. Women were more informed than men about non-work tasks, responsibilities, and events as they spent significantly more time in that domain than their male partners did, who preferred work.

Christian explained:

*It is much harder for me to keep track of events than for Wendy. I do not speak to our families as much as she does. Same goes for appointments. Let's say my parents' doctor visits. I am up in the air most of the day [as a pilot] with little access to email or phone. Wendy does this kind of planning. (Christian, 33, Commercial Pilot)*

Men in conventional couples were willing to receive "direction" from their wives when it came to short-term planning. Likewise, as with other strategies that were intended to decrease conflict, men in conventional couples said that they let their partners take charge of deciding which tasks and events both partners needed to be present for. This echoes the finding described previously about women forcing men to participate in the non-work domain. Men in these couples relinquished their control over planning the non-work domain to their partners, once again as a way to minimize the conflict with them.

Women in conventional unions confirmed this finding, stating that on most occasions they assumed the role of family organizer. However, they also felt that they were "forced" into organizing the non-work domain by themselves, which often led to scheduling conflicts between the couple's non-work schedule and the husband's work commitments. Further contributing to such conflicts was the tendency for conventional partners to keep individual calendars.

Conventional couples did not have a rationale for this, they had simply never considered an alternative, given how different their lives were, with men concentrating on work and women equally engaged in both work and non-work domains. Monica provided an example:

*I don't think having joint calendars is something we would consider. Why would he want to see my Pilates or doctor's appointments? It would only distract him more from work. (Monica, 30, Human Resource Manager)*

Monica's comments illustrate an important finding of this study. Despite attempts to reframe their husbands' career orientation through forced segmentation, as described earlier, women in conventional unions understood that involving their career-oriented partners in the non-work domain created stress and amplified the couple's conflict. They, therefore, sought to minimize such involvement unless it was absolutely necessary. It was for this reason, according to the women in these couples, that most of their non-work planning was done individually. Women described letting their male partners know about upcoming events, urging them to pencil those events into their own schedules. Yet these women also added that many plans were destined to fail because of a lack of coordination, their partners often unable to attend planned events or fulfill responsibilities. As a result, planning often failed to ensure greater work-life balance, which in turn created even more conflict for conventional couples.

While short-term planning was done individually by female partners in conventional couples, joint planning was considered an essential strategy for managing work-life balance in the long-term, because of diverging work schedules. Like careerist couples, conventional couples used long-term planning to plan vacations and shorter breaks from work, which were seen as ways of disengaging from work to spend quality time together. These couples typically described planning two or three vacations/breaks each year in advance, as described by David and Monica:

*If I don't schedule my vacations in advance, I will be left with no weeks available in my schedule for the year by the end February. Typically, Mon [his wife] and I*

*sit down right in the beginning of the year to pencil in our time away. We plan vacations, out of town weddings, weekend getaways. Takes away a lot of arguments down the road when I cannot take off time on the short notice. (David, 33, Financial Analyst)*

It is notable that David's explanation echoed that of careerist couples; individuals with a strong career orientation planned time away from work in advance so their work domain was not negatively affected. Furthermore, data analysis also suggested that long-term planning was used to reduce conflict between partners in conventional couples. David's wife Monica also commented on long-term planning as a strategy to both achieve work-life balance and to reduce conflict between her and David:

*I think it is much easier for me to take off time from work than for David. I don't have to deal with clients, whose plans might change the last minute. As I said before, I mostly plan everyday things, but when it comes to vacations and getaways, I need David's input. Once it is agreed on and, in the schedule, it is set in stone. (Monica, 30, Human Resource Manager)*

According to Monica, involving David in long-term planning was crucial to ensure that during planned trips, work was not the top priority, despite his career orientation. This theme was also identified by other conventional couples.

#### 6.2.5 Flex-Working

Women in conventional couples reported using flexible work schedules as another strategy to manage their work-life balance (see Figure 5 on page 140). Given these women's preference for both work and non-work domains, it was important for them to not only safeguard their non-work time for their personal use but also to ensure that this time was available on a consistent basis. It is notable, however, that none of the men in these couples did. The women reported how having a flexible work schedule allowed them to leave work early or manage non-work responsibilities during traditional working hours (9 am to 5 pm). On the other hand, men

indicated that such working arrangements were not suitable for them because they would have a negative impact on their careers.

The women in these couples also said that they deliberately chose to work for employers who supported and promoted work-life balance initiatives. Aligning their personal values with those of their employer helped these women manage their work-life balance, as suggested by Jamila:

*I was on the job market for longer than expected. I was looking for a job that would allow me to not be fully consumed. I don't live to work, quite the opposite. When I found my organization, I knew that if I ask for a day off I would not be penalized or looked down upon. (Jamila, 40, Human Resource Manager)*

Jamila's account demonstrates how women in conventional couples strove to maintain balance by selecting employers whose values aligned with their own and who appreciated the importance of dividing time and energy between various life roles instead of solely concentrating on work.

To maintain a flexible working arrangements, women in conventional couples engaged in temporal crafting (the management of time spent on work in terms of length, timing, and location of the working day) (Sturges, 2012). To manage the length and timing of the work day, these women left work on time, even if it meant leaving tasks undone. Echoing themes in the extant literature (Sturges, 2012), these women organized regular evening events, such as classes or appointments, making it necessary to leave work punctually. As Lory said:

*I have massage therapy scheduled every Wednesday. If I cancel the appointment less than 48 hours in advance, I will have to pay a cancellation fee. If I didn't have massage scheduled, I would probably work more, so I find the technique of pre-scheduling evening appointments to be a good buffer from overworking. (Lory, 29, Social Worker)*

Flexible working strategies described here also demonstrate conventional women's preference for a family orientation. We can observe that women in this category were willing to forgo career advancements in order to satisfy their need for consistent participation in the non-work domain.

### **6.3 Non-Conventional Couples' Work-Life Balance Management Strategies**

In non-conventional couples, women had a stronger career orientation, while men exhibited a stronger family orientation. As a result, as in the case of conventional couples, partners in non-conventional couples approached work-life balance strategies differently. However, these differences were more likely to create conflict for the couples when they were dealing with other individuals such as employers, managers, or family members than when they were dealing with each other. They also experienced some conflict regarding societal gender expectations. This is another indication of the relational nature of work-life balance, in this case in relationships other than with their partner. A key concern for these non-conventional couples was to reduce the amount of conflict with others by drawing on specific strategies (see Figure 4 on page 132).

#### *6.3.1 Prioritizing*

As with the other couple categories, non-conventional couples were likely to use prioritizing as a strategy for managing work-life balance. Moreover, they prioritized as individuals rather than as a couple, like their conventional counterparts. Unlike careerist couples, however, who mutually prioritized activities in the non-work domain, members of non-conventional couples prioritized individually (i.e., separately) because of their divergent orientations (career and family). In other words, non-conventional couples described sitting down independently to establish their individual priorities much like participants in conventional couples. Although the women in this group were less vocal than men in conventional couples about their career orientation, they tended to say more about their work role than any other roles



in their lives. This is evidence that they prioritized work over non-work, like men in conventional couples and both partners in careerist couples. Bianna commented:

*I cannot afford to put my job on the back burner . . . I try to prioritize Kevin in the same position as my job, but honestly it is very hard at times. (Bianna, 31, Teacher)*

By contrast, men in non-conventional couples, much like women in conventional couples, stressed the importance of non-work roles and their struggle to manage those roles because of work demands. They gave several reasons why prioritizing non-work roles would be impractical, a situation that created significant internal conflict for them. They described employers who expected them to remain immersed in their professional roles, for example, by extending the workday past traditional working hours. They were also expected to help colleagues who were unable to come to work because of parental responsibilities. They cited these expectations as a source of conflict between the work and non-work domains, the latter which they preferred to devote to hobbies, self-care, or volunteering. In contrast to their partners, who voluntarily prioritized work, men did so in reaction to their employers' expectations. Tamir commented on this involuntary prioritization of work:

*I have to stay later at work on many occasions, especially when projects' deadlines are moved. Naturally, I am the one who is asked to stay behind because I do not have to take care of young children. So even if I have something planned for that evening, I cancel. I cannot really refuse to complete the work task as there is no one to fill in for me. There are weeks when all my evening plans have to be cancelled just to stay on top of the projects. (Tamir, 37, Computer Programmer)*

Here Tamir demonstrated how his non-work priorities were often overruled by the expectations of his superiors at work. We can also see how Tamir was conflicted about lowering his expectations for non-work activities, as inevitable as it seemed to him. While men in non-conventional couples wanted to prioritize the non-work domain, on most occasions they were not

able to do so. Instead they prioritized the non-work domain occasionally, as situations and work demands permitted. Unlike their conventional counterparts, who gladly spent most of their time and energy in the work domain, men in these unions described feeling pressured to remain constantly engaged in their work to live up to the perceived expectation of being an “ideal worker”. This once again demonstrates how one’s preferred orientation, whether career or family, influences one’s understanding of a choice such as increased participation in the work domain, which satisfied men in conventional relationships but caused dissatisfaction for men in non-conventional couples.

In addition, both partners in non-conventional couples described establishing and prioritizing “non-negotiables”, non-work activities each partner was unwilling to relinquish, even during times of increased demands in the work domain. These included gym classes, weekly visits with parents/family, going on date nights with one another, or volunteering. Regardless of what the chosen activity was, both men and women in this group allocated a given time slot for it in their personal calendars. While both partners safeguarded their selected activities, women cancelled them more often than their partners because of work conflicts. In practice, for women in these couples then, activities or plans were only non-negotiable when they did not interfere with work, a further reflection of their desire to keep their careers at the forefront.

Men, on the other hand, sought to preserve their non-negotiables at all costs:

*I have a buddy whom I went to university with. Every 13<sup>th</sup> of the month we get together for tea. We have been doing that for 48 years. I even make sure that none of our trips fall on that day. This is my non-negotiable. (Collin, 67, Investment Manager)*

Collin’s sentiments reflect the tendency of men in non-conventional relationships to prioritize roles other than work. Establishing non-negotiables ensured that at least one or two activities remained untouched and provided a “guaranteed” escape from their work domain.

### 6.3.2 Negotiating

Data analysis suggests that non-conventional couples regularly engaged in negotiation to achieve work-life balance. In addition to negotiating with each other, these couples also negotiated with other individuals in their lives such as employers and family members. This strategy was regarded as a tool that helped avoid conflict and ultimately to achieve work-life balance that satisfied both partners. This kind of negotiation was described as constructive dialogue. Daniel provided an explanation:

*Whitney [Daniel's wife] works very hard. At the same time, I understand how much she invests into her job and how important it is for her to continue climbing this never-ending career ladder. We do have conversations on how to fix this and maybe see each other more often. But we don't argue about it. I would never force her to change the situation given how much she enjoys what she does.  
(Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

Daniel's account supports previous findings in work-life balance literature suggesting that men in non-conventional couples tend to express high levels of support for their careerist wives (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2007; Gilbert, 2014). Moreover, Daniel's quotation suggests that the divergent career and family orientations of partners in non-conventional couples created less intra-couple conflict than in conventional ones. Negotiations in non-conventional couples were described optimistically and seen as constructive, which is why these couples engaged in negotiation rather than compromise, which is what conventional couples did.

On the other hand, both men and women in non-conventional couples reported difficulties negotiating with other individuals and groups such as employers, managers, and family members in order to achieve satisfactory work-life balance. The men mainly described negotiating with their employers. Collin commented:

*I simply do not understand why I am expected to work until 9 pm to meet deadlines when other colleagues of mine are gone at 5 pm to pick up their*

*children? I have these discussions with my boss all the time, yet I have not seen any changes . . . Speaking of segregation of genders. (Collin, 67, Investment Manager)*

Women in non-conventional couples, however, more frequently had to negotiate with extended family members than with employers. Like careerist couples, women in this category sensed pressure from extended family members who wanted more of their time and attention. Overall, there was consensus among women in this category that their prioritization of work over the non-work domain was not accepted by their extended families and thus required constant negotiation. Viktoria commented on this theme:

*I have many elderly relatives. My siblings often expect me to “pick up the slack” and get involved in taking care of those relatives . . . I am constantly told how bad of a niece/daughter/daughter-in-law I am. Each and every time I have to give my siblings a run through my schedule simply to show how busy I am with work. (Viktoria, 62, Director of Sales)*

Having these conversations with her family allowed Viktoria to focus on her work with minimal non-work interference, thereby achieving the kind of work-life balance sought by women in non-conventional couples.

### 6.3.3 Integrating

Integration was the next most often-cited strategy non-conventional couples used to achieve work-life balance, which they defined as blurring the line between work and personal time to cultivate a more interconnected life. Women in this group typically included work in their non-work domain while still preserving work as their top priority. As mentioned before, women with career orientations preferred to participate in the work domain at all times. As a result, instead of separating themselves entirely from work when in non-work roles, they sought to integrate two. This allowed them to stay engaged in the work domain even when physically

present in the non-work domain, thereby achieving a satisfactory work-life balance for them.

Whitney gave an example of this integration:

*I recently purchased an Apple watch. I find having this device really allows me to stay connected . . . If an email or phone call demands my immediate attention, I will get the notification. It allows me to relax without worrying that I missed something. (Whitney, 44, Higher Education Director)*

For Whitney, engagement in the non-work domain was only enjoyable as long as she remained connected to her work. This also provided her with a sense of calm while remaining in control, a sentiment shared by many participants in this dissertation with a high career orientation.

In line with their family orientation, on the other hand, men in these couples described participating in non-work activities while at work. While questioning the ethics of doing so, several male participants in this category explained that limiting the work domain to only fulfilling work demands caused stress. Integration allowed them to be present in both domains at the same time. In other words, they used integration to participate in non-work activities they considered important while also satisfying their work demands. This ability signified their desired level of work-life balance. Daniel spoke to this:

*When I have to work late nights, I try to find something enjoyable to do while testing new programs or systems . . . It makes working easier and I feel that I do something more meaningful than just write a code. (Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

Integration was the way non-conventional couples preferred to manage joint work-life balance. Their accounts indicated they tended to blend work and non-work domains to maximize time spent as a couple, for example by answering emails while watching television together. They also tried to be physically in the same room together, even while one of them was working.

This finding again confirms that partners in non-conventional couples felt more emotionally supported by each other than partners in conventional couples. One possible

explanation for this difference was the nature of the conflict, which in the case of the non-conventional group remained external to the couple. Namely, both men and women felt pressure externally to adhere to the expectations of either their organization or extended family concerning work-life balance. As a result, non-conventional couples were motivated to reduce or eliminate intra-couple conflict. Furthermore, non-conventional couples' accounts suggested higher levels of acceptance when it came to each other's work-life balance preferences that resulted from their differing career/family orientations. They demonstrated stronger cohesion between the partners and a greater willingness to accommodate one another in their joint pursuit of work-life balance, which was not the case for the conventional couples.

#### *6.3.4 Short-Term and Long-Term Planning*

Like conventional couples, non-conventional couples identified short-term planning among their work-life balance management strategies (see Figure 5 on page 140). They also reported that one of them took primary responsibility for this activity, usually the woman. This is an interesting finding and worthy of further exploration. While women in these couples were career oriented, spending less time in the non-work domain than their male partners, much like conventional women they were still responsible for the couple's short-term planning.

Participants offered several reasons why women took primary responsibility for short-term planning. First, women had significantly less time and/or desire to engage in non-work activities than their male counterparts. Therefore, they were much more likely to schedule those non-work events that they prioritized highest in order to increase the likelihood of them occurring. Second, non-conventional men said that if they planned events without their partner's input, their career-oriented partner would end up facing conflict at work. This echoes

conventional women's responses regarding planning without their partner's input and, as a result, experiencing scheduling conflicts. Kevin explained:

*When we just got married, I did try to plan at least for outings and dates . . . We both realized that she needs to initiate the planning. She was feeling very upset if she couldn't make the plans I set out for us. Now at least we both know that if it is in the calendar it will be done. That means her work will not get in [the] way. (Kevin, 35, Engineer)*

Finally, men in non-conventional couples felt they had more flexibility than their partners and were better able to work around their wives' short-term planning priorities:

*Technically I can plan everything, but then Victoria would most likely cancel most of it because she has something going on at work. I ask her to do the planning because I am more flexible to adapt to her schedule. (Collin, 67, Investment Manager)*

Non-conventional couples also spoke about creating lists and reminders. Both men and women created individual lists of their own tasks and responsibilities most often on a weekly basis. In addition, some described having a joint list of household chores, which listed each partner's tasks. These joint lists were created by either one or both partners but were always discussed by the partners to confirm the information.

As with other types, non-conventional couples articulated the importance of long-term planning as a strategy to achieve work-life balance. They specifically described joint long-term planning to ensure both partners' availability for vacations or short trips. Interestingly, non-conventional couples reported taking vacations more often than conventional couples. One explanation for this was the relative synergy in their definitions or views on work-life balance. Non-conventional partners wanted to maximize time together because it was enjoyable and important for their relationship. They often mentioned that work demands prevented them from engaging with each other as much as they would like. In addition, all non-conventional couples spoke of having strong and supportive relationships which they hoped to preserve in spite of the

work demands of both partners, whether those demands were voluntary (as in case of women) or coerced (as in the case of men) in non-conventional couples. For example, Daniel commented:

*There are weeks when Whitney travels and we barely have time to speak to each other. I think having those planned trips really motivates us on [a] daily basis . . . We miss each other greatly and take every opportunity to rekindle our relationship when time permits. (Daniel, 47, Information Technology Specialist)*

Like conventional couples, non-conventional couples secured time for these trips at the beginning of the year. Despite having a career orientation similar to the men in conventional couples, women in non-conventional couples were more amenable to taking trips, since their partners did not prevent them from engaging in work, even on trips. Viktoria addressed this:

*I like to get away with Collin as much as possible . . . That doesn't mean that I am totally off work. I regularly check my emails, put out fires even close deals on the beach if I have to. Collin is very supportive about it, he is ok with me taking half an hour or . . . checking in every few hours with the office. (Viktoria, 62, Director of Sales)*

Viktoria's enjoyment of trips was enhanced by her freedom to participate in the work domain. She identified this as a sign of support from her partner, the lack of which conventional men described as a source of conflict.

#### **6.4 Egalitarian Couples' Work-Life Balance Management Strategies**

Partners in egalitarian couples are equally oriented toward career and family. They have much in common with careerist couples because both partners have similar expectations regarding work-life balance management strategies. Partners in this category shared a similar desire to be meaningfully immersed in both work and non-work domains (see Figure 4 on page 132).

Unlike other couples in this study, egalitarian couples reported managing work-life balance together, through in-depth and consistent discussions about expectations concerning



work-life balance. This stands in contrast to conventional and non-conventional couples who differentiated between strategies undertaken by individuals and the couple because of the divergent career and family orientations of the partners. The work-life balance management strategies described by egalitarian couple are presented below (see Figure 5 on page 140).

#### 6.4.1 *Consistent Communication and Collaboration*

Egalitarian couples reported how they regularly discussed their understanding of work-life balance and how they might achieve it as a couple. They reported, for example, how when one or both partners felt dissatisfied with their joint work-life balance, they would sit down together and discuss their concerns:

*I don't think you can agree on the idea [of] work-life balance and never talk about it again. Circumstances do change at times . . . As a result, the expectations of work-life balance also change. It is important to discuss those expectations with a partner as they directly affect them. (Evan, 35, Ph.D. Candidate)*

The important finding that emerges from Evan's statement is that for couples in this group, work-life balance changed depending on situational factors, a tendency that was not evident in other types. As a result, egalitarian couples acknowledged the need to communicate expectations on a consistent basis. They reported that these conversations allowed them to mutually analyze their current degree of work-life balance. If they identified problems or were dissatisfied, they could determine which strategy to employ as a couple to bring about a more satisfactory balance. Faith's comments are indicative of this:

*Sam [her husband] and I rely on each other a lot when we feel that work-life balance is getting off track . . . In those situations, we have "check-in" chats as we call it. Most of the time it is only one of us who is falling off the wagon at a time, so we discuss how to address it. Sometimes it is hard to come up with the solution especially if there are inflated demands at work. But then we try to establish deadlines as to when we expect to return to our normal state. We*

*support one another emotionally if we fail to find the fix for the problem. (Faith, 33, Lawyer)*

This finding suggests a high degree of collaboration in egalitarian couples, which was seen as especially important by them whenever their current experience of work-life balance was less than desired. Communication and collaboration, it was noted, could be difficult and time-consuming but was rarely negative, nor was it described in terms of conflict.

Finally, while egalitarian couples mentioned prioritization as one of their work-life balance management strategies, they insisted that their priorities were aligned most of the time. Consequently, they relied on communication as the most effective strategy for the overall improvement of work-life balance.

#### 6.4.2 Segmenting

Most of the participants in egalitarian couples reported segmentation as another preferred strategy for managing their work-life balance. Because they were equally inclined toward both domains, they preferred to be fully immersed when participating in either domain at any given time. They proposed that full immersion in one domain would be difficult to achieve when participating in the other domain at the same time, such as by working while on vacation. Rachel provided an example of this:

*I spend my days researching human psychology. I run the lab. Each experiment takes a long time to set up and execute. I cannot lose focus even for a minute. Because if I do, I might miss something groundbreaking or important in the study. Same goes for Evan [her husband], who is in the same field as me. Having said this, when I come home, I want nothing to do with my work. I want to relax and do other things. I perform well if I concentrate on one thing. (Rachel, 30, Ph.D. Candidate)*

Challenging those participants whom preferred integration, Evan agreed with the value of segmentation as a preferred work-life balance management strategy. He added that giving full

attention to whichever role he was in at the moment helped him achieve a higher degree of satisfaction with it:

*In the middle of my work day . . . I try not to answer the phone or the text message to make sure that I don't miss anything. At the same time, Rachel and I really try not to engage in work-related conversations at home, which is at times difficult as we study in the same program. We don't want for work to constitute our relationship. (Evan, 35, PhD Candidate)*

These accounts show a high degree of consensus between egalitarian couples concerning the segmentation of work and non-work domains.

Confirming Rachel's and Evan's perception of the value of segmentation, Sam spoke about separating work and non-work domains, offering a critique for integration strategy. He provided an example of how being in both domains simultaneously can lead to negative consequences:

*If I cannot disengage from my job, I would treat my volunteering the same way. Trying to do as much as possible in the shortest amount of time. But this is not the purpose of [volunteering], is it? I prefer to keep my job out of my life and vice versa. (Sam, 48, Architect)*

Corroborating seminal research on work-life conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), Sam explained how transferring the activities of one role into the other would create conflict for him, because the activities necessitated by each role were dissimilar.

To separate work and non-work domains, several participants in this category engaged in mindfulness practices, which none of the couples in other categories mentioned. According to Michel et al. (2014), engaging in mindfulness helps individuals cope with cognitions, emotions, and energy levels that prevent them from being fully present in work and non-work roles. Echoing mindfulness literature, participants in egalitarian marriages used mindfulness as a self-regulation technique to control thoughts, emotions, and behaviour and align these states with personal ideals. Bryan explained how they practiced mindfulness as a couple:

*Through conversations Leena and I determine how we want our work-life balance to look like for at least [a] short time into the future . . . If we agree not to have work tasks completed during vacations, we turn off our work emails when we are away. If one of us “breaks” this pattern, we acknowledge it and try to get back to what was the standard agreed upon. In general, we try to be present in the moment and enjoy what we do without having interruptions. (Bryan, 47, Veterinarian)*

Bryan’s account reveals that mindfulness for egalitarian couples is exercised by both individuals and as a couple. Mindfulness allows egalitarian couples to choose behaviours that are consistent with their needs, values, or standards, which is evident in Bryan’s example of turning off work emails during trips couple takes. Finally, mindfulness informed the way these couples interacted, embedding their communication in a state of attentiveness to one another and the situation.

#### 6.4.3 Integrating

While most egalitarian couples in the sample preferred segmentation, they also described engaging in integration when absolutely necessary. Two of the most frequently cited reasons for this were family emergencies and unexpected work situations. In both cases, egalitarian couples maneuvered between work and non-work domains temporarily before returning to segmentation after things had calmed down. Sergio described this in detail:

*My mother broke her hip last month and could not watch over herself anymore. For the first two to three weeks I was trying to be at two places at once: my mother’s home and work. It was extremely difficult to coordinate. Once I figured out the schedule and hired a sitter for her, I was back to my regular routine being at work during the day without having to worry about my mom. I would only visit her in the evenings or weekends. (Sergio, 38, Architect)*

Sergio’s example demonstrates that the strategy of integration was a short-term solution with the long-term intention of being able to return to segmentation. This finding complements the contemporary work-life balance literature. For instance, previous studies describe integrators as being open to segmentation if the need exists (Derks, Bakker, Peters, & van Wingerden, 2016;

Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Moreover, integrators, unlike segmentors, can freely move between integration and segmentation strategies (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009). However, as in the case of egalitarian couples, segmentors feel discomfort when they need to integrate and work to return to their comfortable state of segmentation as soon as the situation allows.

#### 6.4.4 *Short-Term and Long-Term Planning*

Following occasional integration, couples in this group engaged in planning as a strategy to achieve work-life balance. Like careerist couples, they described planning as a joint activity. Moreover, both short and long-term planning were supplemented by discussions of the couple's priorities. In the case of egalitarian couples, planning was aimed at allocating a "fair" amount of time to both work and non-work domains. In doing so, these couples sought to engage in both work and non-work domains without compromising either. Samantha spoke to the planning strategy she and her partner used:

*Usually we plan our weeks a few days in advance. We discuss what we have coming up and what needs to be done to address the responsibilities as well as leave time for us to enjoy activities we are involved in, be that our outings, hobbies, volunteering, church, etc. We move and shift things around in the calendar to get what you call balance. If we don't do that, I feel we tend to sway to over-working while ignoring other parts of life. (Samantha, 33, Accountant)*

Of all the couple groups, egalitarian couples were the most vocal about the importance of making specific plans as a strategy for achieving work-life balance. Among the most frequently cited reasons for planning was the need to realistically evaluate what could be achieved in a given timeframe. Noah specified:

*It is important to have realistic expectations. Let's say we have to attend a family dinner, meet with friends, go to church [a] few times a week, attend art classes, spend time with our dogs and meet with our realtor for[an] investment property discussion. It doesn't sound like too much, unless you start putting it into your schedule and realize that you physically don't have time to do it all. Having the physical schedule helps a lot. (Noah, 55, Lawyer)*

In addition, couples described using overt or explicit planning to avoid inter-role conflict. In line with their preference for segmentation, all egalitarian couples recounted planning their schedules to more distinctly separate their work and non-work roles to the best of their abilities. As they described it, making specific plans allowed them to minimize the need for integration and instilled a sense of control over their lives by creating well-defined barriers between their work and non-work domains. This was also a strategy described by careerist couples.

In addition to the reasons for scheduling and planning, egalitarian couples were the most creative at choosing tools for this activity. Their preferred organizational methods ranged from pen-and-paper calendars on the fridge to shared phone calendars, websites the couples themselves managed, and applications on communication devices. In general, egalitarian couples described planning and organizing as a mutually beneficial and enjoyable activity for the partners to engage in, unlike conventional couples who reported experiencing conflict during similar planning sessions.

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has addressed the fourth research question of the dissertation: “How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?” I addressed this question according to the career and/or family orientations of the participants. Couples in the four categories relied on a number of the similar strategies to achieve work-life balance. At the same time, it is important to note that although the strategies each group favoured seem similar on the surface, further inquiry demonstrated that the four categories of couples attributed different meanings and desired outcomes to those same strategies. Strategies employed by careerist couples, for example, were aligned with their overarching orientation towards assigning

more importance to their work. Their strategies were primarily aimed at protecting the work domain from non-work interference at any given time. Hence, their work-life balance management strategies served to enable those couples to allocate most of their time to their work.

Conventional and non-conventional couples, however, were more oriented towards reducing conflict. For conventional couples this conflict was internal (i.e., between the partners), whereas for non-conventional couples it was typically external (e.g., conflict with employers and societal expectations). Finally, for egalitarian couples, reflecting their orientation towards meaningfully immersing themselves in both domains without making substantial sacrifices in either, work-life balance strategies were crucial in constructing an environment where work and non-work domains could coexist without jeopardizing either. In short, although many of the strategies explored in this chapter bore superficial similarities, it must be emphasized that they were associated with strikingly different functions, understandings, and purposes when analyzed from the vantage point of the four couple categories.

## **CHAPTER 7:**

### **7.0**

## **DISCUSSION**

Drawing on a series of in-depth interviews, this study explores how dual-career professional couples without children understand, interpret, and experience work-life balance. It challenges contemporary notions of the construct of work-life balance by demonstrating the versatility with which dual-career professional couples without children participate in and experience the work and non-work domains of their respective lives. In this chapter I reiterate the purpose, background, and significance of the study, summarize its findings, and present the theoretical and practical contributions it makes to management scholarly literature. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the limitations of the study and identifies areas of further inquiry.

### **7.1 Summary of Research Objectives**

Despite calls for action in work-life balance literature, current academic research into dual-career professional couples' work-life balance continues to focus on the family (Kelliher et al., 2018'forthcoming'; Özbilgin et al., 2011; Wayne, Butts, Casper, & Allen, 2017). Based on a review of the literature, it is evident that there is a paucity of research exploring the responsibilities and commitments of dual-career professional couples without children in the non-work domain (Rick & Meisenbach, 2017). Moreover, most research on dual-career professional couples with child-rearing responsibilities has been grounded in theoretical and methodological individualism (e.g., Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Chan et al., 2016; Colichi, Bocchi, Lima, & Popim, 2017; Munn & Chaudhuri, 2015). In other words, the focus of much of the research on work-life balance to date has been on differences between dual-career



professional couples with children. This research has been carried out with the intent to pinpoint variables within couples' lives as a way to establish the antecedents to work-life balance, the consequences of it, and the strategies couples use to manage it (Rajan-Rankin, 2016).

In contrast, the results of this study suggest that dual-career professional couples' work-life balance would be better explored from a relational standpoint, where partners are seen to influence the experiences and understandings of each other's' work-life balance. Thus, adopting a relational perspective, this interpretive study has provided a robust analysis of work-life balance in dual-career professional couples without children. Its qualitative methodology, as opposed to the surveys that underlie most other studies (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017), offers a "thick description" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), not only of couples' understandings and experiences of work-life balance, but also of their concomitant work-life strategies.

The study sought to answer four research questions: (1) How do dual-career professional couples without children define work-life balance? (2) What are the main influences on the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children? (3) How do dual-career professional couples without children experience work-life balance? and (4) How do dual-career professional couples without children manage their work-life balance?

## **7.2 Summary of Findings**

### *7.2.1 Types of Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children*

It became apparent during the early stages of data collection that in spite of sharing common characteristics, such as engaging in professional occupations and not being parents, the couples in the sample were not homogeneous. The findings showed that the differences between the couples can be attributed to the preferred orientation, whether career and/or family, of each partner in the couple. Based on analysis of the data, I proposed that dual-career professional

couples without children can be located in four categories: careerist, conventional, non-conventional, and egalitarian (see Table 2 on page 169). Couples in the first category, careerist, comprised two partners with strong career orientations. In this category, partners attributed a high level of importance to their respective careers, individually and as a couple, and described non-work roles as secondary to their work. The second category, conventional couples, consisted of couples where the man was oriented to his career and the woman to family. Women in conventional couples emphasized care in their preferred family orientation and engaged in behaviours such as home organization, elder care, and meal preparation in addition to work responsibilities. Men in contrast reported being significantly less engaged in housekeeping and caregiving activities and, instead, focused on career activities. The third category, non-conventional couples, comprised couples where the woman was career orientated while the man was family oriented. Men in this category were considered the family's primary caregiver and took the lead in household duties (cleaning, cooking, vacation planning, etc.) in addition to their work responsibilities. Women played a secondary role in household tasks, concentrating instead on career-related activities. Partners in couples in the fourth category, egalitarian couples, both exhibited career and family orientations. At home both partners embraced a family orientation, attempting to divide household chores and non-work responsibilities between them, including, but not limited to, providing care to extended family. At work, both partners strove for professional success, accepting promotions, training opportunities, and challenges that enabled them to further their careers. Consequently, data analysis suggested that the answers to the four research questions in this study differed between the participating couples based on which category couples belonged to, which I discuss in greater detail below.

Table 2: Typology of Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children

<p><b><u>Careerist Couples</u></b></p> <p><b>Men:</b> Career Orientation <b>Women:</b> Career Orientation</p>	<p><b><u>Conventional Couples</u></b></p> <p><b>Men:</b> Career Orientation <b>Women:</b> Family Orientation</p>
<p><b><u>Non-Conventional Couples</u></b></p> <p><b>Men:</b> Family Orientation <b>Women:</b> Career Orientation</p>	<p><b><u>Egalitarian Couples</u></b></p> <p><b>Men:</b> Career and Family Orientation <b>Women:</b> Career and Family Orientation</p>

7.2.2 *Research Question 1 – Definitions of Work-Life Balance among Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children*

When asked to define work-life balance, participants' responses reflected several dominant themes. Although they employed similar vocabulary in their definitions, the meanings they attached to words varied depending on which category of couple they belonged to. The definitions of work-life balance fell into three categories: (1) work-life balance as flexibility, autonomy, and control; (2) work-life balance as the ability to engage equally in work and non-work activities; and finally, (3) work-life balance as satisfaction with work and non-work activities.

Careerist couples defined work-life balance as comprising flexibility, which they described as the ability to fulfill their work responsibilities at any time and with minimal interference from the non-work domain. For men in conventional couples, work-life balance was having the ability to address work-related obligations during non-work hours, should the need arise. Women in conventional couples emphasized that work-life balance was connected to flexibility and freedom to leave work and attend to other responsibilities during working hours. Women in non-conventional couples also described flexibility as being central in their definition

of work-life balance. The ability to attend to work responsibilities outside of typical working hours dominated their responses. Men in non-conventional couples, on the other hand, described work-life balance as freedom from their organization's expectations, in particular the ideology of men having to be the breadwinners. Finally, egalitarian couples defined work-life balance as the ability to fulfill the various roles and obligations of work and non-work spheres.

While all the couples in the sample referred to the importance of flexibility and control, only women in conventional couples and both partners in egalitarian couples defined work-life balance as comprising *equal* engagement in work and non-work activities. One of the explanations for this particular finding may be that women in conventional couples as well as individuals in egalitarian couples value participation in the non-work domain equally if not more than in their work domain. As a result, they have a stronger desire than members of other categories to spend at least an equal amount of time in the non-work domain as in the work domain.

Many other participants, however, proposed that a more suitable definition of work-life balance would be satisfaction in both domains without having to sacrifice either. Virtually all participants, including egalitarian couples who defined work-life balance as equal participation in both domains, agreed that the satisfaction derived from participation in either a work or non-work role was more important to work-life balance than the actual time allocated to this role. Contrary to previous studies that posit equal time distribution between the domains as key to work-life balance (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Catherine Kirchmeyer, 2000), this finding suggests that it is not the amount of time spent in each of the domains that determines work-life balance. In other words, a person can experience work-life balance even if they spend more time in one of the domains than in the other as long as they derive the desired satisfaction by doing so.

### *7.2.3 Research Question 2 – Influences on Definitions of Work-Life Balance among Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children*

Data analysis suggested that couples drew on three sources for their definitions of work-life balance: upbringing and parental influence, interactions with marriage partners and other stakeholders in their social circle, and perceived expectations of their employing organizations and/or professions.

The majority of couples in the sample cited their upbringing and watching their parents negotiate their own work and non-work domains as one of the most powerful and enduring factors influencing their definitions of work-life balance. Following Bandura's (1969) social learning theory, this finding provides evidence that when it comes to work-life balance, individuals tend to pattern their thoughts, feelings, and actions after another person who serves as a model (their parents in this case), especially in the early stages of their development. (Bandura, 1969) suggests that parental influence is far from being the only influence on a person's actions and behaviour, and in line with this, all individuals identified at least two other people who had influenced their definitions either in the past or present, whether their spouse, a friend, or a colleague. This finding further demonstrates that work-life balance is a relational endeavor rather than an individual one, as it is impacted by interaction and connection with others.

Finally, in addition to the importance of relationships in the formulation of work-life balance definitions, participants also discussed systemic influences. Namely, perceived expectations within their respective professions was a third factor that helped shape both individuals' and couples' definitions of work-life balance. Depending on the circumstances of their career, participants cited both formal and informal criteria that influenced their definition, for example, ongoing work demands, hours, deadlines, and fluctuating schedules. Although all

participants considered the demands of their respective organizations and professions to be high, their definitions of work-life balance differed depending on the degree of autonomy and flexibility built into their positions.

#### *7.2.4 Research Question 3 – Experiences of Work-Life Balance among Dual-Career*

##### *Professional Couples without Children*

Participants' orientation towards career and/or family in conjunction with their definition of work-life balance affected how they experienced it both on an individual level and as a couple. In other words, the degree to which couples experienced satisfactory work-life balance differed according to the level of importance each partner or couple ascribed to work and non-work domains and whether or not their experience of work-life balance aligned with their definition of it.

In general, the level of balance couples expressed ranged from high (in the case of careerist couples with minimal life-to-work conflict) to low (in the case of conventional and non-conventional couples, who typically experienced more work-to-life conflict, albeit for different reasons). Egalitarian couples articulated a moderate degree of work-life balance, and most couples faced a combination of both conflict and enrichment between work and non-work domains. Overall, in comparison to the rest of the couples, careerist couples expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with their work-life balance. Given their preference for the work domain over the non-work domain, they achieved the greatest sense of work-life balance when they had the freedom to fully apply themselves to their career. This finding demonstrates that despite popular rhetoric suggesting equal participation in work and non-work domains as work-life balance, couples in this category were most content with allocating their time to their work domain while limiting their participation in non-work activities. This finding can be connected to

conservation of resources theory, which states that people seek to obtain, retain and protect things they value (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Careerist couples, for example, aim to protect the work domain at all costs, including limiting their participation in the non-work domain, thereby conserving their resources. This finding also highlights that the experience of work-life balance is highly subjective and varies between couples depending on their values and attitudes, which are shaped by their preferred orientation, whether family or career.

Partners in conventional couples, on the other hand, both described consistent dissatisfaction with their work-life balance but for different reasons. Men, who had a career orientation, viewed the non-work domain as an impediment to work-life balance. In agreement with (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) conservation of theory, men in conventional couples felt that participating in the non-work domain prevented them from immersing themselves in work, which negatively affected their overall work-life balance. While much of the literature has addressed limited time in the non-work domain as an impediment to work-life balance, for men in conventional couples it was the opposite. The negative impact on their work-life balance was driven primarily by the requirement to spend more time in the non-work domain than they wanted to.

Responses of women in conventional couples were in line with traditional approaches to work-life balance scholarship, suggesting that lack of work-life balance for them meant not spending the desired amount of time in the non-work domain. Mirroring previous findings on the scarcity perspective in work-life balance literature, women in conventional couples felt that their work often infringed on the non-work domain, preventing them from allocating the amount of time they would have liked to, to their non-work responsibilities and interests (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; McMillan, Morris, & Atchley, 2011).

Partners in non-conventional couples also reported divergent experiences of work-life balance. In most instances, women in non-conventional couples expressed a higher degree of satisfaction with their work-life balance than did the men, but occasionally they too experienced dissatisfaction with their work-life balance. Since women in these couples had a strong career orientation, they were most satisfied when they were afforded the possibility to engage in the work domain at any time. Hence, women generally attributed their positive sense of work-life balance to their partner's support for their career orientation. In particular, women in non-conventional couples valued partners who supported their dedication to work and did not limit the amount of time they spent at work. In contrast, men in these couples were generally dissatisfied with their work-life balance. According to the data, men's dissatisfaction stemmed from perceived systemic pressures to adhere to the breadwinner model typically expected from men, whereas women's dissatisfaction was driven by perceived systemic pressures to fulfill caring and nurturing roles. This finding demonstrates that for both men and women in non-conventional couples, dissatisfaction with work-life balance was primarily associated with societal and organizational expectations to conform to traditional gender roles either at home or in the workplace.

Finally, egalitarian couples were the only ones who reported simultaneously experiencing satisfaction and dissatisfaction with work-life balance. Both men and women in these couples experienced work-life conflict because of time constraints and work-life enrichment because they took on a wide variety of different life roles; participation in one role enhanced their experiences in other roles. Egalitarian couples spent considerable amounts of time discussing gender role expectations (or rather, the lack thereof) in their relationship. For them, equally dividing responsibilities reduced work-life conflict. Furthermore, egalitarian couples spoke about



improving their work-life balance through work-life enrichment. In conjunction with having insufficient time to attend to their desired non-work roles, for these couples participation in one role enhanced their experiences in other roles, thereby reducing work-life conflict and enhancing their overall work-life balance. About half the participants in egalitarian couples gave examples of how work roles allowed them to develop transferable skills such as organizing or negotiating, which they could utilize in other areas of their lives. What this demonstrates is that the skills they used at work were helpful in their non-work lives. As a result, we can conclude that there is a connection between work and non-work domains in that the skills required in each of the domains are not necessarily dichotomous.

#### *7.2.5 Research Question 4 – Work-Life Balance Management Strategies among Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children*

In terms of the fourth research question, couples used similar strategies to manage their work-life balance even while their definitions of work-life balance and experiences of it were different. Strategies they used included prioritizing, negotiating, cooperating, planning, delegating, compromising, flex-working, integrating, and segmenting. Couples, while utilizing similar strategies, often assigned different meanings and objectives to these tactics depending on which type of couple they were. For example, both conventional and non-conventional couples relied on compromising and minimizing conflict to achieve greater work-life balance. For conventional couples this strategy was intended to reduce conflict between partners, whereas for non-conventional couples it was used to reduce conflicts with stakeholders, such as employers and society.

In addition, all of the strategies discussed by the participants can be classified as either proactive or reactive depending on couples' overall objectives of work-life balance, such as achieving greater work-life balance or minimizing internal (intra-couple) and external (with outside stakeholders) conflict. For instance, for careerist couples whose main objective was to prioritize work over the non-work domain, strategies were used proactively. In careerist couples, both partners relied on negotiation with external stakeholders to safeguard their work domain prior to experiencing conflict. In other words, they described negotiating with others proactively to eliminate potential conflict in advance. On the other hand, conventional couples, whose main objective was to minimize intra-couple conflict, used similar strategies but did so reactively. They described relying on post-conflict negotiation between the partners to achieve a level of consensus and thereby mitigate the conflict. This finding once again indicates that couples with similar career and/or family orientations were in agreement about their desired work-life balance and used management strategies proactively to retain it, whereas couples with opposing career and/or family orientations relied on reactive management strategies by adjusting their expectations and experiences of work-life balance individually and as couples.

The main takeaway from this finding is that while the work-life balance management strategies utilized by couples seem similar on the surface, the overall objectives of the couples for choosing those strategies varied depending on which category they belonged to. First, the choice of work-life balance management strategies and their intended purpose was largely influenced by the preferred orientation (careerist and/or egalitarian) of each partner. Second, the choice and the intended purpose of the management strategy was further impacted by couples' definitions of work-life balance as well as their actual experiences of it. In particular, for couples with similar orientations, work-life balance management strategies were utilized to maintain the

alignment between definitions and actual experiences. Whereas for couples with opposing orientations (conventional and non-conventional), work-life balance management strategies were used to reduce conflict and to achieve some level of consensus either between the partners (in conventional couples) or with stakeholders external to the couple (in non-conventional couples). Therefore, we can observe that there is a connectivity between couples' understandings of work-life balance, their experiences of such, and their choice of preferred management strategies. Furthermore, we can conclude that the strategies described by couples are underpinned by interactions with others. Therefore, achieving work-life balance is in fact a social process, often one of negotiation, compromise, and working with others, rather than an individual or even a couple project.

### **7.3 Theoretical Contributions**

The topic of work-life balance has been the subject of much debate, that is, what it is, how to achieve it, and the individual and organizational implications of achieving/not achieving it have been the principal areas of interest (Zheng, Molineux, Mirshekary, & Scarparo, 2015). This study adds to that debate by exploring the experiences of professional dual-career couples without children, within an interpretive ontology. In doing so, it contributes to our understanding of work-life balance in four key ways.

First, despite growing scholarly interest in professional dual-career couples on the one hand, and the interface between work and life more generally on the other, we still know very little about the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children. Therefore, responding to Özbilgin and colleagues' (2011) challenge to diversify the scholarly focus beyond traditional family arrangements to include minority and underexplored demographic groups, this

study provides insight into the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children. Moreover, it builds on Masterson and Hoobler's (2015) dual-earner couple typology and demonstrates that dual-career professional couples without children cannot be uniformly characterized. These couples differ from one another based on the preferred orientation of each partner, which in turn impacts their personal and shared understandings and experiences of work-life balance.

Second, this study challenges the call in scholarship to “develop one clear definition of work-life balance” and the “necessity to move towards a consensus of the exact meaning of work-life balance” (Kalliath & Brough, 2008, p. 326). It indicates that work-life balance is a subjective construct that differs from individual to individual and from couple to couple, including among those sharing similar characteristics. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that arriving at a universal definition of work-life balance is not feasible. Moreover, based on the findings, this study concludes that arriving at a universal definition of work-life balance may not even be advisable, precisely because it would overlook the subjective nature of what constitutes work-life balance, thus ignoring individual differences by imposing or assuming a one-size-fits-all approach to work-life balance.

Third, echoing the study by Moen (2003), this study demonstrates that understanding and experiencing work-life balance in dual-career professional couples is a “social-relational process” (Moen, 2003, p. 10). In the first instance, partners' lives are embedded in and influenced by each other such that their understandings and interpretations of work-life balance are shaped by their partner. But this also extends to other stakeholders, including the couple's social circle.

Finally, this study takes up Eikhof, Warhurst, and Haunschild's (2007) call to examine under-researched demographic groups in light of the fact that "it is nearly exclusively childcare that features in any recognition of life, accompanied only by the occasional mentioning of care for elderly dependents, as if workers' lives were only constituted around (child)care responsibility" (Eikhof, Warhurst, & Haunschild, 2007, p. 328). Findings in this study suggest that despite not having parental responsibilities, virtually all couples in the sample struggled to achieve an acceptable work-life balance, which they attributed to a variety of physically and emotionally taxing responsibilities and obligations in both work and non-work domains. Aside from demands associated with the work domain, non-work responsibilities included household duties, relationships with extended families, volunteering, taking care of pets, self-care, and so on.

### *7.3.1 A Typology of Dual-Career Professional Couples without Children*

The idea that dual-career professional couples are not a homogeneous group is not altogether new in the field of management scholarship (Masterson & Hoobler, 2015). Since the 1980s when women began to enter the full-time labour force in significant numbers, scholars have focused on the behaviours and roles of dual-career professional couples (e.g., Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, & Beutell, 1989; Higgins & Duxbury, 1992; Miano et al., 2015). Consequently, in the last three decades, scholars have developed several typologies to explain what distinguishes dual-career couples from other couples. In 2009, Cullen, Hammer, Neal, and Sinclair employed a person-centred approach to identify three types of dual-career couples: high child care, high parent care, and high work demands. In another typology, Hall and MacDermid (2009) established four couple types based on the division of work and family

responsibilities: parallel, second shift-career, counterbalanced, and second shift-nurture couples. A final typology was that of Helms, Walls, Crouter, and McHale (2010), who offered four categories of couples to reflect differences in spouses' attitudes, division of household labour, and levels of marital satisfaction: main-secondary, co-provider, ambivalent co-provider, and mismatched couples. Some recent quantitative analyses have also focused on dual-career couple types (e.g., Boz Semerci & Volery, 2018; Käsälä & Oinas, 2015; Wang & Lee, 2017). It is important to note that in quantitative studies, couples have been categorized according to the differences in the number of working hours of the partners, thus minimizing or overlooking other aspects of their lives, namely how unpaid household or family work is allocated between both partners/parents. Unlike this study, previous studies concentrated on quantifiable measures, not the attitudes and preferences of couples regarding work-life balance.

Although dual-career typologies have received much attention in recent research, the focus remains on couples with children. Moreover, just as there are likely to be differences between dual-career professional couples with children, this study has indicated that there are also important differences between dual-career professional couples without children. Finally, in addition to the paucity of research on dual-career professional couples without children, both scholarly literature and the media tend to describe these couples as primarily career oriented (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018). In other words, it is assumed that couples without children lack interest in other aspects of life outside of their work domain (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018). My study challenges this assumption as the data clearly shows that this is not the case. Not all dual-career professional couples without children are career oriented, with some exhibiting a family orientation or a combination of career and family orientations. Given this finding, there is a need to develop further theoretical explanations for dual-career professional couples without children.

This finding demonstrates that theories that have been applied to couples with children cannot easily be applied to couples without children. There is a need to move towards a theory that is specifically focused on dual-career professional couples without children.

Given the gaps identified in the paragraph above, it is important to first develop a typology that adequately accounts for the variety of dual-career professional couples without children. In line with Masterson and Hobbler (2015), this study proposes a typology that takes into account couples' interpretations of work-life balance based on individual partners' preferences for career and/or family roles. Couples without children are not necessarily primarily work oriented (as I pointed out above); they may also exhibit a family orientation or a combined preference for both career and family. Their orientation, in turn, affects their definitions and experiences of work-life balance. To reflect these differences, in previous chapters of this dissertation I outlined four distinct categories of dual-career professional couples without children based on their career/family orientation preferences: careerist, conventional, non-conventional, and egalitarian.

### *7.3.2 The Subjective Nature of Definitions of Work-Life Balance*

The second theoretical contribution of this study has to do with definitions of work-life balance. As stated earlier, definitions of this construct varied between the participants. I initially located this study within an interpretivist ontology that accords importance to individual interpretations of a given phenomenon, in this case work-life balance. Thus, I have explored the extent to which definitions of work-life balance were informed by the subjective understandings of the construct of individual partners and couples. For example, although the participants in the study shared common characteristics, such as being professionals and not having children, they

defined and understood work-life balance differently. Therefore, despite the call in the literature to produce a universal definition of work-life balance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008) and reflecting the interpretivist stance I take in this study, data in this study suggested the centrality of individual experience and interpretation in defining work-life balance.

In addition, for several decades now, achieving work-life balance has been regarded as the ability to participate in and derive satisfaction *equally* from work and life domains, with minimal inter-role conflict (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014; Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello, 2016). Also, previous research has suggested that work-life balance requires a high level of engagement in work-related roles that generate positive affect through the successful transfer of skills, values, privilege, and status from work-related roles to other roles in non-work domains (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Sirgy and Lee also state that “a co-requisite for work-life balance seems to be equal engagement in non-work-related roles” (Sirgy & Lee, 2018, p. 233). In summary, much of the research on work-life balance makes the case that it is achieved when individuals have role commitments across life domains. In other words, previous research prioritized equal participation in different roles, suggesting that individuals with satisfactory work-life balance could not be engaged exclusively in work but had to be equally engaged in the non-work domain (Voydanoff, 2005).

However, as this study suggests, such a conclusion assumes that everyone wishes to divide their time equally between the two domains. It also presupposes that equal participation in both domains signifies the most satisfying form of work-life balance. This study challenges this assumption by showing that work-life balance is less about achieving symmetry between the domains and more about deriving the most satisfaction from any given work or non-work role, regardless of how much time and energy is allocated to it. In this study, for example, careerist



couples, who spent the majority of their time working, reported the most satisfying level of work-life balance in comparison to the other three groups of couples in the sample. Previous research would have characterized this limited engagement with the non-work domain as a negative influence on overall life satisfaction (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). This was not the case for careerist couples in this study, however. Moreover, while careerist couples spoke the most to the positive value of work, virtually all couples in the sample described their work as a source of satisfaction in their lives in one way or the other. This finding aligns with Eikhof and colleagues' (2007) proposal that work-life balance research is largely based on negative and reductionist assumptions about work. Given the responses from the participants in this study, we should consider the possibility that work can be gratifying and fulfilling on multiple fronts and that such an experience of work extends beyond work itself to support more positive evaluations of work-life balance. As Isles (2004) states, "work can make a contribution – for some the major contribution – to overall life satisfaction" (p. 23). This was the case for couples in this study.

Challenging the dominant discourse in the literature on the necessity of equal participation in both domains for a high level of work-life balance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Sirgy & Wu, 2013; Voydanoff, 2005), both men and women participants oriented toward their career (careerist couples, men in conventional couples, and women in non-conventional couples) reported that increased non-work participation created work-life conflict. In other words, when trying to or forced to participate in both domains equally, participants with career orientations experienced lower degrees of work-life balance and greater overall dissatisfaction. This finding once again signals that for some work-life balance is not necessarily about striving for equal participation in both domains; rather, it is about deriving the most satisfaction from any given role regardless of the time allocated to that role. Contrary to one-

size-fits-all solutions described previously in work-life balance literature, this finding accords primacy to agency and signals individual freedom of choice instead as an important factor in determining work-life balance.

### *7.3.3 Work-Life Balance as a Relational Process*

This study demonstrates that achieving work-life balance is an inherently relational process that occurs through interactions with others, illustrating that the construct of work-life balance should not be examined from a strictly individualist perspective. This theme permeated the findings of this study, echoing previous research (e.g., Özbilgin et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2016). This finding complements the theoretical framework of a family life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 2009; Elder, 1995). Greenfield and Marks (2006) suggest that one of the central propositions of the family life course perspective is that of linked lives whereby people in a salient relationship with each other, such as marriage partners, occupy mutually influential “interlocking developmental trajectories” (p. 443) throughout their lives. While the linked lives perspective has been extensively studied in sociology and psychology (e.g., Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008; Elder Jr & Rockwell, 1979; Hareven, 2018; Mayer, 2009; Shanahan, 2000), it remains under researched in work-life balance literature.

Complimenting the extant literature and extending the theory into work-life balance scholarship, the results of this study indicate that circumstances in one partner’s life have implications for the life of the other partner that in turn affect their individual and shared understandings and experiences of work-life balance. In other words, the linked lives principle posits that dual-career partners exert considerable influence on each other’s individual understanding and experience of work-life balance, resulting in a joint life course dynamic. This

finding adds further weight to arguments that a dual-career professional couple's work-life balance should, in fact, be explored from a relational standpoint.

Echoing the theoretical/ontological paradigm within which this study is located, this finding further demonstrates the influential role interpersonal interactions have in shaping couples' perspectives and behaviours. This study demonstrates how participants' understandings and experiences of work-life balance are also informed and shaped by interactions with others outside of the couple relationship. Relationships with significant others, such as family, friends, colleagues, and employers, were shown to be particularly influential (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This finding echoes the literature on social support with respect to work-life balance experiences. The importance of social support from family members in experiencing positive work and non-work outcomes has been demonstrated in several studies, particularly in its relation to work-family conflict (Wallace, 2005), work-family facilitation (Aryee, Tan, & Srinivas, 2005), coping effectively with life stressors (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018), and improved performance in all areas of life (Ten Brummelhuis, Haar, & Roche, 2014). Russo, Shteigman, and Carmeli (2016) suggest that "only a handful of studies [have] examined the link between family social support and work-family balance" (Russo et al., 2016, p. 176). Russo and colleagues (2016) have also shown that perceiving social support from one's partner can increase an individual's capacity to experience role balance as the partner "provides an invaluable aid to the focal actor to accomplish work and family goals" (p. 176). This was critical to the participants in this study, and many spoke of the importance of their partner's support in their efforts to attain satisfactory work-life balance. For example, careerist couples stressed that a partner's contentment with their "inflated" work engagement allowed them to immerse themselves in work, thereby achieving a desirable degree of work-life balance. Findings from interviews with conventional couples demonstrated the

opposite effect, where the lack of support from partners impacted work-life balance negatively for both men and women in this couple category.

The importance of systemic support for work-life balance for dual-career professional couples was also evident in the findings of this study. Systemic support has been shown to be an important resource that helps individuals accomplish their priorities, including greater work-life balance. Russo et al. (2016) explain that systemic support can nurture optimal psychological and environmental conditions for individuals “who may feel safer and more capable to invest in activities that promote greater work-life balance” (p. 175). Russo et al. also suggest that in supportive organizations, individuals feel freer to devote time, energy, and other personal resources to both work and non-work activities that enhance their work-life balance. Mirroring findings from previous studies, the importance of systemic support in achieving work-life balance was noted by the majority of the participants in this study. For example, women in conventional couples spoke at length about seeking employment in organizations that promoted flex working and appreciated their desire to devote time to the non-work domain. By the same token, a perceived lack of systemic support affected men in non-conventional couples in particular. They drew attention to organizational expectations of men as the ideal worker based on the “male breadwinner” model, demonstrating how the lack of systemic support consistently impacted their experiences of work-life balance negatively.

#### *7.3.4 Adopting a Broader Conceptualization of Non-Work Life*

Finally, in answer to the call in the literature to include activities other than caring activities in the analysis of work-life balance, such as sport, leisure, and community roles (Eikhof et al., 2007; Hall, Kossek, Briscoe, Pichler, & Lee, 2013; Kelliher et al., 2018'forthcoming'; Özbilgin et al., 2011), this study identifies the variety and complexity of

elements that constitute the non-work domain of dual-career professional couples without children. Notkin (2014) observes that in scholarly and popular depictions, the “life” aspect of work-life balance is often synonymous with personal time spent on caring activities. She also notes that the ways non-parents spend their personal time is typically regarded as less important than that of parents with their children. Echoing Notkin’s (2014) observations, participants in this study spoke about having to manage others’ assumptions about them having fewer non-work responsibilities in comparison to their coworkers who had children. While participants often cited work as an important aspect of their lives as a couple, they described it as one factor among many that influenced their individual and shared experiences of work-life balance. Couples in all categories in the study referred to a variety of non-work responsibilities that required ongoing attention, including caring for their partners, extended family members, pets, etc. While caring activities still loomed large for the participants in this study, other non-work activities were also described as important. Those activities involved self-care through the cultivation of personal interests, such as volunteering, spending time with friends, health and fitness, and hobbies. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that non-work responsibilities and pursuits consistently made demands on dual-career professional couples without children, affecting their work-life balance.

What emerges from this study is that work-life balance is an important dimension in the lives of couples who are not parents. As Notkin (2014) has observed, it is often assumed that dual-career professional couples without children do not struggle when it comes to work-life balance. Yet the data in this study challenges this assumption. Managing and achieving work-life balance is as much a concern for these couples as it is for other demographic groups with parental responsibilities discussed in the literature.

Achieving work-life balance is particularly difficult for women in conventional couples, who continue to assume the majority of responsibility for domestic work in their households. The core issue for these women, as it is for women with children, is the challenge of finding a balance between the different domains. They also report a greater sense of responsibility for extended family members in comparison to their male counterparts. Finally, women in conventional couples share a prevailing perception that their families expect them to assume such responsibilities precisely because they do not have children and therefore have more free time. This finding indicates that work-life balance for couples without children is largely affected by responsibilities for family members, in this case elderly parents, which is still about caring but for a group other than children.

## **7.4 Practical Implications**

### *7.4.1 Implications for Dual-Career Professional Couples with and without Children*

First, this study brings to light a new understanding that dual-career professional couples without children cannot be characterized in the same way, nor do they uniformly define and experience work-life balance. This study also calls on couples to be mindful of their career, family preferences, and aspirations when evaluating their work-life balance. In other words, when looking to understand their work-life balance, individuals, in this case partners in couples without children, should be aware that their definition and experience may differ from that of their counterparts. The main takeaway for dual-career couples without children is that a one-size-fits-all solution to work-life balance does not exist. It is important for them to acknowledge the centrality of individual preferences and only then craft a work-life balance for themselves as a couple and as individuals. It is also important to keep in mind that as circumstances change over time so will how they define their work-life balance. In summary, dual-career professional

couples should be mindful that work-life balance is an individual, composite, and dynamic phenomenon.

Second, building on the importance of acknowledging individual differences, the “balance” dimension of work-life balance does not necessarily mean symmetry or an equal emphasis on the two domains. This study suggests that couples might want to consider thinking of work-life balance not from the perspective of equal time distribution between the domains, but from the perspective of work-life satisfaction. Rather than scheduling an equal number of hours for both work and personal tasks (something that the participants in this study found unrewarding and unrealistic), couples should engage in roles that bring most satisfaction to them regardless of the time allocation required.

Third, this study serves as a valuable source of information for dual-career professional couples with or without children because it provides them with an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and thereby become better equipped to deal with the challenges of their own work-life balance. For example, this study describes work-life balance management strategies used by couples to align themselves with different orientations (career and/or family) and reduce intra-couple conflicts. It also describes strategies used by couples to reduce conflict with stakeholders external to the couple. Awareness of these strategies can assist couples to understand work-life balance in a deeper sense as well as encourage them to consider using these strategies to ensure the betterment of their work-life balance.

#### *7.4.2 Organizational Implications*

First, this study points to the need for organizations to reconsider their existing work-life balance policies and procedures. Despite the increasing diversity in family structures and employees’ personal responsibilities, there have been reports that some organizational work-life

balance policies are still premised on couples who have children (Adame-Sánchez, González-Cruz, & Martínez-Fuentes, 2016). This study shows that the non-work domains of dual-career professional couples without children have multiple dimensions that need to be taken into account in organizational work-life balance policies, that is, dual-career professional couples without children also have domestic responsibilities much like their parenting counterparts, whether that is caring for elderly parents, other family members, or even non-family members. Organizational policy makers must recognize the diverse range of work-life balance needs and the importance of offering inclusive policies, rather than concentrating on policies that specifically benefit working parents with children.

Second, it is important that organizations acknowledge that dual-career employees without children are not all motivated by the same things. Careerist individuals may benefit from policies aimed at professional advancement, while their family-oriented peers may be more attracted to flex-working options because of their desire for meaningful immersion in all areas of their lives. It is also important that work-life balance initiatives be based on an underlying principle of equity. One-size-fits-all policies do not support growth-producing environments where retention becomes an issue if the needs of certain groups of employees are not reflected in work-life balance policies. Human resources professionals should, therefore, develop a range of policies and procedures that would include and serve their increasingly diverse employees, including those without children.

Third, findings of this dissertation indicate the need for organizations to consider the entirety of their employees' lives, including those of parents. For example, much like the sample in this dissertation (couples without children), employees with children have responsibilities and interests beyond their children, like sports and animal care. In addition, those with children are



undoubtedly also variously oriented towards career and/or family. Understanding the complexity of individuals' whole lives can help organizations in developing better suited work-life balance policies for their workforce.

## **7.5 Limitations of the Study**

Despite the contributions this study makes, it also has limitations. First, this study reflects the experiences of a particular demographic group: Caucasian couples residing in North America. Farivar and colleagues (2016) suggest that work-life balance depends on social and cultural contexts and reflects the political and economic developments of a country. They argue that cultural norms influence the concept of work-family balance because of the perceptions and meanings people assign to the concept across cultures (Farivar, Cameron, & Yaghoubi, 2016). That is to say, dual-career professional couples without children in other racial/cultural/national contexts might well understand and experience work-life balance in ways other than the couples in this study did. For example, Moghadam, Knudson-Martin, and Mahoney (2009) found that for dual-career couples in Iran, the larger social context limited couples' ability to implement egalitarian practices in their relationship. Moghadam et al. (2009) also reported that despite expectations of mutuality in decision-making, socialization and the male-dominant social structure in Iran reinforced male power and limited options for women. Cowdery et al. (2009) suggest that in African-American couples, both men and women tend to put family needs above their personal and professional needs. The sense of mutual responsibility of African-American husbands and wives encourages shared household responsibilities, as well as joint responsibility for earning family income. Given these examples, more country-specific studies are needed to understand better the complexity of work-life balance in cross-cultural settings.

Second, the couples in this study were self-selected in that they volunteered to participate. Thus, there is no way of knowing the extent to which dual-career professional couples in this study differed from dual-career professional couples who would not have volunteered.

The third limitation of this study also concerns the sample. In this study, the focus was on professional dual-career couples without children. Despite Warren's (2015) observation that work-life imbalance is not just a middle-class problem, contemporary researchers including myself tend to overlook working-class and blue-collar workers. Including this population in research could yield different results and thereby expand and enrich our understanding of work-life balance.

Fourth, in this study I have only focused on heterosexual couples, which led me to consider traditional and non-traditional issues in terms of gender relationships. Including same-sex dual-career professional couples in this study could yield different conclusions pertaining to couple types and their understandings and experiences of work-life balance (Languilaire & Carey, 2017).

The fifth limitation is the potential for single researcher bias. While I followed procedures rooted in qualitative research to test for inter-coder reliability (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013) and performed member checks (Cho & Trent, 2006), I conducted all of the interviews myself. This allowed me to select the themes to discuss, but it also necessitated vigilance on my part to adhere to the trustworthiness and rigor required by qualitative research. Having said that, I discussed the findings at length with the members of my dissertation committee, including the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data.

## **7.6 Suggestions for Future Research**

A number of ideas emerge from this study that point to possibilities for future research. First, our understanding of dual-career professional couples might be extended if similar studies were conducted with a larger sample. Although I have offered a four-fold typology for dual-career couples without children, I do not presume that these groups encompass the entire population of dual-career professional couples without children. Further research may uncover other couple types not yet identified in the literature, which in turn would aid scholars as well as human resources practitioners in their policy-making.

Second, stemming from the limitations of this study, future research should examine different subsamples of dual-career professional couples without children based on cultural background. Recent studies have suggested that diversity within the work-life context has received limited attention (Chang et al., 2010) even though traditional gender roles have shifted (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). The majority of work-life balance research to date is limited to a North American context, with samples comprising largely Caucasians (Farivar et al., 2016). This effectively limits the applicability of work-life balance research by ignoring other races and ethnic groups (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). This gap in research also overlooks work-life balance issues in developing, non-western countries (Farivar et al., 2016). However, the complexities associated with work-life balance likely transcend the typical western concepts of this construct (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Within the multiple definitions of work-life balance are considerable cultural variations that are mediated by role-related expectations. Without extending research to study other cultural groups, the literature will continue to be limited in its scope and understanding of this phenomenon. Incorporating minority-population couples into these studies

would lend insight into how work and personal life are balanced, and whether certain strategies transcend cultural and ethnic divides (Roehling, Jarvis, & Swope, 2005).

Third, while this study addressed an important gap in the literature by involving couples without children in the work-life balance conversation, it has nonetheless retained scholarship's focus on upper-middle-class couples in professional occupations (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Bochantin & Cowan, 2016; Warren, 2015). In order to expand our understandings of work-life balance, future research must incorporate non-professional and blue-collar couples. Views and experiences of work-life balance may be very different for people with a stable financial income than for those struggling to maintain their livelihood.

A fourth limitation of this study is the absence of LGBT couples in the sample. As Languilaire and Carey (2017) write, "voices of [the] LGBT community in work-life balance research seem invisible or not on the frontline of work-life balance research despite their increasingly legitimate presence in organizational and societal discourses" (Languilaire & Carey, 2017, p. 100). Languilaire and Carey (2017) also claim that contemporary work-life balance studies continue to retain a "heteronormative view of the family" (Languilaire & Carey, 2017, p. 100) even though challenges experienced by the LGBT community affect their experiences of work-life balance differently than those of heterosexual individuals and couples. In light of this, future research should include this population in order to broaden our understanding of varieties of dual-career couples, as well as their understanding and experiences of work-life balance.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore how dual-career couples without children, a group that remains under researched, understand, interpret, and experience work-life balance. To this

end, my interpretive study provided a robust analysis of work-life balance of dual-career couples without children, making several important contributions to contemporary research on work-life balance in spite of the gaps in the research identified earlier. It demonstrated that dual-career couples without children are not homogeneous and their understandings and experiences of work-life balance depend of their orientation towards career, family, or both. It also discussed the management strategies used by these couples to achieve what they perceived as successful work-life balance, again based on their underlying orientation. In this regard, this study provides a solid foundation upon which further research can be built in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the work-life balance of dual-career professional couples without children.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval

<b>Certificate #:</b>	<b>STU 2016 - 093</b>
<b>Approval Period:</b>	<b>07/04/16-07/04/17</b>

#### HICS APPROVAL

**To:** **Galina Boiarintseva**  
Graduate Student of Human Resources Management,  
Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies  
[lina@shulman.ca](mailto:lina@shulman.ca)

**From:** Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics  
(on behalf of Denise Henriques, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

**Date:** Monday, July 04, 2016

**Title:** Work-Life Balance Among Dual-Career Couples without Children: A Qualitative Study

**Risk Level:** ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

**Level of Review:** ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, **“Work-Life Balance Among Dual-Career Couples without Children: A Qualitative Study”** has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University’s Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics ([ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, **“RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE”**.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416-736-5914 or via email at: [acollins@yorku.ca](mailto:acollins@yorku.ca).

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM  
Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,  
Office of Research Ethics

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

### **Work-Life Balance Among Dual-Career Professional Couples Without Children: A Qualitative Study**

#### **Informed Consent Form**

##### **Introduction**

I would like to invite you to participate in a study that investigates work-life balance among dual-career professional couples without children, which I am conducting as part of my doctoral thesis at the School of Human Resources Management at York University.

##### **Background Information**

While we already know a lot about work-life balance, much of the research focuses on parental responsibilities for how dual-career professional couples manage multiple obligations associated with work and family. However, given societal changes where traditional families (mother, father and 2 children) no longer represent the majority but are being steadily replaced by other forms of families, giving voice to dual-career couples without children is imperative.

##### **Purpose of this Study**

In this study I am interested in finding out about dual-career professional couples' thoughts and experiences of work-life balance. I am specifically interested in exploring this issue with dual-career professional couples without children.

##### **Procedure**

This research will involve your participation in a one-on-one interview with the researcher (myself). Our discussion will take about one hour of your time where you can choose the location of the interview. Moreover, if at any time during the interview, you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may say so and I will move on to the next question. Ideally, I would like to record the interview, but I can assure you that the recorded information will be kept in a secure location and will remain confidential. All the data collected will be stored digitally on the password-protected computer at a secure location accessible by the researcher only, for the period of the study (about 1-2 years). During the transcription phase, all of the names will be changed to maintain confidentiality.

##### **Risks and Benefits**

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. In the unlikely event that you feel uncomfortable answering some questions, then you are free to decline to answer, which will not affect your remaining participation in anyway.

There are a few potential benefits that you might wish to consider. Participation in this study may allow you to reflect on your thoughts and experiences of work-life balance. Furthermore, there is potential for you to discover insights about yourself and your experience of work-life

balance, possibly generating new insights that you may not have considered before.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time during our interview. Your decision not to participate will not influence the relationship you may have with the researcher or the nature of your relationship with York University either now or in the future.

### **Withdrawal from the Study**

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating or to refuse to answer particular questions will not affect your relationship with the researcher or York University. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be immediately destroyed.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. The information you provide will remain confidential. Your name and identity will not be disclosed at any time. If a direct quote from your interview is used in the final dissertation document, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. The data may be seen by the ethical review committee and may be published in an academic outlet (e.g., journal), but no personal identifiers will ever be given.

### **Sharing the Results**

I intend to use the knowledge obtained from this research for academic purposes in the form of my dissertation. Each participant will receive a summary of the findings before it is made available to the public.

### **Available Sources of Information**

If you have any further questions, you may contact me directly at [lina\\_b@yorku.ca](mailto:lina_b@yorku.ca). I will be more than happy to answer your questions or address your concerns. If you would like to speak to my dissertation committee for further clarification, you may contact Dr. Julia Richardson (primary supervisor) at [jrichard@yorku.ca](mailto:jrichard@yorku.ca), Dr. Souha R. Ezzedeen (committee member) at [souha@yorku.ca](mailto:souha@yorku.ca) and/or Dr. Christa L. Wilkin (committee member) at [christaw@yorku.ca](mailto:christaw@yorku.ca).

**This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)**

### **Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in a study conducted by Galina Boiarintseva. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Participant

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator

## Appendix C: Demographic Data Form

### Participants Demographic Form

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we proceed with the interview could you please answer the following questions in order to provide some basic demographic details. In case you prefer not to answer any of the questions you may leave the space blank.

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:                      Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Age:                        25-35 \_\_\_\_\_ 36-45 \_\_\_\_\_ 46-55 \_\_\_\_\_ 55+ \_\_\_\_\_

Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

Status of Employment:      full-time \_\_\_\_\_ part-time \_\_\_\_\_ unemployed \_\_\_\_\_

What best describes your marital status?      Married \_\_\_\_\_      Living with the partner \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D: Demographic Information of Individual Members of Dual-Career  
Professional Couples without Children**

<u>Participants</u>	(21 couples = 42 individuals)*
<u>Gender</u>	
Female	21
Male	21
<u>Country of Residence</u>	
Canada	24
USA	18
<u>Age</u>	15
25-35	14
36-45	6
46-55	57
55+	
<u>Professions</u>	
Lawyer	3
Computer Programmer	1
Financial Analyst	1
Human Resources Manager	3
Civil Engineer	2
University Professor	4
Architect	2
Medical Doctor	5
Engineer	1
Teacher	2
Ph.D. Candidate	3
Manager of Finance	1
Director of Finance	1
Investment Manager	1
School Principal	1
Director of Sales	1
Higher Education Director	1
Marketing Manager	1
Social Worker	1
Veterinarian	1
Commercial Pilot	1
Accountant	2
Procurement Manager	1
Information Technology Specialist	1
Space Engineer	1
<u>Years in Profession</u>	
>10	17
10-20	11
21-30	9

30+	5
<u>Marriage Status</u>	
Married	42
Non-Married	0
<u>Employment Status</u>	
Full-Time	42
Part-Time	0
Unemployed	0

### Appendix E: Final Sample <sup>6</sup>

Couple	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Years in Profession	Location
1.	Tamir	Male	37	Computer Programmer	9	Toronto, Canada
	Debra	Female	35	Lawyer	7	
2.	David	Male	33	Financial Analyst	6	Toronto, Canada
	Monica	Female	30	Human Resources Manager	5	
3.	Joseph	Male	55	Civil Engineer	28	New Jersey, USA
	Sabrina	Female	53	University Professor	25	
4.	Sergio	Male	38	Architect	8	Fort McMurray, Canada
	Rachel	Female	36	Doctor	6	
5.	Kevin	Male	35	Engineer	11	Philadelphia, USA
	Bianna	Female	31	Teacher	4	
6.	Rick	Male	39	University Professor	15	Chicago, USA

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<sup>6</sup> Participants' names have been changed to ensure anonymity.



	Courtney	Female	38	University Professor	15	
7.	Evan	Male	35	Ph.D. Candidate	4	New York, USA
	Rachel	Female	30	Ph.D. Candidate	3	
8.	John	Male	69	Manager of Finance	41	Orlando, USA
	Marikée	Female	67	School Principal	39	
9.	Patrick	Male	45	Procurement Manager	13	Toronto, Canada
	Jamila	Female	40	Human Resources Manager	8	
10.	Collin	Male	67	Investment Manager	45	Toronto, Canada
	Viktoria	Female	62	Director of Sales	30	
11.	Sam	Male	48	Architect	10	Toronto, Canada
	Faith	Female	33	Lawyer	5	
12.	Frank	Male	31	Marketing Manager	4	Ann Arber, USA
	Lory	Female	29	Social Worker	2	
13.	Daniel	Male	47	IT Specialist	22	New York, USA
	Whitney	Female	44	Higher Education Director	18	
14.	Ryan	Male	64	Space Engineer	40	Orlando, USA
	Julie	Female	58	Director of Finance	21	

15.	Chris	Male	43	Doctor	17	Toronto, Canada
	Alessia	Female	42	Doctor	12	
16.	Bryan	Male	47	Veterinarian	17	Toronto, Canada
	Leena	Female	45	Accountant	22	
17.	Christian	Male	33	Commercial Pilot	5	Toronto, Canada
	Wendy	Female	36	Teacher	8	
18.	Robert	Male	43	Doctor	17	Toronto, Canada
	Terry	Female	42	Doctor	12	
19.	Timothy	Male	34	Ph.D. Candidate	6	Waterloo, Canada
	Diana	Female	32	Civil Engineer	5	
20.	Curtin	Male	35	Human Resources Manager	17	Toronto, Canada
	Samantha	Female	33	Accountant	22	
21.	Noah	Male	55	Lawyer	28	Toronto, Canada
	Tatyana	Female	56	University Professor	21	

## **Appendix F: Interview Protocol**

1. Tell me about yourself please?
2. I would like to know more about your work. Please describe your typical day at work.
3. What about your other roles in life? What do you do outside of work?
4. Which role, in your opinion, holds a priority for you?
5. Does one role hold higher priority over the other or your feel that both of them are equally important to you?
6. What about your partner? How would they describe and compare their work and non-work roles? And their priorities.
7. How would you define work-life balance?
8. Do you think your partner would agree with your definition of work-life balance?
9. How do you think your partner would define work-life balance?
10. Do you think you are in sync when it comes to defining work-life balance?
11. What would you say influences your definition of work-life balance?
12. Are there social forces, personal forces, organizational forces that play a role in your definition formulation? If so, please describe them.
13. Now please tell me about your experiences of work-life balance.
14. Given your definition of work-life balance, how is your experience of work-life balance? Are your definition and experiences aligned?
15. What about your partner? Do you think their definition and experiences align?
16. How do you manage your work-life balance individually? And as a couple?
17. Have you found certain strategies for yourself to maintain your work-life balance? What about as a couple?
18. What do you do in practice to ensure work-life balance?