

THE INFLUENCE OF IDENTITY SALIENCE ON CROSS-GENERATIONAL  
PERSPECTIVES OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

By

Cherise Nicole White

Approved:

---

Christopher Cunningham  
Assistant Professor  
(Committee Chair)

---

Brian O'Leary  
Associate Professor  
(Committee Member)

---

Bart Weathington  
Associate Professor  
(Committee Member)

---

Jerald Ainsworth  
Dean of Graduate School

THE INFLUENCE OF IDENTITY SALIENCE ON CROSS-GENERATIONAL  
PERSPECTIVES OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

By

Cherise White

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science  
in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
Chattanooga, Tennessee

April 2011

Copyright © 2011

By Cherise White

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to test a new model of work life (nonwork) balance (WLB) that may explain individual and cross-generational differences in views of WLB. A prominent feature within this model, identity salience, is described as the values and importance a person attaches to the multiple roles they manage. This study addresses one of the major causes for inconsistency in the existing WLB research by examining how and why perceptions of WLB differ depending on the life stage of sample participants. The model was supported and findings suggest that individual perceptions of work life balance are contingent on their identity salience. This model did have utility for explaining individual and cross-generational differences in perceptions of WLB. In general, Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers all valued nonwork over work. However, there were significant differences between the three groups and their perceptions of WLB.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my parents, Rev. Dr. Quentin and Pamela White, and my sisters Elise and Rosa White.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many people who provided me the support, which without this thesis could not have been completed. Heartfelt thanks are due to Dr. Chris Cunningham, my committee chairman, for his dedication and the time it took to guide and assist me with the particulars of the master's program and the thesis process. Great appreciation is also due to the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Brian. O'Leary and Dr. Bart Weathington.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xi
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
Cross Generational Balance Considerations .....	2
Multiple Roles.....	3
The Meaning of Work and Family.....	4
Existing Role Interface Models .....	5
Work Family Conflict .....	6
Frone's Model of Work-Family Interference .....	7
Work Life Balance .....	8
A Balance Board Model of WLB .....	9
The Present Study .....	13
III. METHODOLOGY .....	19
Participants.....	19
Demographics .....	20

Procedure .....	21
Measures .....	22
IV.    RESULTS .....	24
V.    DISCUSSION .....	31
VI.    LIMITATIONS.....	37
VII.   PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	38
VIII.  CONCLUSION.....	38
REFERENCES .....	39
APPENDIX	
A. SURVEY.....	44



## LIST OF TABLES

(Frone, 2003) Dimensions of work-family balance .....	8
Explanations of interference and enhancement between work and nonwork domains. ....	10
Descriptive Statistics for Generation Y .....	20
Descriptive Statistics for Generation X .....	21
Descriptive Statistics for Baby Boomers .....	21
Comparison of slopes H1 .....	29
Comparison of slopes H2.....	29

## LIST OF FIGURES

Balance Board Model of WLB .....	12
Hypothesis 1: Work Enhancement versus Nonwork Interference .....	15
Hypothesis 2: Nonwork Enhancement versus Work Interference .....	16
Hypothesis 3: Overall Enhancement versus Overall Interference .....	18
Scatterplot of WLB and Balance Difference Score A .....	25
Scatterplot of WLB and Balance Difference Score B .....	27
Scatterplot of WLB and Balance Difference Score C .....	28

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WLB, Work Life Balance

WINW, Work Interference with Nonwork

NWIW, Nonwork Interferences with Work

WENW, Work Enhancement of Nonwork

NWEW, Nonwork Enhancement of Work

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The shift in representation of multiple generations of workers in the workforce has led to a wide range of perspectives on work and life questions ripe for research attention. Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance (2010) address how there will be a large change in organizations in years to come when millions of older workers retire. Twenge et al. emphasize that young individuals will enter the workforce to fill these openings. This workforce shift will require a better understanding of the work values of Generation Y. Twenge et al. also mention that there needs to be a clear understanding of how Generation Y's values compare or differ from the values of other generations.

Examining multiple generations within the workforce is important because the demographic profile of the workforce has changed quite a bit over the past few decades (Pitt-Catsouphes, & Smyer, 2007). Due to this change, particular in age demographics within the workforce, attention has been placed on examining age diversity and the opportunities and/or challenges that come with this change. An example of a challenge across the generations within the workforce is work-nonwork balance. This is the type of challenge that is likely to increase in difficulty for members of all generations due to several factors, as outlined by Hansen (1991),

including the increasing number of dual-earner families, single earner households, and single-parent families.

### **Cross-Generational Balance Considerations**

In general, there is a shortage of literature examining the meaning of WLB across the generations currently represented in today's workforce. Therefore, the present study addresses this shortage by gathering WLB and identity salience data from individuals representing three generations. According to Kupperschmidt (2000), a generation is a distinguishable group that has birth year, age location, and noteworthy life events in common. This group's range is usually determined by a five to seven year period. However, there is an inconsistency in generation labels among authors (De Kort, 2004; Smola & Sutton, 2002). For this study, the three generations of particular concern are Baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y.

These generational groups were chosen because of their large representation within today's workforce. It is important to consider these three generations because now is the first time in history that up to four generations are represented at the same time in the workforce. It should be noted that a fourth generational group, the Silent or Traditional generation, which includes individuals born before 1946, are also present within today's workforce. However, the representation of this fourth generation within the workforce is not as prevalent as the other three groups.

Support for the following classification of generations comes from the following different multi-generational literature sources (Cusmir & Parker, 1990; De Kort, 2004; Dries, Kerpel, & Pepermans, 2008; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lankard, 1995; Smola & Sutton, 2002). More specifically, the generation groups in the present study are Generation Y (persons born between

the years of 1981 and 1999), Generation X (persons born between the years of 1965 and 1980), and Baby Boomers (persons born between the years of 1946 and 1964). Investigating the meaning of WLB across these generational groups, in addition to examining differences in perceived identity salience, will help provide empirical support for a new model of WLB proposed by Cunningham (2007). Before this model is explained, it is necessary to review the forces in work and nonwork life domains that people seek to balance.

### **Multiple Roles**

Working individuals are involved in multiple roles that they constantly attempt to manage. Finding balance between work and nonwork domains requires the management of multiple role demands, which can be exhausting and stressful for workers of any generation (Swift, 2002). The difficulties or fulfillment that an individual may experience when managing multiple role demands can strongly influence his or her perspective of WLB. Frone (2003) emphasizes the importance of social roles because they define a person by distinguishing role boundaries. He further suggests that social roles help determine what we do, with whom we associate, our thoughts and feelings, how we spend and arrange our time, and our physical location. Frone matched each of these components with a type of role boundary. For example, what we do is paired with behavioral boundaries, who we associate with is linked to relational boundaries and our thoughts are attached to cognitive boundaries. Our feelings are constrained by affective boundaries. Our use of time is limited by temporal boundaries, and our physical existence is limited by spatial boundaries. It is through a consideration of these types of boundaries that we can understand the separation and interconnectedness of work-nonwork domains.

## **The Meaning of Work and Family**

For the majority of individuals in the U.S., one of the most dominant roles in a person's life is the occupational role. Work is a complex role with multiple meanings for most individuals, reflecting the need to feel embedded within social, familial, and cultural settings (Schultheiss, Blustein, & Flum, 2003). As stated in Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, humans desire to love and to belong. In a recent study on the meaning of work, Schultheiss (2006) found that some individuals experience a sense of belonging in their work and work communities. However, that feeling of belonging is only present when that role and work community is with people who share the same interests and values. Schultheiss further notes that there is not a large distinction between work, social, familial, and cultural life sectors.

Also supporting Schultheiss's idea of a lack of distinction between various sectors is Richardson's (1993; 2002) finding of work being all encompassing of both market work and nonwork. She defines market work as the work a person is paid to do in an occupational setting. In contrast, nonwork is referred to as the activities one partakes in that are not compensated or are done for one's self, family, or community. To comprehend the integration of work-nonwork and the meaning of WLB, it is important to understand not only the meaning of work, but also family.

The traditional perspective of family, *a man, woman, and children*, is not an accurate representation of the families within this country at this time (Schultheiss, 2006). There are an array of family structures currently existing, including two-parent families, one-parent families, cohabitating couples, gay and lesbian families, and extended families (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). This shift in family structure can be attributed to recent changes in the

workforce and society (DeBell, 2006; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). According to Guerts and Demerouti (2003) workforce and societal changes that have lead to a shift in family structure is the importance of the quality of life, the woman's movement, the strong presence of working mothers, and an increase in the number of single-parent families, performance expectations, and technology. Furthermore, Lockwood (2003) found that both the employer and employee perceive this change of family structure as being one of the difficulties in today's society and a key contributing factor to workforce issues such as poor WLB.

### **Existing Role Interface Models**

The existing research regarding work-nonwork or work-life role interactions has been dominated by studies of work and family role demands. Six fundamental conceptual models capture important elements of these relationships. Frone (2003) identifies three non-causal models. The first of the three is the *segmentation* model, which suggests that work-nonwork are independent sectors of life that have no influence on another. The second model presented by Frone is the *congruence* model. This model proposes that it is possible for work and family to take on a positive or negative correlation, but their relationship is spurious due to sharing a common cause. The last of the non-casual models is the *identity* or *integrative* model. This model postulates that both work and nonwork roles are so intertwined that it is impossible to differentiate between the two.

In contrast to these models, three different causal models suggest that a person's experiences in one life domain may affect a different life domain, (Frone, 2003). The first of the causal models is the *spillover* model. This model proposes that if something positive happens within the work domains it will transfer into the nonwork domain and vice versa. The



*compensation* model posits that the negative consequence of an incident in one domain can be counterbalanced by positive occurrences in another domain. Therefore, if an employee exhibits unhappiness in one of the domains (e.g., work) there will be a decrease in time and energy exerted in that role and an increase in the time and energy dedicated to the other life domain (e.g., family), which alternatively yields compensation for the lack of happiness in the former domain.

Last is the *resource drain* model (Frone, 2003). This model also postulates that the resources an individual uses meeting the demands of one domain are resources that could be expended in another domain. Therefore, reactions to the multiple demands in one domain make it harder to meet the demands in another domain. For further clarification, the resource drain model argues that the use of inadequate resources in one domain limits the availability of those same resources for use in another domain.

### **Work-Family Conflict**

Work family models like the compensation model or the resource drain model lead to the concept of work-family conflict (WFC), which arises when a person attempts to manage several roles that require time, energy, and commitment (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and a conflict develops between the demands in these multiple roles. Greenhaus and Beutell also note that conflicting demands from work and family sectors are reciprocally incompatible. Hence, partaking in either work or family life is further complicated by involvement in the other role (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). A consequence of such conflict between the work and life domains is strain. Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee (1994) affirm that the combination of numerous roles can cause two kinds of strain: overload and interference. According to Higgins et al.,

overload occurs when there are high demands of time and energy that hinder the ability to perform all roles sufficiently or comfortably. In contrast, Greenhaus and Beutell describe interference to exist when various work and family events require involvement at the same time at different locations.

Interference can be further segmented into two mechanisms (Gutek, Searle, & Kelpa, 1991). The first of the two mechanisms is family/nonwork-interference with work, which arises when the responsibilities required to maintain the nonwork role get in the way of performance in a work role. The second mechanism is work interference with family/ nonwork, which develops when work demands hinder the ability to perform various nonwork duties.

### **Frone's Model of Work-Family Interference**

This two-way interference model is a core component of a widely used WLB model proposed by Frone (2003). In Frone's model (*Table 1*), the aforementioned work-interference with family/nonwork is termed (WFC), family/nonwork-interference with work is referred to as family work conflict (FWC). In addition to these forms of conflict, two opposing forces are also incorporated: work-family/nonwork facilitation (WFF) and family/nonwork-work facilitation (FWF). Both forms of facilitation are present when the experiences, skills, and opportunities that develop in one domain have a positive effect on a person's ability to meet demands in another domain.

**Table 1**

**Frone's (2003) Dimensions of Work-Family Balance**

	<b><u>Type of Effect</u></b>	
	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Facilitation</b>
<b><u>Direction of Influence</u></b>		
<b>Work-to-Family</b>	<b>Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC)</b>	<b>Work-to-Family Facilitation (WFF)</b>
<b>Family-to-Work</b>	<b>Family-to-Work Conflict (FWC)</b>	<b>Family-to-Work Facilitation (FWF)</b>

Most of the research on WLB and WFC has focused on forms of interference between work and family domains, limiting our understanding of multiple role involvements to work and family role integrations (Kossek & Lambert, 2005). Early on, Mark (1977) asserted that our involvement in multiple life roles could augment, rather than diminish, resources and energy, and enhance overall well-being. Application of Frone's (2003) complete model makes it possible to explore positive and negative role interactions and the complex concept of WLB.

**Work-Life Balance**

In contrast to interference or conflict between work and nonwork roles, WLB represents a positive management of competing role demands. As a construct, WLB has various definitions and Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) define WLB as the degree to which a person is equally involved and satisfied with his/her work and nonwork roles. Frone (2003) posits that WLB is the absence of conflict and the presence of facilitation within work and nonwork roles. Reece, Davis, and Ploatajko (2009) suggest that WLB refers to the attainment of stability among the demands between work and personal life, as well as the search for daily accomplishment and

satisfaction in all areas of one's life. Lockwood (2003) defines WLB as, "the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities" (Lockwood, 2003, p. 3). Although all of these WLB definitions share some similarities, their differences highlight the difficulty present in capturing the meaning of "balance" as used within WLB research.

Perhaps balance is not even the appropriate conceptualization. Bacigalupe (2001) suggests that balance may not effectively capture the difficulty inherent in achieving positive work-life role integration. As Cunningham (2007) points out, the word "balance" implies reaching a final destination or state. MacDermid, Leslie, and Bissonnette (2001) suggest that we use a phrase such as "staying on course" in place of the balance label. Another alternative, supported by Cunningham (2007) is that work and nonwork are "mutually reinforcing" in line with work by Aryee et al. (2005).

Voydanoff (2005) notes that there is an inconsistency in defining the concept WLB and this generates confusion within the literature. Related to these definitional challenges is the issue of appropriately measuring WLB (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). This discrepancy in whether the most appropriate measurement label is balance, imbalance, or something else provides the impetus for the present study, which is targeted at identifying a general definition of WLB that is applicable across generations, but taking into account one's identity salience.

**A balance-board model of WLB.** Cunningham (2007) posits that balance is an active process requiring continuous adjustment due to shifting work-nonwork demands and boundary conditions. Such conditions are expected to change, depending on one's stage of life. In Cunningham's balance-board model, Frone's (2003) notion of equilibrium is modified to include a shifting fulcrum point on which the forces of interference and enhancement rest.

This setup makes it possible to consider individuals' abilities to successfully maintain multiple roles via different strategies over time. Cunningham's (2007) model is indirectly influenced by the work of Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000), Clark (2000), and Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009). In this model, the four ends of the balance board represent the different work-nonwork interfaces. The work-nonwork interface is divided by interference and enhancement. As stated earlier, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define interference as having work and family/nonwork activities that require time and dedication at the same time but at different locations (*Table 2*). In contrast to interference or conflict, a positive effect, enhancement, can arise. According to Marks (1977) enhancement occurs when an individual has a sufficient supply of energy, flexible skills along with a positive boost in self-esteem and well-being.

**Table 2**

**Explanations of interference and enhancement between work and nonwork domains.**

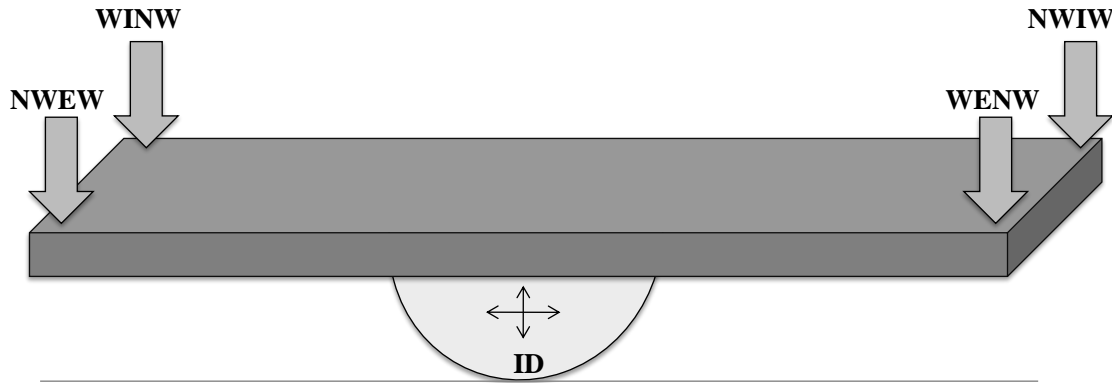
	<b>Work to Nonwork</b>	<b>Nonwork to Work</b>
<b>Interference</b>	<b>Work Interfering with Nonwork: interference occurs between work life and nonwork life outside of the workplace (WINW)</b>	<b>Nonwork Interfering with Work: life outside of work interferes with work life (NWIW)</b>
<b>Enhancement</b>	<b>Work Enhancing Nonwork: work enhances life outside of the workplace (WENW)</b>	<b>Nonwork Enhancing Work: some aspect of nonwork enhances the work domain (NWEW)</b>

In the work to nonwork interface, there is nonwork-enhancing work (NWEW) and nonwork-interference with work (NWIW). NWEW exists when activities (i.e., volunteering, charity events, leisure time with family) create a sense of enhancement for an individual which

can ultimately spillover into the work life leading to enhanced job performance and job attitudes (Fisher, Bulger & Smith, 2009). On the opposite end of the spectrum, a person can experience NWIW. This would be likely to develop if, for example, your child suddenly falls ill and you find you have to immediately leave work, but you also needed to finish a critical project by the end of the workday.

Another form of work to nonwork integration is work-enhancing nonwork (WENW) where organizations provide employees with benefits (i.e., flextime, telecommuting, onsite day care, gym memberships) that make meeting nonwork demands easier, in hopes of relieving some of the existing conflict between work and nonwork. Lastly, having to work 60 hours a week in the office and then an extra 10 when you go home illustrates how work can interfere with nonwork (WINW).

Cunningham's (2007) balance-board model is also meant to be a conceptual aid to understanding different configurations of WLB. Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual model. The top portion frames WLB as it is typically conceived following from Frone's (2003) work, but this model uses interference and enhancement versus Frone's facilitation and conflict forces at equilibrium. "In reality, however, forces come into play that will shift your balance, and the board will hit the floor." (Cunningham, 2007, p. 8) The second element of Cunningham's model is that this balancing board is balancing on top of a person's identity salience. As such, this tipping point or fulcrum can be expected to shift depending on an individual's desire or need to put work or family/nonwork first depending on their current life situation. An important implication of this is that WLB may look very different depending on where a person's balance point happens to be set (Cunningham, 2007).



WINW = work interference with nonwork  
 NWEW = nonwork enhancement of work

NWIW = nonwork interference with work  
 WENW = work enhancement of nonwork

ID = identity salience

**Figure 1**  
**Balance Board Model of WLB**

In Cunningham’s (2007) balance board model, the balance point is influenced by one’s needs, values, and place in life. This shifting fulcrum point is, “built of a person’s current set of values and priorities” (p. 7). These values and priorities shift depending on the salience a person places on work and nonwork roles at a specific point in that person’s life. As an example, Cunningham suggests that a married individual with children or an individual caring for an elderly parent may see a shift in the balance point toward the nonwork side, given the importance of managing nonwork demands versus work demands, whereas a twenty-something career starter may see the balance point shifted toward the work side of the model. These types of factors can be determined by one’s life stage and identity salience. Generally, identity is influenced by various roles a person partakes in but the role that is most prevalent at a particular time is referred to as being salient. The more salient a role-identity is, the more strongly a person will

be to identify with that role (Callero, 1985). For example, a high work-salience individual is likely to define his/her identity more strongly with the work domain, whereas a high family-salience individual is likely to define his/her identity more strongly with the family/nonwork domain.

Identity theorists proclaim that the self consists of a compilation of identities, all of which exist to fill various roles (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Humans manage several roles at once. Each, of these roles reflects the discovery of, "Who am I?" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). The answer to this question likely depends in part on one's life context and the number of competing role demands that a person is juggling at any point in time. By definition, identity salience is the importance and value we attach to the efforts we extend in each role (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Work family balance literature has examined various groups and individuals' perspectives on WLB but little research has investigated this concept across generations. A person's identity salience is essential to the present study, serving as an indicator of an individual's general viewpoint on role centrality and dominance and a correlation with individual values and personal perceptions of WLB.

### **The Present Study**

The purpose of the present study is to test Cunningham's (2007) model of WLB and work/nonwork and to examine whether the concept of WLB differs for members of different generations. The model may have utility for explaining individual and cross-generational differences in perceptions of WLB. At the core of this new model is the concept of identity salience as a representation of an individual's role importance and life stage. This study will address one of the major reasons for inconsistencies in the existing WLB research, as well as



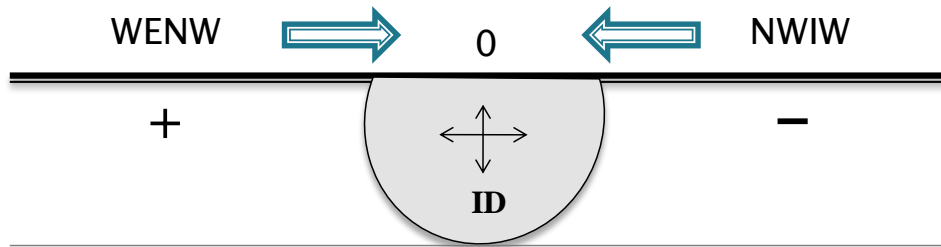
how and why perceptions of WLB differ depending on the life stage of sample participants. By exploring and contrasting WLB perceptions across multi-generational groups in today's workplace, there is the potential to develop a more comprehensive and rich model of WLB.

The presence of WLB perspectives across generations within the work family/nonwork literature may be deficient, but the concept has been around for decades. Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer (2007) propose that WLB became a prevalent issue with the Baby Boomer generation as an essential factor of their contentment with the work sector. However, it is important to note that Baby Boomers were raised during a time where attention was focused on family (Zemke et al., 2000). With that said, the Baby Boomer Generation has recently experienced an increase in family-related responsibilities (Hammer et al., 2005). Many individuals of this generation are finding that they now are or soon will be caring for an older relative (Halpern, 2005). In addition, some members of this generation are also caring for their children and grandchildren (Dilworth & Kingsbury, 2005). Therefore, this generation is in need of organizational support so they can balance their work and family demands (Halpern, 2005; Hammer, et al., 2005).

Given these factors, it is hypothesized that:

*H1(a)*: Baby Boomers are more likely to perceive they have WLB when they feel a greater degree of work enhancing nonwork (WENW; e.g., through the use of flex-time, child care services, telecommuting) than nonwork interfering with work (NWIW; e.g., having to leave work or constant nonwork distractions) (e.g.,

Figure 2 continued).



**Figure 2**

**Hypothesis 1: Work Enhancement versus Nonwork Interference**

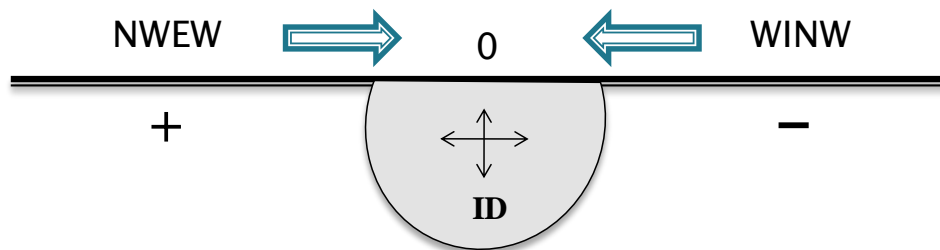
As stated before, a person’s identity salience is important to the present study, because it displays an individual’s perspective on role centrality and dominance. For the Baby Boomers their identity salience has been found to be focused on their work lives. Research by Gursoy, Maier and Chi (2008) found that Baby Boomers ‘live to work’, are loyal to their companies, have a high reverence for authority and moving up the ranks within their organization.

*H1(b)*: It is expected that the Baby Boomer participants will perceive their identity salience to be more work than nonwork based, compared to participants from other generations.

Pitt-Catsoupes et al. (2007) assert that people born to Generation X and Y, who are the young workers of today’s workforce, hold a high expectation of interconnecting and balancing their work and family demands. A study done by Catalyst Inc., found that both men and women from Generation X tend to place more importance on personal life and family than they do work and they also want organizational support to help them manage their work and nonwork demands. Catalyst Inc. also suggested that the goal of this generation is to maintain a happy

family, enjoy life, and to find others to love. Other studies have also supported this idea that Generation X is more concerned with family and personal life than work (Burke, 1994; Conger, 1998; Deal, et al., 200. Families and Work Institute, 2004; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H2 (a)*: Generation X participants are more likely than the other generations to perceive they have WLB when nonwork enhancement of work (NWEW) is more pronounced than work interfering with nonwork (WINW) (Figure 3).



**Figure 3**

**Hypothesis 2: Nonwork Enhancement versus Work Interference**

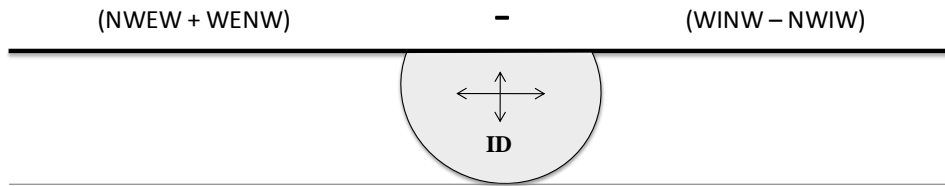
Wiant (1999) found that Generation X members were concerned about achieving both their own goals along with their work goals. He also discovered that this generation was not as loyal to organizations as past generations and were more “me” oriented. Wiant also discovered that persons in this generation tend to desire promotion sooner than other generations and they did not feel very strongly about work being a highly important part of their life. Baby Boomers, Generation Y and Generation X all strive to

find some type of work life balance, but Generation X, has been found to focus most on their families or nonwork (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Thus, it is expected that,

*H2 (b):* Generation X participants will perceive their identity salience to be more nonwork than work based compared to participants from other generations.

The oldest individuals in Generation Y are either just entering or already in the workforce. Due to this positioning, these individuals are expected to demonstrate an eagerness to get started and also to find a balance between both work and life (Cates & Rahimi, 2001; Eisner, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2000), though the meaning of such balance might be very different for members of this generation compared to members of other generations who have more significant formal work and nonwork role obligations. Sturges and Guest (2004) found that Generation Y placed a high priority on maintaining an equal balance between their work and personal lives. Studies that have reached the same conclusion about Generation Y members and WLB include Cates and Rahimi (2001), Eisner (2005), and Howe and Strauss (2000). Therefore, it is expected that those in Generation Y will perceive they have balance when they are able maintain the demands of both work and nonwork. It was, therefore, expected that

*H3(a):* Generation Y participants are more likely than other generations to perceive they have WLB when their perceived level of enhancement from both nonwork and work domains (NWEW + WENW) is more pronounced than their perceived level of interference from both nonwork and work domains (WINW + NWIW) (Figure 4).



**Figure 4**

**Hypothesis 3: Overall Enhancement versus Overall Interference**

Twenge et al. (2010) found Generation Y members to have a similar viewpoint of work as Generation X members did in Wiant’s (1999) study. Specifically, Generation Y members felt that work was not the most imperative aspect of their lives and they valued their nonwork or leisure time more. Twenge also found that this generation has placed a lot of value on achieving work-life balance since they were in high school. People from this generation in Twenge’s study carried the viewpoint of working to make a living, moreso than living to work. It was expected, then, that:

*H3(b):* Generation Y participants perceive their identity salience to be more focused on an even balancing of both work and nonwork domains, rather than a strong preference toward work or nonwork domains.

In addition to the preceding hypotheses, an exploratory research question was also considered, regarding whether there are generational differences in personal meanings of WLB. It is very common to use only quantitative data to test participants’ identity salience, work/nonwork-facilitation, and enhancement. Given the objectives in the present study, however, a qualitative component was included, to make it possible to study the meaning of WLB as determined by the participants themselves. Specifically,

*Research Question:* Will responses to an open-ended question about the meaning of WLB show that balance means something different across the three target generations?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

This study surveyed undergraduate and graduate students at a medium-sized university and a community college in southern United States, as well as other adults from a variety of locations throughout the country. As previously stated, the target generations for this study were Generation Y, Generation X, and Baby Boomers. To facilitate the identification of participants representative of all three generational groups, the Generation Y participants (primarily undergraduate college students) were asked to supply contact details for two individuals representing the Generation X and Baby Boomer groups. Therefore, students who were members of Generation Y (for this study including people between the ages of 18-29) were asked to identify a member of Generation X and the Baby Boomer generation to also respond to the survey. The same rule applied for initial participants of either of the other two generations. For clarification, Generation X includes the ages 30-45 and Baby Boomers the ages 46- 64. Thus, a targeted snowballing sampling strategy was employed in identifying participants for this study. The snowball sampling method increases efficiency of identifying hard to reach populations by having members of the target population recruit other participants (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981; Erickson 1979).

## Demographics

Two waves of data were collected. Combined, there were 516 participants in the study, 226 from the first wave and 290 from wave two. Due to missing data (excessive amounts for some participants) and incompleteness of the survey, only 439 participants' data were included in the analyses. Initially, 671 individuals were contacted, 325 for the first wave and 346 for the second wave. The response rate for the first wave was 70% and for the second wave it was 84%. Of these respondents, 201 were categorized as members of Generation Y, 98 Generation X, 126 Baby Boomers, and 14 other (who either did not report their age or belonged to some other generation). There were 115 male and 322 female participants.

In terms of marital status, 48% were single, 35% married, 5% living as married, 11% divorced, and 1% widowed. Less than 1% had only some high school education, 21% had completed high school or received their GED, 52% had some college or Associates degree, 15% already had a Bachelors of Arts or Science degree, 8% had a Masters of Arts or Science degree, and 2% had a doctoral degree of some sort (MD, Ph. D., etc.). Most participants reported having no children (51%), followed by one child (19%), two children (12%), and three children (8%). Demographic information for each generation is presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Generation Y**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1 <b>Sex</b>	1.77	0.42					
2 <b>Age</b>	21.01	2.8	-0.24 **				
3 <b>Marital Status</b>	1.16	0.54	0.23 **				
4 <b>Education</b>	2.86	0.77	0.58 **	0.11			
5 <b>Dependents</b>	0.35	1.19	0.05	0.11	-0.03		
6 <b>Hours worked/week</b>	22.24	12.36	-0.43 **	0.12	0.35	0.11	0.11

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ;  $N = 201$ .

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Generation X**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1 <b>Sex</b>	1.76	0.432					
2 <b>Age</b>	39.58	4.67	0.076				
3 <b>Marital Status</b>	2.23	0.92	0.12	0.23 **			
4 <b>Education</b>	3.24	0.9	-0.056	0.58 **	0.11		
5 <b>Dependents</b>	1.84	1.51	0.16	0.05	0.11	-0.03	
6 <b>Hours worked/week</b>	37.45	13.06	-0.3 **	-0.43 **	0.12	0.35	0.11

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ;  $N = 98$ .

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Baby Boomers**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1 <b>Sex</b>	1.66	0.474					
2 <b>Age</b>	52.67	4.8	-0.136				
3 <b>Marital Status</b>	2.48	1.05	0.171	0.01			
4 <b>Education</b>	3.6	1.04	-0.133	0.1	-0.02		
5 <b>Dependents</b>	2.04	2.85	-0.217 *	-0.14	-0.09	-0.03	
6 <b>Hours worked/week</b>	38.6	18.31	-0.101	-0.07	0.06	0.16	0.02

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ;  $N=126$ .

## Procedure

Participants were asked to respond to an internet-based survey managed through the Psychology department's secure SurveyMonkey account. Initial participants were recruited through psychology courses at a southern public university, continuing adult education courses at a separate southern community college, and a Facebook group. Initial volunteers, who were either employed or a full time student, were asked to provide their email address and an email with a link to the survey was sent to all willing participants. At the end of the survey these same initial participants were asked to provide the first name and email address of two members of two different generations from themselves (as described above). This modified snowballing approach was taken to maintain a proper record of all participants contacted. Follow-up



reminder emails were sent to participants both the original set and those recommended if records indicated they had not yet responded or responded partially.

There were two versions of the survey: one for students and the participants recruited through the students' contacts, and a one for those who were recruited from the community college and Facebook group. Participants from the community college were recruited through the continuing education adult services department. An email with a direct link to the survey was sent out to students in this department asking for volunteers. The Facebook page was created to contact individuals from a given network who qualified for this study. On the group page that only, those who qualified had access to, a short description of the study was given and the link to the survey was included for those willing to participate.

## **Measures**

The full survey containing the following measures is presented in the Appendix.

**Demographics.** To fully describe the sample and understand limits on generalizability of results, the following demographic information was gathered for each participant: (a) sex, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) education, (e) dependents, and (f) hours worked.

**Work-life balance.** A six-item WLB scale by Carlson, Grzywacz, and Zivnuska (2009) was used. These items corresponded to Grzywacz and Carlson's (2007) definition of work-family balance. Hence, each item contained a reference to the expectations or negotiation of roles (e.g., "I do a good job of meeting the role expectations of critical people in my work and family life."). The scale was slightly modified for the present study by changing the response scale to a seven-point from a five-point Likert scale. In addition, the wording of the items was adjusted slightly to include "nonwork life" in place of the less inclusive "family life" language in

the original items. This change in wording helped to ensure consistent relevance to all three samples and consistency with the focus of the other measures used in this study. The Cronbach alpha initially found by Carlson et al. for the original scale was .93. The Cronbach alpha in the present study was also .93.

**Work/nonwork interference and enhancement.** A 17-item scale by Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009) was used to assess how frequently participants have experienced certain feelings about their work and nonwork roles during the last three months. An example of one of those items was “Because of my job, I am in a better mood at home” and “I come home from work too tired to do things I would like to do”). Ratings were made on a five-point scale: 1 (not at all), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), and 5 (almost all of the time). In previous research, the Cronbach’s alphas were .91 for work interference with personal life, .82 for personal life interference with work, .70 for work enhancement of personal life, and .81 for personal life enhancement of work. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha were .91 for work interference with personal life, .89 for personal life interference with work, .77 for work enhancement of personal life, and .84 for personal life enhancement of work. An exploratory factor analysis with oblimin rotation was run on these items to check the initial factor structure reported by Fisher et al. Results confirmed the four-dimensional structure of this measure, and scoring proceeded as recommended by Fisher et al. Full results of this EFA are available from the author.

**Identity salience.** Participants’ identity salience was measured by a 10-item scale developed by Cunningham (2005). A seven-point Likert scale was used to rate work-salience and nonwork-salience. An example work-salience item is, “I feel most like myself when I am working” and an example nonwork salience item is, “Most of the satisfaction I experience in life

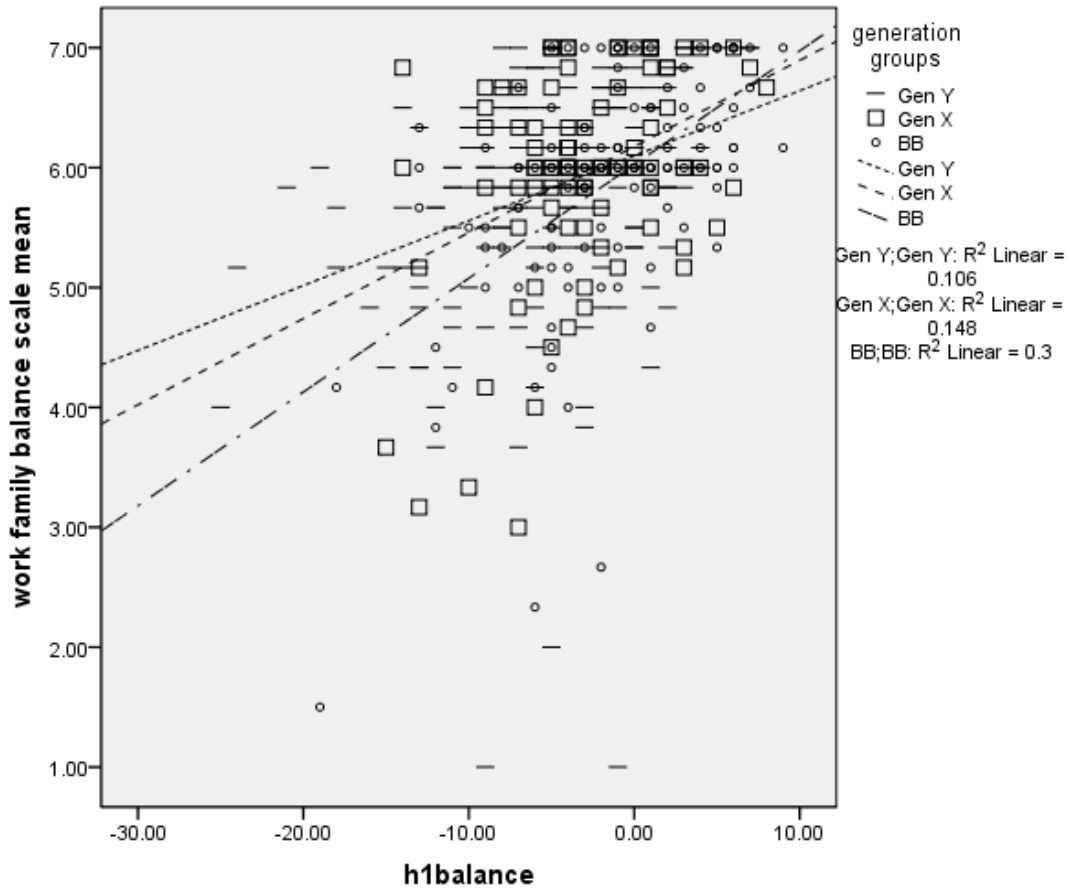
is due to experiences and accomplishments outside of work”. In previous research with this scale, Cronbach’s alphas have been .86 for work-salience and .82 for nonwork salience. In the present study Cronbach’s alphas were .82 for work salience and .83 for nonwork salience.

## **Results**

Each hypothesis was operationalized in terms of a series of balance difference scores constructed from participants’ scores on the Fisher et al. (2009) dimensions. As already mentioned, this scale measured work/nonwork-interference and -enhancement. The balance difference scores represented whether an individual placed more emphasis on one role domain (work or nonwork) versus the other (nonwork or work). By subtracting one of the Fisher et al. subscale scores (i.e., WENW) from another (i.e., NWIW) we were able to generate a difference score that indicated each person’s degree of work-nonwork balance in terms of the hypothesized work-nonwork dimensions. To provide construct validity support for these difference score operationalizations, all balance difference scores were then correlated with participants’ general WLB scores from the Carlson et al. (2009) work life balance scale.

Balance difference score A was computed for Hypothesis 1a which states Baby Boomers are more likely to perceive they have WLB when they feel a greater degree of work enhancing nonwork than nonwork interfering with work. This score is the result of subtracting perceived NWIW from WENW, such that a higher score would reflect a higher degree of WENW relative to NWIW. This balance difference score was correlated with participants’ scores on the WLB scale. Results showed significant positive correlations between these two variables within each generation, suggesting that higher levels of WLB were associated with higher levels of WENW versus NWIW. Most relevant to this hypothesis, this relationship was stronger for Baby Boomers

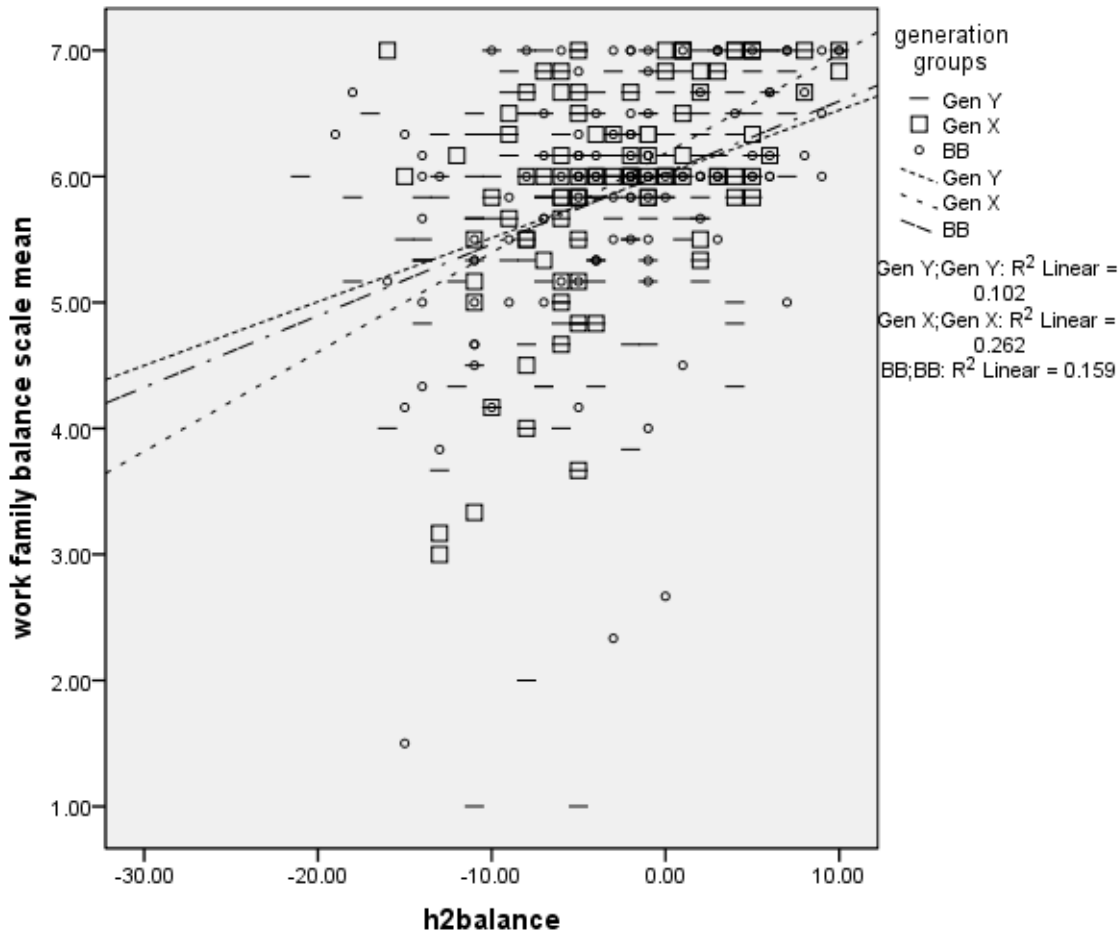
( $r = .54$ ) than for Generation Y ( $r = .38$ ) or Generation X ( $r = .32$ ) members. These correlations were further tested with a Fisher's  $r$ -to- $z$  test, which showed that the correlation for Baby Boomers was significantly greater than the correlation for Generation Y ( $z = 1.83$ , one-tailed  $p < .05$ ) and Generation X ( $z = 2.03$ , one-tailed  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was supported (e.g., Figure 5 continued).



**Figure 5 Scatterplot of WLB and Balance Difference Score A**

Balance difference score B was computed for Hypothesis 2a which stated Generation X participants are more likely than the other generations to perceive they have WLB when

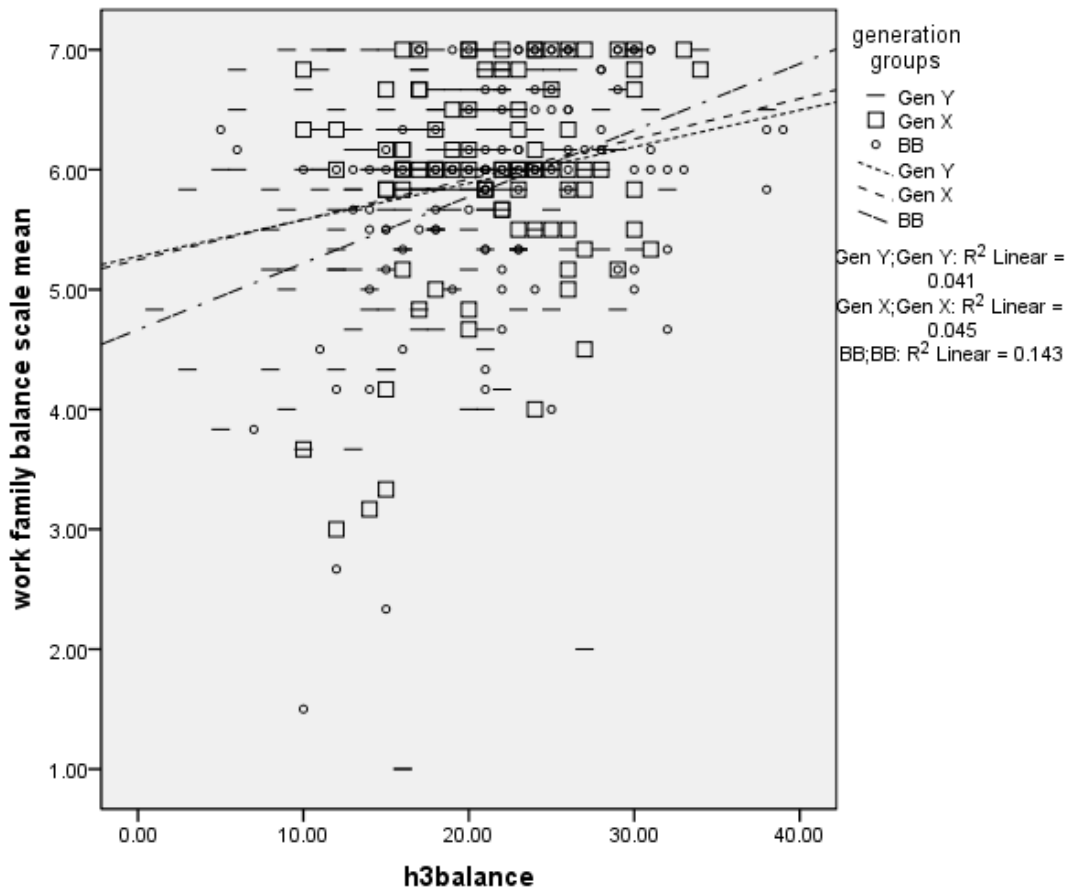
nonwork enhancement of work (NWEW) is more pronounced than work interfering with nonwork (WINW). To test this hypothesis, balance difference score B was computed by subtracting perceived work-nonwork interference from nonwork-work-enhancement, such that a higher score would reflect a higher degree of nonwork-work-enhancement relative to WINW. This balance difference score was correlated with participants' scores on the WLB scale. Results showed significant positive correlations between these two variables within each generation, suggesting that higher levels of WLB were associated with higher levels of nonwork-work-enhancement versus WINW. Most relevant to this hypothesis, this relationship was stronger for Generation X ( $r = .51$ ) than for Baby Boomers ( $r = .39$ ) or Generation Y ( $r = .32$ ) members. These correlations were further tested with a Fisher's r-to-z test, (*Figure 6*) which showed that the correlation for Generation X was significantly greater than the correlation for Generation Y ( $z = 1.87$ , one-tailed  $p < .05$ ), but not significantly different than the correlation observed for Baby Boomers. Thus Hypothesis 2a, was partially supported.



**Figure 6 Scatterplot of WLB and Balance Difference Score B**

Balance difference score C was computed for Hypothesis3a which posited that Generation Y participants are more likely than other generations to perceive they have WLB when their perceived level of enhancement from both nonwork and work domains (NWEW + WENW) is more pronounced than their perceived level of interference from both nonwork and work domains (WINW + NWIW). Hypothesis 3, was correlated with participant's scores on the WLB scale. To test this hypothesis, balance difference score C was computed by subtracting the sum of a person's NWIW and WINW scales scores from the sum of that person's nonwork-

work-enhancement and WENW scale scores. A higher score on this variable would reflect a higher degree of general enhancement versus general interference. Results showed significant positive correlations between these two variables within each generation, suggesting that higher levels of WLB were associated with higher levels of general enhancement than general interference. This hypothesis was not supported, however, because the correlation was not stronger for Generation Y ( $r = .20$ ) than for Generation X ( $r = .21$ ) or Baby Boomers ( $r = .37$ ) members (e.g., Figure 7 continued).



**Figure 7 Scatterplot of WLB and Balance Difference Score C**

In addition to comparing correlation coefficients, there was also a comparison of slopes to see if the slopes predicting the balance difference score A from the WLB score are different in one generation from another (Table 6). In a comparison of slopes correlation coefficients are converted to z-scores. The greater a correlation coefficient is the higher or steeper the slope will be. The comparison of slopes confirms the findings from the correlation coefficients. The comparisons of slopes indicate that the slope is steepest for Baby Boomers on the balance difference score C than it was for Generation X or Generation Y. Therefore, the comparison of slopes suggests that Baby Boomers reached perceived WLB along with higher levels of WENW at a greater rate than Generation X or Generation Y. It is important to highlight that this finding favors Hypothesis 1a, though this comparison of slopes had the least statistical support compared to the other models.

**Table 6**  
**Comparison of slopes H1**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Intercept</b>	<b>Slope</b>	<b>SE<sub>slope</sub></b>	<b>SD<sub>X</sub></b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
GenY	6.10	.05	.01	.30	201
GenX	6.18	.07	.02	.33	98
BB	6.03	.10	.01	.51	126

The comparison of slopes for the balance difference score B from the WLB score confirm the findings from the correlation coefficients. The slopes for the three generations slightly differ but Generation X is significantly different from the other generations (Table 7). The comparisons of slopes indicate that the slope is highest for Generation X on the balance difference score B than it was for Generation X or Generation Y. Therefore, the comparison of slopes implies that Generation X had a steeper slope, which implies a more prominent



relationship between the two measures of balance, such that a greater increase in WLB is associated with a more extreme difference between the two work-nonwork scale scores.

**Table 7**  
**Comparison of slopes H2**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Intercept</b>	<b>Slope</b>	<b>SE<sub>slope</sub></b>	<b>SD<sub>x</sub></b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
GenY	6.02	.05	.01	.30	201
GenX	6.18	.08	.01	.44	98
BB	6.03	.06	.01	.37	126

To test Hypothesis 1b, 2b, and 3b a series of paired samples *t* tests were conducted to evaluate the impact of identity salience on perceived WLB within each of the generational subgroups. The results indicate that nonwork identity salience ( $M=27.43$ ,  $SD=4.82$ ) was significantly greater for Generation Y participants than work identity salience ( $M=17.01$ ,  $SD=5.99$ ). For Generation X, nonwork identity salience ( $M=26.66$ ,  $SD=6.25$ ) was also significantly greater than work identity salience ( $M=17.77$ ,  $SD=6.54$ ). Following suit, Baby Boomers also reported a greater degree of nonwork identity salience ( $M=25.16$ ,  $SD=5.72$ ) than work identity salience ( $M=18.37$ ,  $SD=6.51$ ).

To address the exploratory research question, a preliminary qualitative analysis was conducted on participants' open-ended responses to the question, "How would you describe a situation in which you would actually feel that your work and other life roles are actually balanced?" To analyze this data, thematic and content coding techniques

were used. As this was not a core research hypotheses, the results from this analysis are discussed in the next section.

## **Discussion**

The present study tested a new model of work life (nonwork) balance (WLB) that may provide a deeper look into individual and cross-generational differences in the perceptions of WLB. Also tested was the impact of identity salience on perceived WLB. A goal of this study was to address one of the major reasons for inconsistencies in the previous WLB literature by shining some light on how and why a person's life stage and values influence perceived WLB across generations.

Hypothesis 1a was supported, in that the relationship between positive balance difference score A and WLB was strongest and most positive for Baby Boomers than participants from the other generations. Both the Fisher's *r*-to-*z* test and comparison of slopes provided support for Hypothesis 1a. In both of these test Baby Boomers were found to be significantly greater than Generation Y and Generation X. This implies that WLB for Baby Boomers is more strongly associated with high levels of WENW versus NWIW.

Hypothesis 2a was partially supported. The correlation coefficient for Generation X was found to have a stronger relationship than Baby Boomers or Generation Y did for balance difference score B with WLB. However, when the Fisher's *r*-to-*z* test was computed the results showed that for a one-tailed test in the hypothesized direction, this correlation was significantly greater for Generation X than Generation Y, but not Baby Boomers. This implies that WLB for Generation X is more strongly associated with high levels of NWEW versus WINW.

Although findings for Hypothesis 3a were not statistically significant, findings suggested that each generation had higher levels of general enhancement versus interference. This hypothesis was not supported since the correlation was stronger for Generation X members than Generation Y or Baby Boomers. This implies that WLB for Generation Y was not more strongly associated with overall enhancement versus overall interference. Alternatively, findings suggest that Generation X was more strongly associated with overall enhancement versus overall interference.

Hypothesis 1b and 3b were not supported. Baby Boomers had more of a nonwork dominant identity salience versus our hypothesis, in which it was predicted that Baby Boomers would be more work dominant. This suggests that generally Baby Boomers feel more defined by their nonwork involvements than their work involvements. Generation Y was hypothesized perceive identity salience to be more focused on an even balancing of both work and nonwork domains, rather than a strong preference toward work or nonwork domains. This hypothesis was not supported. There was a strong influence of the nonwork role involvements on identity than work role involvements. Hypothesis 2b was supported indicating that Generation X does place more importance on their nonwork lives than their work lives. These results indicate that although all three groups associate their identities more strongly with nonwork than work domains of life, Generation Y members are significantly more defined by their nonwork role involvements than Baby Boomers.

Finding for Hypothesis 1a indicate that Baby Boomers perceive their lives to be balanced when there is greater facilitation from their work life to their nonwork life. In other words, their work life enhances their nonwork life more than their nonwork interferes with their work. This

finding confirms recent literature, which discussed how Baby Boomers have to take on new responsibilities such as caring for older relatives and grandchildren (Halpern, 2005, Dilworth et al., 2005). The results of Hypothesis 1 supports this theory that there may be new responsibilities this generation has to take on and they feel that their work should be enhancing and providing resources so they can maintain their work and nonwork lives.

The difference between Generation Y with Generation X and Baby Boomers could be a result of Generation Y not having the same familial and work demands as Generation X and Baby Boomers. In addition, many of the participants for Generation Y were college students therefore, their work and nonwork lives could be different from the participants who they recruited who are not in this stage of life. Therefore, there was support for Generation X placing more value on their nonwork lives more so than their work lives but they share this value with Baby Boomers more so than with Generation Y.

Hypothesis 3a was not supported but findings imply Generation X experiences and perceives more general enhancement in their lives versus interference than Generation y or Baby Boomers. This could mean that they feel their jobs and work enhances their nonwork lives. Benefits of flexible schedules, telecommuting, onsite daycares, and working in fields that are truly one's passion are possibly some of the tools provided in their work lives that lead them to feel a greater sense of enhancement. Generation X also has greater nonwork to work enhancement, suggesting their families or nonwork lives support their work lives.

As for Generation Y, it is possible that because many of these individuals are in college they are not at a place in life where they feel there is high general enhancement amongst all of their roles. The demands of being in higher education tend to call for work that is never ceasing

through papers, studying, keeping up with reading assignments, and group projects where meeting times may be late at night due to compensating for various different schedules. For those having to attend classes, work and attend to their families, time may be limited. This finding may be due to individuals in Generation Y being at different stages in life than Baby Boomers and Generation X. Members of Generation X and Baby Boomers have more tenure in their jobs and careers and may have greater demands on them with taking care of children, grandchildren and or elderly parents (Halpern, 2005, Dilworth & Kingsbury, 2005). Even though some participants from Generation Y may have similar demands as Generation X and Baby Boomers, in this study the consensus indicates that their demands are different.

Baby Boomers had more of a nonwork dominant identity salience versus our hypothesis where we predicted them to be more work dominant. This suggests that generally Baby Boomers feel more defined by their nonwork involvements than their work involvements. Generation Y was hypothesized to perceive balance when they are able to manage and maintain both work and nonwork demands. This hypothesis was not supported. There was a strong influence of the nonwork role involvements on identity than work role involvements. Hypothesis 2b was supported indicating that Generation X does place more importance on their nonwork lives than their work lives. These results indicate that although all three groups associate their identities more strongly with nonwork than work domains of life, Generation Y members are significantly more defined by their nonwork role involvements than Baby Boomers.

With regard to the exploratory research question, responses to the open-ended question indicated a number of recurring themes of importance to the participants as a whole and by generation. Preliminary qualitative analyses included analyzing responses to this question

separately within each generational subgroup. Comment themes were identified within each set of responses and these themes were then grouped into categories based on content similarity. The dominant categories or types of responses included spiritual life, family, work, difficulty, and facilitation. For spiritual life, Baby Boomers had a greater average of spiritual terms listed. It is possible Baby Boomers see their spiritual life as being a large part of their WLB because they have been through more experiences than individuals from the other two generations. Generation X had the second highest score in this category indicating their experiences in life exceed those of Generation Y, which in turn supports their value for spiritual life.

The second theme, family, also was greatest among Baby Boomers. Once again, this generation has lived longer, indicating more responsibilities when it comes to family. These individuals may find family to be a great factor in their work life balance because they could potentially be grandparents, caregivers, still supporting children, or other family members. This supports the findings from earlier that Baby Boomers need their work life to enhance or facilitate their nonwork life to benefit their various responsibilities. Generation X's average of responses on this theme was almost the equivalent of Baby Boomers. Generation X had a significantly lower average response to the category family, indicating that value of family may be respective of a support system than caring for offspring. This illustrates the different life stages the generations as a whole are at and how the value placed on family could be indicative of various life responsibilities or relationships to family.

The category of work included themes such as organizing, prioritizing, meeting goals, and more. There were interesting findings in this third category. Baby Boomers had a slightly higher total of work qualities listed as being a part of their work life balance; however,

Generation Y was right behind them. This finding supports the previous findings and suggests that Baby Boomers place higher importance of their work life due to their position in life and as a result of the current economy. They may be nearing retirement or considering it but still find work to be of great importance. Generation Y, may have the second highest average in this category because they are soon entering the workforce or starting their careers. In addition, majority of the participants in this study for Generation Y were college students so they would be more likely to be focused on education to enhance their careers and future work lives.

The category representing the range of difficulties, incorporated terms of imbalance, impossible, exceeds, cannot, hard, interference, conflict, and stress. Generation Y's average far exceeded that of Baby Boomers or Generation X. This suggests that Generation Y experiences more difficulty in reaching a place where they feel their life is balanced. This lack of balance could be a result of college life or a lack in the demands Generation X and Baby Boomers have. Generation Y is still trying to define their work lives and therefore are in a different stage in life where they find it difficult to maintain the various demands and roles that they may have.

The last category, facilitation, had similar findings across all three generation groups. Generation Y had the highest average while Generation X was one response below and Baby Boomers two below Generation X's. This finding suggests that there are small differences among generations when it comes to valuing facilitation, enhancement, equality and evenness of work nonwork roles. This supports the findings in hypotheses 3b, where all three groups indicated more importance of nonwork identity than work identity.

## **Limitations**

There were a few limitations within this study that must be noted. Of the three samples in this study, there was a greater representation for Generation Y than for Baby Boomers or Generation X. This is a result of access to participants from this generation and heavy recruiting in the first wave of data collection, which started with undergraduate students. In addition, the present Generation Y participants may share similar values being that there is a common goal to go to college to receive training, education and the fulfill requirements needed to pursue a career. Therefore, these participants may by default be more biased to being more work focused than other Generation Y individuals who are not pursuing higher education. Of course their identity salience would reflect whether this is true or not, but this is an important area for further study.

Another limitation of the present study is linked with the use of surveys. The electronic surveys in this study were completed by participants in their own environments on their own time. This is convenient for participants but limiting when it comes to data interpretation. There is no true way to capture participant's level of honesty. In addition, there is the possibility of participants responding in a way they feel they should or a way that makes their answers more appealing to the researcher. Some advantages of using surveys to collect data are the low cost of time and money, the ability to reach a wide range of individuals from various geographic areas, anonymity, and standardization of questions (Gillham, 2000). However, limitations include concern with data quality, there is no opportunity for follow-up questions for clarification, and the wording of questions could impact participant's responses.



## **Practical Implications and Future Research**

The inconsistent definition of work life balance may benefit from a change in the way we view the concept. Findings in this study suggest that there may be a need to define work life balance by generations instead of creating one general definition. In this study, similarities of valuing nonwork were found; however, we did discover that there are prominent differences across the generations. Future research should consider generational differences in perception of work life balance. This is also true for organizations. Organizations may profit from addressing work life balance differently for the different generations. Future research should also incorporate longitudinal research. It would be interesting to see if and how each generation's perspective of work life balance changes as they reach new stages in their life.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to test Cunningham's (2007) model of WLB and work/nonwork and to observe whether the concept of WLB varies for members of different generations. The model was supported and findings suggest that individual perceptions of work life balance are contingent on their identity salience and values at that moment. Depending on the demands, one has and where they fall in terms of enhancement versus interference, their position on the balance board in Cunningham's model will adjust. This model did have utility for explaining individual and cross-generational differences in perceptions of WLB. The exploration and contrasting of WLB perceptions across the three generational groups in this study helped support a more comprehensive and rich model of WLB. In general, Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers all valued nonwork over work. However, there were significant differences between the three groups and their perceptions of WLB. Overall, this is a

growing area of concern and would benefit from more research. Cross-generational differences in WLB exists and organizations may find value in understanding these differences and considering generational definitions of WLB when dealing with their employees and assessing their benefit packages.

## References

- Aryee, S., Srinivas, E. S. & Tan, H. H. (2005). Rhythms of life: Antecedents and outcomes of work-family balance in employed parents. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(1), 132-146.
- Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(3), 472-491.
- Bacigalupe, G. (2001). Is balancing family and work a sustainable metaphor? *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 13*, 5-20.
- Beutell, N. J. & Wittig-Berman, U. (2008). Work-family conflict and work-family synergy for generation x, baby boomers, and matures. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 23*(5), 507-523.
- Biernacki, P. & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods Research, 10*, 141-163.
- Burke, P. J. & Reitzes, D. C. (1981). The link between identity and role performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 44*, 83-92.
- Burke, R. J. (1994). Generation X: Measures, sex and age differences. *Psychological Reports, 74*(2), 555-562.
- Callero, P. L. (1985). Role-identity salience. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 48*, 203-215.
- Catalyst Inc. (2001). *The Next Generation: Today's Professionals, Tomorrow's Leaders*. Web site: URL <http://www.catalystwomen.org>.
- Cates, K. & Rahimi, K. (2001, November 19). "Survey- mastering people management." *Financial Times*.
- Conger, J. (1998). "How 'Gen X' Managers Manage." *Strategy and Business, 10*, 21-31.
- Cunningham, C. (2005). New applicant decision making: understanding the influence of salary, family-friendly and life-friendly policies, and culture as influential organizational attributes. Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2005.
- Cunningham, C. (2007). Attempting to understand work-family/nonwork balance: A "balance-board" conceptual model. Unpublished manuscript.

- Cusmir, L. H. & Parker, B. (1990). A generational and sex-based view of managerial work values. *Psychological Reports* 66, 947-951.
- Deal, J., Peterson, K. & Gailor-Loflin, H. (2001). *Emerging leaders: An annotated bibliography*. Greensboro, North Carolina
- DeBell, C. (2006). What all applied psychologists should know about work. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37, 325–333.
- De Kort, L. (2004), “Generations at work”, available at: [www.aimnt.com.au/ntatwork/generations\\_at\\_work.pdf](http://www.aimnt.com.au/ntatwork/generations_at_work.pdf) (accessed September 7, 2007).
- Dilworth, J.E. & Kingsbury, N. (2005). Home-to-job spillover for Generation X, Boomers, and Matures: A comparison. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 26(2), 267-281.
- Dries, N., Kerpel, E. D. & Pepermans, R. (2008). Exploring four generations’ beliefs about career. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23, 907-928.
- Eisner, S.P. (2005). Managing Generation Y. *Advanced Management Journal*, 70(4), 4-15.
- Erickson, B. (1979). Some problems of inference from chain data. *Sociological Methodology Research*, 10, 276–302.
- Families and Work Institute. (2004). *Generation & gender in the workplace*. Watertown, MA: American Business Collaboration.
- Fisher, G. G., Bulger, C. A. & Smith, C. S. (2009). Beyond work and family: a measure of work/nonwork interference and enhancement. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 14, 4410456.
- Forsyth, D. R. (1980). A taxonomy of ethical ideologies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 175-184.
- Frone, M. R. (2003). Work-family balance. In J. C. Quick & L. E. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational health psychology* (pp. 143-162). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Gillham, B. (2000). *Developing a Questionnaire*. New York: Continuum.
- Greenhaus, J. & Beutell, N. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 10, 76-88.

- Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., & Shaw, J. D. (2003). The relation between work–family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *63*, 510–531.
- Greenhaus, J. H. & Parasuraman, S. (1999). Research on work, family, and gender: Current status and future directions. In G. N. Powell (Ed.), *Handbook of gender and work* (pp. 391–412). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Guerts, S. A. E. & Demerouti, E. (2003). Work/non-work interface: A review of theories and findings. In M. J. Schabracq, J. A. M. Winnubst, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Handbook of work and health psychology* (pp. 279–312). New York: Wiley.
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T. A. & Chi. C. (2008). Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *27*, 448-458.
- Gutek, B., Searle, S., & Kelpa, L. (1991). Rational versus gender role explanations for work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *76*, 560-568.
- Halpern, D. F. (2005). Psychology at the Intersection of work and family: Recommendations for employers, working families, and policymakers. *American Psychologist*, *60*(5), 397-409.
- Hammer, L.B., Neal, M.B., Newsom, J.T., Brockwood, K.J., & Colton, C.L. (2005). A longitudinal study of the effects of dual-earner couples' utilization of family-friendly workplace supports on work and family outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *90* (4), 799-810.
- Hansen, G. L. (1991). Balancing work and family: a literature and resource review. *Family Relations*, *40*, 348-353.
- Higgins, C., Duxbury, L. & Lee, C. (1994). Impact of life-cycle stage and gender on the ability to balance work and family responsibilities. *Family Relations*, *43*, 144-150.
- Huitt, W. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. Retrieved [September 5, 2010] from, <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/regsys/maslow.html>
- Kendall, C., Kerr, L. R., F. S. Gondim, R. C., Werneck, G. L., Macena, Raimunda, H. M. M., . . . McFarland, W. (2008). An empirical comparison of respondent-driven sampling location sampling, and snowball sampling for behavioral surveillance in men who have sex with men, Fortaleza, Brazil. *AIDS Behavioral*, *12*, 97-104.
- Kossek, E. E. & Lambert, S. J. (2005). *Work and life integration: Organizational, cultural, and individual perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum

- Kupperschmidt, B. (2000), "Multi-generation employees: strategies for effective management". *Health Care Manager 19*, 65–76.
- Lankard, B.A. (1995), *Career Development in Generation X: Myths and Realities*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH.
- Lockwood, N. R. (2003). Work/ life balance challenges and solutions. *Research Quarterly*.
- MacDermid, S. M., Leslie, L. A., & Bissonnette, L. (2001). Walking the walk: Insights from research on helping clients navigate work and family. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 13*, 21–40.
- Marks, S. R. (1977). Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time and commitment. *American Sociological Review, 42*, 921– 936.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*, 370-396.
- Morf, M. (1989). *The work life dichotomy: prospects for reintegrating people and jobs*. New York: Quorum.
- Pitt-Catsoupes, M. & Smyer, M. A.(2007). The 21st century multi-generational workplace, Issue Brief 9 (Chestnut Hill, MA: The Center on Aging and Work/Workplace Flexibility, Boston College,), 4–5.
- Reece, K. T., Davis, J. A., & Polatajka, H. J. (2009). The representations of work-life balance in Canadian newspapers. *Work, 32*, 431-442.
- Richardson, M. S. (1993). Work in people's lives: A location for counseling psychologists. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 40*, 425–433.
- Richardson, M. S. (2002). A metaperspective for counseling practice: A response to the challenge of contextualism. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 61*, 407–423.
- Reiter, N. (2007). Work life balance: what do you mean? The ethical ideology underpinning appropriate application. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 43*, 273-294.
- Schultheiss, D. E. P., Blustein, D. L., & Flum, H. (2003). *Relational discourse in the social construction of career and working*. In R. Young & A. Collins (Chairs), Social constructionism and career theory, research, and practice. Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.
- Schultheiss, D. E. P. (2006). The interface of work and family life. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 37*, 334-341.

- Smola, K.W. and Sutton, C.D. (2002), "Generational differences: revisiting generational work values for the new millennium", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 23, SP1, pp. 363-82.
- Strauss, W. & Howe, N. (1991). *Generations: The history of America's future, 1584 to 2069*. New York: William Morrow.
- Stryker, S. (1968). Identity salience and role performance: The importance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30, 558-564.
- Stryker, S. & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present and future of identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63, 284-297.
- Stryker, S. & Serpe, (1982). Commitment, identity salience and role behavior: Theory and research example. In W. Ickes & E. S. Knowles (Eds.) *Personality, Roles, and Social Behavior*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Sturges, J. & Guest, D. (2004). Working to live or living to work? Work/ life balance early in the career. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 14,(4), 5-20.
- Swift, L. (2002). Work-life balance important in relief world, too. *Reuters AlertNet*. Retrieved July 6, 2010 from <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefsources>
- Teachman, J. D., Tedrow, L. M., & Crowder, K. D.(2000). The changing demography of america's families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*.62(4), 1234-1246.
- Twenge, J. M. (2010). A review of the Empirical Evidence on generational differences in work attitudes. *Journal of Business Psychology* 25, 201-210.
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S. M., Hoffman, B. J., & Lance, C. E. (2010). Generational differences in work values: Leisure and extrinsic values increasing, social and intrinsic values decreasing.*Journal of Management*, 36(5), 1117-1142.
- Voydanoff, P. (2005). Towards a conceptualization of perceived work-family fit and balance: A demands and resources approach. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 822-836.
- Wiant CJ. 1999. Are you listening to your employees? *Journal of Environmental Health* 62: 51-52.
- Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filipczak, B. (2000). *Generations at work: Managing the clash of veterans, boomers, xers and nexters in your workplace*. New York: American Management Association.

## APPENDIX

### **Work-Family Balance Measure** *Carlson, Grywaz, & Zivnuska 2009*

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements using the seven-point, Likert-type scale, 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (somewhat disagree), 4 (neither agree nor disagree), 5 (somewhat agree), 6 (agree), 7 (strongly agree).

1. I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my nonwork life.
2. I do a good job of meeting the role expectations of critical people in my work and nonwork life.
3. People who are close to me would say that I do a good job of balancing work and nonwork demands.
4. I am able to accomplish the expectations that my supervisors, my family and nonwork friends have for me.
5. My coworkers, members of my family, and my nonwork friends would say that I am meeting their expectations.
6. It is clear to me, based on feedback from co-workers, family members and nonwork friends, that I am accomplishing both my work and nonwork responsibilities.

### **Work/Nonwork Scale** *Fisher, Bulger, & Smith, 2009*

Please rate the frequency with which you have experienced certain feelings about your work and nonwork roles during the last three months. Use the following 5-point rating scale: 1 (not at all), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), and 5 (almost all of the time).



1. I come home from work too tired to do things I would like to do.
2. My job makes it difficult to maintain the kind of personal life I would like.
3. I often neglect my personal needs because of the demands of my work. .
4. My personal life suffers because of my work.
5. I have to miss out on important personal activities due to the amount of time I spend doing work.
6. My personal life drains me of the energy I need to do my job.
7. My work suffers because of everything going on in my personal life.
8. I would devote more time to work if it weren't for everything I have going on in my personal life.
9. I am too tired to be effective at work because of things I have going on in my personal life.
10. When I'm at work, I worry about things I need to do outside work.
11. I have difficulty getting my work done because I am preoccupied with personal matters at work.
12. My job gives me energy to pursue activities outside of work that are important to me.
13. Because of my job, I am in a better mood at home.
14. The things I do at work help me deal with personal and practical issues at home.
15. I am in a better mood at work because of everything I have going for me in my personal life.
16. My personal life gives me the energy to do my job.
17. My personal life helps me relax and feel ready for the next day's work.

### **Identity Saliency** *Cunningham, 2007*

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements using the seven-point, Likert-type scale, 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3(somewhat disagree), 4 (neither agree nor disagree), 5 (somewhat agree), 6 (agree), 7 (strongly agree).

1. I feel most like myself when I am working.
2. Most of the satisfaction I experience in life is due to work-related experiences and accomplishments
3. My work-related duties come first on my list of priorities, above all other responsibilities
4. I view my work as the most important aspect of my life
5. My identity (e.g., who I am) is most strongly based on what I do at work.
6. I feel most like myself when I am with family and friends.
7. Most of the satisfaction I experience in life is due to experiences and accomplishments outside of work.
8. My responsibilities outside of work come first on my list of priorities, above all other duties.
9. I view my activities outside of work as the most important aspects of my life.
10. My identity (e.g., who I am) is most strongly based on what I do outside of work.

### **Open-Ended Question:**

The concept of work-life or work-nonwork balance means something different to most people. As you think about the ways in which you manage the demands in your work and other life or nonwork roles (e.g., family, community, church), how would you define a sense of balance between these sets of role demands and challenges? In other words, how would you describe a

situation in which you would actually feel that your work and other life roles are actually balanced?

## VITA

Cherise White was born in Roanoke, VA, to the parents of Rev. Dr. Quentin and Pamela White. She is the oldest of three children. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at Hampton University and her Master of Science degree at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in Industrial Organizational Psychology. She has three years of experience in teaching and one year in career services and counseling. She has also presented research at numerous conferences throughout VA, TN, NM, IL, LA, and MI.

Cherise is passionate about all areas of psychology and in her spare time loves to read, sing, dance, cook and enjoys watching movies.