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Work-family interface in the context of career success: A qualitative inquiry

(Accepted for publication and in press in Human Relations journal)

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Abstract

Work–family researchers are increasingly recognizing the need to expand their focus to advance the field. One population largely neglected by work-family researchers is individuals who have been extremely successful in their careers. In addition, organizational career scholars have largely neglected the interplay between employees' work and family lives. This study contributes to the work-family literature by studying work-family interface (WFI) in the context of career success. We sought to explore the lived experiences of 28 distinguished professors (DPs) who are among the top 2-5% scholars in their field, to provide an in-depth understanding of their WFI and the prominent factors affecting it over their careers. Our findings have theoretical implications for both work-family and career success literatures.

Keywords

work-family, work-family interface, career success, distinguished professor, academic careers

Introduction

Do Nobel Prize laureates ever grocery shop? Does a distinguished professor, with over forty thousand citations to his works, find time to chat with his spouse? Does a renowned female scientist struggle with childcare arrangements while traveling around the country giving scientific lectures almost every other week? Such questions about those who have outstanding research careers have rarely received scholarly attention.

Highly successful individuals have always been attractive to the mainstream. Celebrities receive extensive attention and are followed by a massive number of individuals in social media and the press (Lawrence, 2006). In academic contexts, the same trend happens in a milder sense.

Individuals create Wiki pages for top-notch scholars in their fields (Guess, 2008; Izhikevich, 2006), read and follow their work, and admire their voluminous citations. This leads to gaining information on successful people's working lives, not of their personal lives, nor on their approach to the WFI (e.g. Mason et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2005).

In recent years, two popular books have been published focusing on individuals who have achieved outstanding success: *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Gladwell, 2008) and *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World* (Grant, 2016). Both books have interesting and novel findings about successful individuals' personalities, their approach to work and to work-related decision-making but do not specifically address the outliers' or non-conformists' family spheres or their approach to the WFI.

Studies on the WFI have significantly increased over the last three decades (Allen et al., 2012). Moreover, continuous changes in employee demographics and employment arrangements, as well as the shifting nature of families, make the WFI a more interesting research topic (Michel et al., 2011). Work–family researchers are increasingly recognizing the need to expand their focus to advance the field (e.g. Kossek et al., 2011). One population largely neglected by work-family researchers is individuals who have been extremely successful in their careers. Gaining insights from experiences of individuals with potentially different forms of work–family contingencies can contribute to the WFI research (Allen and Eby, 2016; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 2002). It allows work-family scholars to learn if any factors are overlooked in work or family domains that play a key role in the successful individuals' WFI. It might also provide fresh insight into the 'career success and personal failure' notion (Korman et al., 1981) that was developed more than three decades ago before work-family scholarship

blossomed. Therefore, the dearth of literature focusing on how this specific population experience the WFI is the first motivation for this qualitative study.

The second motivation for this study is to examine the interface between work and family domains in relation to career success. Despite extensive literature on the WFI and its implications for understanding contemporary careers, organizational career scholars have largely neglected the interplay between employees' work and family lives (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014). However, gaining insight into the career-long WFI of individuals—highly successful ones in our case—has theoretical implications for the current understanding of the WFI and career success. This approach allows for capturing episodes of experience that could be missed if we were to focus on snapshots of experience rather than on expanded careers. Also, it highlights the factors (either from work or from family) that have been prominent over a successful individual's career.

In this study, we seek to understand the essence of the WFI for distinguished professors (DPs), defined here as being among the top 2-5% of researchers in their field, who work at a research-intensive university in the United States (US). Different institutions around the world might use different terminologies to refer to DPs, but regardless of the term, all such individuals are highly acknowledged in their fields. The DPs have been well received by their professional bodies both outside and inside their immediate institutions. All the DPs in the selected institution hold the highest academic rank, have numerous citations to their publications, and have won major national and international academic awards. Studying extreme cases is beneficial for theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990; Pratt et al., 2006). Although it is not the purpose of this study to propose a theory, the findings can be a stepping-stone for theory building.

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of the DPs, who are highly accomplished professors in academia, to provide an in-depth understanding of their WFI and the prominent factors affecting it in their work or family over their career. Given the qualitative nature of this study, we do not attempt to generalize about the WFI of highly successful individuals (Mason, 2002; Stead and Elliott, 2009). However, we do intend to provide insights into WFI in the context of career success.

We will begin with a brief overview of the WFI literature and how it relates to career success. We will then describe methodology and methods, followed by our findings and discussion.

Work-family theories

Various scholars suggest that 'cross-domain effects' exist in the relationship between work and family spheres (e.g. Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). This perspective sees work and family having a reciprocal influence on each other, so that work interference with family and family interference with work demonstrate two facets of the WFI phenomenon.

Scholars in multiple disciplines have adopted a number of theoretical approaches to explain the interface between individuals' professional and personal lives (Greenhaus et al., 2003). For example, work-family border theory (Clark, 2000) explains that the interaction of work and family arenas are not emotionally but humanly connected. Individuals are 'border-crossers' who transit between the two spheres on a daily basis. Resource-drain theory explains the linkage between work and family by referring to the transfer of finite personal resources, such as time, attention, and energy, from one domain to the other (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000).

It is beyond the scope of this study to review all the work-family constructs and the theories associated with them. We therefore limit ourselves to provide a general overview of

three main WFI conceptualizations that emerged in our findings. Hence, we will focus on work-family conflict (WFC), to represent a negative perspective; work-family enrichment (WFE), to represent a positive perspective; and work-family facilitation (WFC), to represent the system-level perspective toward the WFI.

Work-family conflict

Drawing insights from role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined WFC as:

> […] a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role. (p.77)

Based on their literature review, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggested a model for WFC in which they identified three forms of conflict between work and family: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based. Time-based conflict denotes that the time requirements of one role limit the time available for fulfilling the requirements of the other role. Strain-based conflict contributes to WFC when the demands of work and family roles are not compatible. Behavior-based conflict occurs when work and family roles have incongruent behavior expectations.

Later explorations emphasize two dimensions for WFC: work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW) (Gutek et al., 1991; Kelloway et al., 1999). These two dimensions have been the basis of extensive empirical research. Researchers have found that work-related variables (e.g. time spent at work, work-related stress) predict WIF, and nonwork variables (e.g. time spent with family, family-related stress) predict FIW (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). Empirical evidence also supports the negative influence of WFC on work-

related outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance), nonwork-related outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, family performance), and stress-related outcomes (e.g., work-related stress, family-related stress, and general psychological strain) (Allen et al., 2000).

Work-family enrichment

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) proposed a theoretical model that anticipated a positive relationship between work and family spheres. This WFE model 'specifies the conditions under which work and family roles are "allies" rather than "enemies"' (p.75). WFE is defined as 'the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role' (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006: 72). Carlson et al. (2006) developed a scale to measure WFE, which has been adopted by several researchers. Wayne et al. (2006) found that individuals' identity and informal support were antecedents of WFE and affective organizational commitment and turnover intentions were outcomes of WFE. In a meta-analysis, McNall and colleagues (2010) concluded that both work-to-family and family-to-work enrichment were positively associated with family and job satisfaction, affective commitment, and physical and mental health.

Work-family facilitation

Wayne et al. (2007) added to the work-family literature by clarifying the distinction between work-family facilitation (WFF) and WFE. Drawing on positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) they developed a Resource–Gain–Development perspective. Based on this perspective, WFF is defined as 'the extent to which an individual's engagement in one life domain (i.e., work/family) provides gains (i.e. developmental, affective, capital, or efficiency), which contribute to enhanced functioning of another life domain (i.e.,

family/work)' (p. 64). They argued that the previous work-family conceptualizations (e.g. WFE, positive spillover) theorized how involvement in a life domain positively affects an individual's performance in another domain, while WFF focuses on the system-level effects (e.g. work or family). Positive affectivity, self-efficacy, and work identity are examples of the personal antecedents of WFF, while enriched jobs, coworker and supervisor support, and supportive work-family culture are examples of the environmental resources that contribute to WFF (Wayne et al., 2007).

WFI and career success

Van Maanen (1977) distinguished between subjective and objective career success. Objective career success outlines observable factors of an individual's career (e.g. salary and job level), while subjective career success has to do with how people understand or appraise their careers based on features they value (Van Maanen, 1977). Arthur et al. (2005) argued that examining career success from either subjective or objective lenses limits our understanding of the whole picture. They urge researchers to adopt both objective and subjective views, and their interdependence, in examining careers and career success. From this standpoint, career success can be seen as 'the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time' (Arthur et al., 2005: 179).

Traditionally, objective career success has been related to an individual's 'personal and social alienation' (Korman et al., 1981, p. 342). Professional success is believed to have the potential to pressure individuals to the extent that they undergo extended negative experiences (e.g. job dissatisfaction, depression), which affect both their work and family lives (Korman et al., 1981). In the same vein, Bartolomé and Evans (1980) argue that extensive involvement with one's career, which usually requires investing long hours at work, disrupts family engagement.

Taking an organizational perspective, Rapoport et al. (2002) emphasize employers' objective career expectations and the employees' subjective career preferences. Thompson et al. (1999) suggest that utilizing organizational work-family benefits by employees might work against their career success and yield negative career outcomes. However, Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) have confirmed career scholars have yet to explore how the interface between individuals' professional and personal domains contributes to or hinders their career success. Therefore, this study seeks to address the question: How do highly accomplished professors in academia experience WFI, and what are the prominent factors in their work or family that have affected their WFI over their successful careers?

Methodology and methods

Drawing on interpretivism, which asserts that reality is socially constructed and that single events have 'multiple realities' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), this research adopts a qualitative methodology. We adopted phenomenological research methodology that emphasizes describing the commonalities of a phenomenon among the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher's role

We can relate to the participants of this study in three ways. First, we have worked as faculty members, and we are familiar with the academic life. Second, two of the authors spent extended time at the target university familiarizing themselves with its academic culture. Third, the same authors conducted a systematic literature review on faculty WFI experiences and gained an overview of the phenomenon. To monitor perceptions about the phenomenon during the research process, the authors kept a reflexive journal, which we will discuss later in this section.

Research Context and Recruitment process

The university where we conducted the research had over sixty thousand students, more than 3,500 faculty members, and 16 colleges and schools offering over 100 undergraduate and 250 graduate and professional degrees. The student population was diversified with approximately 50% female, 20% ethnic minority students, and 10% international students.

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, we retrieved the list of the distinguished professors and their official emails from a public link at the target university's website, and sent each member an invitation, and if necessary a follow-up, asking if they were interested in taking part in the study. Out of 84 DPs, 32 agreed to be interviewed, and 28 completed the interview.

Participants

The study participants were selected from DPs employed at a research-intensive university in the US. At the time of the study, Distinguished Professor (DP) was an honorary perpetual title, representing the highest level of faculty achievement. Faculty had to fulfill three criteria to be awarded the title: (a) be among the top 2-5% of researchers in their field of study; (b) have one seminal work that has led to a major advance in their field; and (c) have completed work that has had a discernible impact on the field.

Data collection process

We used semi-structured interviews as the main data collection source for the study. Prior to each interview, the interviewer read through all the participants' CVs and biographies, if available, in order to be acquainted with their work. Learning such information allowed for having a better sense of the interviewees' experiences and asking relevant follow-up questions during the interview.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were provided with a brief overview of the project and were asked for their permission to record the interviews, and to sign the consent form. The interview included eight questions (Appendix 1) and follow-up questions whenever needed. Each participant was interviewed once, and interviews lasted for 30-70 minutes.

Data preparation and analysis

Recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, which resulted in 384 pages of text. We followed the steps suggested by interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) technique (Smith et al., 2009) to analyze the data. First, after we had the transcripts of the first three interviews, we tried to immerse ourselves in the data and familiarize ourselves with it. We read the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings simultaneously to bring the participants to the center of our attention and actively engage with the data. The second step comprised highlighting and taking notes of different ways the participants described, referred to, or expressed their WFI.

IPA suggests making three types of comments: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. We only took descriptive notes because that was consistent with the research purpose, which was describing the lived experiences of the DPs. Third, we placed all the transcripts and notes into NVivo software. We used our notes in conjunction with the associated transcripts to develop emergent themes. In the final step, we categorized and organized subordinate themes under seven larger, superordinate themes presented in the findings section.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research establishes its rigor (Patton, 2002) through trustworthiness, which determines its worth and consists of criteria for credibility (trust in truth of the findings), transferability (applicability of findings to other contexts), dependability (consistency of findings), and confirmability (the extent to which the findings are the result of the study rather

than researcher preferences) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, we focused on developing trustworthiness by utilizing three strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, we built a deep understanding of the target university's culture, policies and procedures ('prolonged engagement'). Second, we asked two of our peers who had sufficient knowledge about qualitative research to give us feedback on our findings ('peer debriefing'). Finally, we kept a reflexive journal as a means to document the research process, observations, interactions with the participants, and reflections. Doing so enabled us to be more aware of the research journey, and the potential biases we brought to the data collection and analysis ('the reflexive journal').

Participants' demographic information

We interviewed 28 DPs (25 males, and three females) in the target institution. In total, the university had 84 DPs at the time of the interviews, among whom eight were female. The age range of the participants was between 45 and 86. Twenty-five participants were married at the time of the interview; one had recently lost a spouse, one preferred to remain single after divorce, and one did not report marital status. Among the 28 participants, four had one child, 13 had two children, three had three children, one had five children, one had six children, five had no children and one did not provide information about children. On average, the participants had 41.28 years of experience in their fields, calculated as the time since they graduated from their Ph.D. programs. Fifteen DPs worked in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (including two female DP participants). Only two participants had less than 30 years of experience in their associated fields. Three participants were not born and raised in the US. We cannot provide a full record of the DP spouses' employment due to the changes in their employment over the DPs' careers; however, the majority of the spouses had part-time or full-time jobs; the very few who did not have jobs were volunteers in their communities of interest.

Commonalities among the DPs

Our data analysis yielded seven commonalities, labeled as superordinate themes, among the lived experiences of the participants: intrinsic motivation for work, spouse support, parenthood, long non-traditional work hours, work benefits, personal life and family involvement, and finally managing an intense period. Below, we will describe superordinate themes and their associated subordinate themes summarized in Table 1. All superordinate themes were shared by all the DPs, but their associated subordinate themes were not necessarily shared by all participants (with the single exception of *passion*). We have distinguished between subordinate themes for clarity purposes, but they overlap in many cases. For example, in the following section 'curiosity' and 'not working for money' are described as two distinct subordinate themes; however, a DP could be both driven by curiosity and seek to make an impact.

Table 1. Superordinate themes and their subordinate themes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
1. Intrinsic motivation for work	Passion
	Making an impact
	Sense of accomplishment
	It's fun
	Curiosity
	Not working for money
2. Spouse support	Encouragement
	Assuming childcare and domestic responsibilities

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
	Following the DP and changing/terminating career
	Contributing to the work
3. Parenthood	Affecting you as a person
	Affecting work schedule
	Not having children
4. Long non-traditional work hours	Extensive daily work hours
	Pre-occupied but physically present
	Travel for work
5. Work benefits	Allowing for travels
	Financial benefits
	Children inheriting certain characteristics
6. Personal life and family involvement	Happiness
	Personal interests
	Respect for the family
	Family time and social activities
7. Managing an intense period	Caretaker role
	Working towards tenure
	Extra professional role

Intrinsic motivation for work

Intrinsic motivation for work is the most prominent theme in our findings. In most interviews, this theme was mentioned and re-emphasized. The DPs' attitude toward work was manifested through six subordinate themes we describe below. The impact of this drive on the DPs' family life is also evident in the other superordinate themes described in the following sections of our findings.

Passion for work. Regardless of their age, tenure or field of study, all the DPs expressed that they were driven by the deep love they felt for their research work. DP_1 said, 'Now you would think at my age – I'm 86 –I would have retired and lived the easy life, but I love what I'm doing.' In the same vein, DP_{11} expressed:

> 'We are the crazy people; we love what we're doing. But most people don't like what they're doing, which is why when they retire, or at some point in their life … they leave that career and go to one they like, where they're having fun … so, when you can do something you love doing … it's unique.'

Making an impact. Almost all the DPs were, and/or had been, involved with some sort of breakthrough research making significant contributions to their field. Producing knowledge and moving the field forward seemed to be the mission and professional agenda for many participants. DP_{24} said:

> 'Actually, I've had a goal for many years of trying to have an impact in my field and … there are different ways I guess you could do that and I have done it different ways … but it's the research that I've probably most enjoyed.'

We acknowledge that having made an impact in their field was a major criterion of the target university for awarding the DP status; however, many of the DPs expressed that their

achievements had not stopped them from looking forward to further extending the impact of their work and contribution to the field.

Sense of accomplishment. Despite having numerous scholarly publications, the DPs cared about publishing their new work. The DPs' passion for their work is evident in their accounts of their excitement from seeing their work in print. DP_3 shared:

> 'And it was wonderful to open the package and smell and look at a new book … there's one thing … I tell young people … when they publish the first book: "The second one will be just as wonderful – so will the third and the fourth." … you don't tire of how wonderful it is to accomplish something.'

It's fun. Having fun in their work was another aspect of the DPs' interest in their work. DP_6 said despite being known as a good teacher, he counted down his teaching time to go back to his research. 'It's fun. It's not work. I mean my wife's standard comment is that I've never worked a day in my life, and there's some truth to that, you know. It's been something I've wanted to do.' DP_7 stated:

> 'For me, the days I can do research are equivalent of days I can play … I'm fascinated with finding new stuff … I think it's why I keep doing it … if you're doing a job that is just fun – and I think [academic] job is fun … it's amazing they pay me for it. Don't tell the president that, okay?'

Curiosity. The majority of the DPs, regardless of their field, asserted that they craved solving problems and finding answers to their questions; therefore, they enjoyed research work. DP_5 referred to scientific curiosity as fire. He said:

> 'What is driving you is the scientific curiosity and figuring out how things work. And that's true for whether you are in educational area or in behavioral science area … If you

> have that fire in you, you really can't stop yourself from trying to figure out how things work … that's what's driving it.'

Not working for money. Most DPs appreciated earning money in academia, but none of them said that money is their number one drive for work. DP_{28} who said she could literally retire at the time and be happy for the rest of her life asserted:

> 'I don't work for money. It's nice to get money and having that money makes me feel secure but if somebody ticked me off here and really annoyed me, I'd just say "Thanks" and then I'd go and probably do some foundation work for free.'

DP_{19} said, 'I wanted to influence the field and move it in certain directions, which is … very difficult to do. And I didn't do that necessarily because of money or any other external reward; I did it because of intrinsic factors.'

Spouse support

Almost all the DPs agreed that had they not received support from their spouses, it would have been either impossible or more challenging for them to achieve their current professional standing. This was the case for both male and female participants. Based on the DPs' accounts of the support they received from their spouses we derived four subordinate themes described below.

Encouragement. Participants received consistent support and encouragement from their spouses to continue their studies or invest in their careers. Those who had married before completing their graduate degree were encouraged by their spouses to proceed in their studies despite the challenges they faced. In some cases where the participants could not support their

family due to pursuit of a graduate degree, their spouse assumed the role of breadwinner. DP_{15} recounted:

> 'I have a very intelligent and a very supportive spouse ... she's actually been a very important part of my career … in fact, she probably supported me and encouraged me to go on to get a Ph.D. and to enter this profession.'

Support by assuming childcare and domestic responsibilities. The DPs' spouses played a major role in managing household and childcare. Although almost all the DPs mentioned that they shared portions of the housework, if their spouse was not working fulltime, it was the spouse who did most of the housework. Some DPs' spouses had assumed primary responsibility for childcare; this was particularly the case where their children were born decades ago when childcare services were not prevalent or affordable. DP_{26}, whose husband had given her full support, asserted:

> '[My husband] … [took] more of the burden of the family … and I could … come home and play and have the fun time … we have four dogs and three children … I think my family has been extremely kind to me in their putting up with my work.'

Changing or terminating career. Many DPs worked for multiple institutions over their careers. In many cases, changing institutions required moving from one state or country to another, which affected their spouses' careers. The DPs received full support from their spouses when going through such changes, despite the fact that changes did not always benefit the spouses' careers. This was the case for DP_7's spouse, '[Moving] meant that [my wife] …

changed careers … She's an attorney by training … when we moved down here she [lost her network] … so, in that sense it's kind of uprooted [her] career a couple of times.'

Contributing to the work. Some spouses became intimately involved with their DP spouses' work in various capacities to support them. DP_{16} stated:

> '[My wife] is tremendously supportive, and I've written several books with [her]. She's not a professional in [my field of study] but she is very good at helping to edit things, find things, analyze things and so forth, and always has been.'

Parenthood

All the participants agreed that parenthood made a difference in combining work and family; those without children mentioned the differences not having children made. In general, parenting affected the DPs' work schedules or lifestyles, at least when the children were more dependent and demanding; however, all of the DPs agreed that they continued fulfilling their professional commitments while raising children. Other than the case of one male DP, at the time of our interviews, most of the DPs were in later stages of their lives and were no longer heavily involved with childcare. Parenthood has three subordinate themes are described below.

Affecting you as a person. Many DPs believed that having children impacts parents in general, no matter what their career is. DP_6, who raised six children asserted, 'Having kids affects you as a person … it affects your job because it affects you as a person. And … I don't think it's any different for me than it is for anybody else who has kids.' For example, as confirmed by many DPs, parenthood experience helped them have a realistic understanding of

what it takes to get used to taking care of a newborn; therefore, they supported their graduate students who had newborns and needed to spend more time on childcare.

Affecting work schedule. The DPs asserted that they had made adjustments to be able to work and fulfill childcare responsibilities. One general adjustment was making sure that they secured time to spend with children when they were at home. DP_{22} recalled:

> 'I was always home for dinner when I was not traveling and did not work again until after the children's bedtime when they were small; then I also typically read to them at bedtime and was available … for homework help as they grew older.'

There were a few cases in which the DPs had children with some type of disability. This put a heavy burden on their shoulders because taking care of kids with special needs required extra time and energy. DP_5 shared:

> 'We have a daughter who has … a learning disability ... it has been very time consuming … we take a lot of trips for her to get her treatment … Plus, she has problems at school and sometimes we have to go get her at school … and … it's been a strain.'

Not having children. There were two couples among the participants who did not have children, and both couples described that not having children had allowed them to devote extensive time to their work. They believed having kids might have required them to make extra adjustments to be able to accomplish the same work. DP_{28} recalled:

> 'I already knew, because I studied human development in college … that if I were going to be a parent, I would have to spend x amount of time [on childcare]. I don't see how I could keep my lifestyle and my work style and have kids. So I made that as an active decision.'

Long non-traditional work hours

Another commonality among the DPs was their extensive and non-traditional weekly work hours. Many DPs asserted that their workload and their involvement with work were extensive throughout their careers. This superordinate theme consists of four subordinate themes described below.

Extensive work hours. Almost all the DPs needed to devote long hours to their work, especially to their research, on a daily basis. The general pattern was that during the early stages of their careers, DPs spent much time on grounding their research work, publishing papers and earning tenure. In later stages, they had to devote time to several research, teaching, and service activities including preparing future researchers, contributing to journals in their fields in several capacities, and submitting grants to support their research staff. In many cases, the DPs had to make extra time by starting their workdays earlier, extending their workdays, or working during the weekends. DP_{12} mentioned:

> 'I've always put in long hours. And working with animals … they don't take any holidays or anything so … on Christmas Day … we'd have to go in and take care of the animals, feed them and so forth.'

Pre-occupied but physically present. According to the participants, doing research projects requires mental engagement. The DPs shared with us that intellectual and research work did not have boundaries as do nine-to-five jobs. As DP_{15} put it:

> 'I try very hard to integrate what I'm hearing into projects on which I'm working, … so … in a way I'm always working … not in a formal sense but I'm always trying to piece things together in a way that will make sense.'

Travel for work. Many DPs needed to participate in conferences and events related to their field, both inside and outside the US. In addition, due to widespread recognition of these

DPs' work, many of them received invitations to give talks, serve as visiting professors, or collaborate on some outstanding research projects, which required them to travel frequently. In some cases, for example when working as a visiting professor, DPs had to spend an extended time at the visiting institution, which contributed to their non-traditional work hours.

Work benefits

All the DPs mentioned that being an outstanding academic, and having a job they were passionate about had benefits for themselves and their families. The benefits of the DPs' work had three major manifestations that are summarized below.

Allowing for travel. Having opportunities to travel to different places enabled many DPs to take their families to places where they might not go otherwise. DP_2 appreciated the experiences and the relationships the trips had yielded:

> 'The travel was great, the cultural … benefits, friends that come through. … one of my closest friends is a colleague I worked with in Britain, another one is a colleague I worked with in Paris – my sons know them, know their children, that kind of thing.'

Financial benefits. As described before, many DPs did not work for money, but they acknowledged that their career had allowed them to live a comfortable life. The DPs' income allowed them to support their families well. When talking about his work benefits, DP_{26} said:

> 'The financial benefits come not only from the salary from the university, but I also do consulting for companies. As I said, I'm an Associate Editor for a journal and all of those activities come with a financial reward. I've received several awards that also have monetary funds that come with them, so I think that … we're definitely rewarded for the work that we do.'

Children inheriting certain characteristics. Many DPs mentioned that their passion, success, and hard work indirectly affected their children. For example, DP_{15} asserted that:

> 'Well, I think as a role model [my work] allowed [my son] to see that commitment and dedication and professionalism take you a long way and I think he's taken that to heart ... He is a teacher and I actually think that has influenced how he teaches … so I think there have been very positive effects.'

Personal life and family involvement

Despite the DPs' hard-to-achieve success in their careers, they attended their personal lives and were involved in family activities. Personal life and family involvement encompass four subordinate themes, each showing one aspect of the family life that the DPs valued and cared about.

Happiness. Many DPs believed that being passionate about their work, having a successful professional life, and enjoying it made them a happy person. The following quotation from DP_6 sheds light on this:

> 'I really like my job. I'm happy ... and I can't help but think that I'm a better husband and parent as a happy person – rather than someone who drags [himself] home after a day doing something they hate … and take out their unhappiness on everybody around them.'

Personal interests. The DPs' attention to their personal lives was also evidenced by the time they devoted to their personal interests. Examples include buying season tickets for their

favorite teams, attending their favorite singers' concerts, and engaging in other things that interest them. DP_{18} confirmed attention to personal interests as she shared her hobbies:

> 'I ride … despite my advanced age and I really love my animals [horses and dogs]. And … this was something I wanted to do and carved out a schedule [for it] and that keeps me healthy mentally and physically.'

Respect for the family. Many DPs respected family, were leading happy family lives and enjoyed decades of happy marriage. Among the 28 participants, five had experienced divorce, and two partially attributed the divorce to their work involvement. DP_2 recounted:

> 'You can't ignore your family for your career because for one thing it's just not fair … there are people who spend too much time on their careers and they become very tunnel vision. And I know it can wreck a family and cause a divorce … if you have a fundamentally happy and stable emotional life, there is no better prerequisite for working happily in what you do.'

Family time and social activities. The DPs showed an interest in their family time, participated in their family reunions, and valued social activities. Non-American DPs would fly home, which took long hours in some cases, to visit their families. Besides, almost all parent DPs played a significant role in their children's lives, and emphasized its importance. For example, DP_{12} recalled, 'When our kids were little … if they had any kind of sports activities … we always went to … see them; that was important … to make sure we stayed engaged with them.'

Managing an intense period

Over their career, all the DPs experienced a period when they had to work extra hard, compared to their typical long work hours, to keep up their research productivity. In most cases, an intense period happened when the DPs undertook an extra, typically temporary, role or

commitment that added to their previous responsibilities; the new role sometimes came from their work domain, and sometimes from family. The DPs mentioned that during the intense period they were mindful of their research work, experienced WFC, and needed to reduce their sleeping, rest or family time in order to maintain their research work. We categorized this intense period into three subthemes described below.

Caretaker role. The DPs experienced an intense work schedule when they were responsible for caretaking of a family member or a loved one; in many cases caretaking required commuting as well. Furthermore, in situations where the care recipient was sick, the DP also carried an additional emotional burden. DP_{21} shared with us that:

> 'My mother had cancer and … there was a couple of years in which we were very worried and she needed care and attention and I went back and forth home during that time … of course that enters into your psyche, but it wasn't an extended period of time.'

Working towards tenure. As academics employed at research universities in the US, the DPs had all gone through the tenure process before they became associate professors. Not all the DPs found the tenure process demanding; however, some DPs mentioned that they were under pressure during this process. DP_{25} shared with us, 'When I was going for tenure I was a madman … I'd get up at three and work till seven, usually every day … that's not a sustainable thing but it did work for me.'

Extra professional role. Mainly due to their success in their fields of study, the DPs were invited to assume additional professional roles that added to their work and family commitments. For example, they served as journal editors, visiting national and international professors, or academic administrative leaders that in most cases were temporary but demanding responsibilities. Below is an example of this subtheme:

> ‘When I was editor of one of our primary journals … I was working probably about 90 hours a week … because I was still trying to stay up to date in my research, so at that time I didn’t spend a lot of time with my spouse. I just couldn’t, and she had to be very understanding. But that was the most demanding of the times … I haven’t worked like that [again] … I have worked a lot of hours and still do work quite a few hours, but that was the most demanding time when I had trouble managing the family/work life balance.’ (DP_{24})

As evident in the commonalities described above, The DPs’ professional and personal lives had both positive (e.g. happiness) and negative (e.g. constant engagement) effects on one another. We can categorize these effects into WF conflict, enrichment, and facilitation. For example, when working long hours or traveling for work, the DPs could experience work-to-family conflict, and when staying up at night to take care of a child, they experienced family-to-work conflict. This conflict was mainly time-based and at its peak during the intense period when the DPs sacrificed other roles to keep up with their research. The DPs’ work and family enriched one another when receiving support from their families to devote full attention to their work or when their work provided financial security to their family. Finally, we noticed that it was not only the DPs themselves that were affected by the impact of their work on their personal life or vice versa. Individuals associated with the DPs at work (e.g. their students) and the DPs’ family members experienced positive and negative WFI effects as well. For example, the DPs’ families traveled to new places due to the DPs’ work, or the DPs spent extra time with their students or at work due to the support they received from their families.

Discussion

This study sought to explore the work-family interface (WFI) among distinguished professors (DPs) at a research-intensive university in the US. Based on findings from the study, the DPs' WFI could be described in terms of their intrinsic motivation for their work; the support they received from their spouses; parenthood; long non-traditional work hours; work benefits; personal life and family involvement; and managing unusually intense periods. Below we will discuss the theoretical contributions of our findings.

First, in the context of career success, we highlighted the role of intrinsic motivation. Based on the DPs' responses, their intrinsic motivation contributed to many aspects of their work and family including devoting long hours to research, constant mental engagement with work, being a happy family member, and setting role models for their children. Most DPs asserted that their craving to solve problems and make discoveries fed their motivation toward their career. This finding is consistent with the previous literature confirming that motivational factors predicted career success (Judge et al., 1995; Whitely et al., 1991).

Small and Reily (1990) speculated that for an employee who loves his or her work, 'positive engrossment' might function independently from stress caused by a heavy workload. Rothbard (2001) discussed how engagement in either the work or family role might enrich or deplete engagement in the other role. In addition, the importance of role for one's identity is associated with the level of enrichment the individual experiences from one role (e.g. work) in comparison with the other (e.g. family) (Wayne et al., 2006). This was the case for our participants who identified themselves with their work and their passion for it. They recounted how their passion both enriched their work and family lives and at times caused conflict. Examples of such enrichment and conflict are reflected in DP_6's quote on being 'a better husband and parent' and a

happy person or DP_{24}'s quote on how accepting an extra professional role reduced his family time. This passion prevailed even in times when the DPs were under heavy pressure both in work and family domains.

Turning specifically to the DPs' passion for their work, we distinguish their passion for work from being 'work-centric' (Galnisky et al., 2003), because based on our interviews, the DPs did not assert that they placed a higher value on work than on family. Neither can we argue that the DPs placed their work role on top of their hierarchy of selves (Marks and MacDermid, 1996) because we did not ask the DPs about the value they placed on their work or family roles.

Our findings about passion are aligned with Vallerand and colleagues (2003) who define passion as 'a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, and they find important, and in which they invest time and energy' (p. 756). Those authors also distinguish between harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion. We categorize the DPs' passion as HP, which refers to an internalization that is autonomous and encourages the individual to willingly engage in an activity of interest. It has been shown that HP is positively related to psychological health and wellbeing (Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2009). We demonstrated that the DPs' passion had both favorable and unfavorable effects on their work and family spheres. In one respect it led them to take time away from family to concentrate on their work or work-related activities. In another respect, it made them happier family members who could be a role model for children and achieve outstanding performance.

Our second theoretical contribution is associated with the intense period that the DPs managed during their careers. Most studies of the WFI do not adopt a career perspective; therefore, the ups and downs of the individuals' WFI experiences over their careers is not well developed in the literature. We discovered that during their careers the DPs experienced a heavy

burden from work to family or vice versa, for at least a temporary period; however, the DPs' extra roles or commitments stemming from the family or career stage they were experiencing could yield fruitful work or family outcomes in the long run. For example, taking care of a loved one or newborn or editing a major journal might result in self-satisfaction or recognition respectively. This sudden reformulation of work-family roles has been referred to as 'punctuated equilibrium' (Majomi et al., 2003). Our conclusion is that managing an intense period during one's career and sacrificing personal or family time to sustain work during this period prove to be key factors in the intersection between the WFI and career success and deserve further scholarly attention.

Our findings align with the work-family literature (Grzywacz et al., 2007; Wayne et al., 2007) in that the DPs' work and family had positive and negative effects on one another. Drawing from Wayne et al. (2005), we distinguished between WFE and WFF to signify the impact of the DPs' work (family) on themselves and on those associated with them at work or family. Our findings confirmed that it was not only the DPs themselves that were positively or negatively affected by their work or family. For example, work travels played a role in the DPs' WFI; however, work travels affected the DP's family members as well. Our study is among the very few qualitative studies that highlighted WFF in its findings; however, our interview questions mainly focused on the DPs' and their WFI. Other studies can include populations such as individuals' less-immediate family members, friends, supervisors, and protégés to examine work-family system-level effects in more detail.

Despite the DPs' long work hours and constant engagement with work, which might be attributed to a lack of balance (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011), they did not perceive themselves to lead an imbalanced life. It was only through the intense period described in the

findings that the DPs were challenged in fulfilling their work and/or family requirements, which is consistent with recent research confirming the association between WFC and sleep quality and quantity (Crain, Kossek, Moen, Lilienthal, and Buxton; 2014) . Therefore, contrary to Frone's (2003) argument, over the DPs' careers the presence or absence of WFE or WFC were not necessarily interpreted as WF balance or imbalance. Our findings on the WFI might be closer to Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), who defined work-family balance as accomplishing role-related expectations, shared with and agreed to by an individual and his/her role-related partners in work and family spheres. However, we need to add that the perceptions of the WFI might change during certain stages of one's career due to a temporary extra role that burdens the individual who already works hard, is engaged in the work, and attends to his/her family.

The third contribution of the study is concerned with differences between male and female DPs. Among our participants, we did not confirm differences between male and female DPs regarding how the demands of family/work roles interfered with their work/family roles. All of our participants were supported by their spouses, devoted long hours to their work, and were highly commited to their work. However, the existing literature asserts that men and women define and experience career success differently (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Ng et al., 2005), and home demands restrict women's achievements in work and career advancement (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014).

The total number of female DPs at the target institution was approximately one-tenth of the male DPS. Moreover, we only had three female participants in our sample, and two of them did not have children. This inequality in the number of females who manage to overcome career challenges and move toward being outstanding in their careers is well-documented in the literature (e.g. Mason et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2005). According to Bailyn (2003), the academic

profession accommodates male academics who have families, while it is much more difficult for female academics to be successful in their careers and to have families. This argument still applies at prestigious universities a decade later (Truong and Hafner, 2014). However, it is urgent that future research explores this finding among a more balanced population or among females who aspired to but did not make it to DP status.

Two participant DPs who were couples either had preferred not to have children, or had waited so long that they could not have children anymore. It might be justifiable that when both parties decide to invest heavily in their careers, it will be challenging to raise children. Literature has shown that dual-career couples are engaged in what is called scaling-back (Becker and Moen, 1999). Over a lifetime, couples use various strategies to reduce their commitment to work to attend to family. For example, they may choose to have a one-job and one-career marriage, or they may choose to trade off work and family roles (Becker and Moen, 1999). When both parties decide to invest heavily in their careers, they may choose to avoid the 'scaling-back' (Becker and Moen, 1999) that might allow them to start a family and have children. Our participant couples reduced their family involvement when they decided, or ended up due to their work circumstances, not to have children. Our findings show that both parties were well-supported by their spouses to attend to their careers; and their decisions on work-family involvement might have been related to both parties' intrinsic motivation and passion for their work. However, we only interviewed two DPs who happened to be married to a DP, and more evidence is needed to pursue this argument.

Fourth, we challenge the traditional literature on career success and personal failure phenomenon (Korman et al., 1981), which is believed to still exist for professional employees (Burke and McAteer-Early; 2006). As evidenced in our sixth superordinate theme, the DPs

attended to their personal lives and were involved with their families. The majority of the DPs were satisfied with their personal lives and did not feel they had lost out in their personal life due to their involvement with their work. Although five participants had experienced divorce, and two partially attributed it to their work demands, the rate was lower than the 40-50% divorce rate in the US reported by the American Psychological Association (2014). Moreover, the DPs' lifestyles were not limited to academia, and many had non-academic hobbies.

The final observation of our study concerns our findings on objective and subjective career success. Based on our inclusion criteria, all of the DPs were objectively successful in their profession: they had reached the highest status in their field of study and had made a significant contribution to their field of study. Our findings, specifically the passion and intrinsic motivation themes, revealed that the DPs also experienced subjective career success in that they highly valued their work and felt positive about what they were doing. For the DPs in our study, subjective and objective career success seemed to be intertwined in different stages of their careers. This is consistent with Arthur et al.'s (2005) argument that objective and subjective career success work interdependently and cannot be treated as distinct from one another. While our study did not primarily focus on this interdependence, our limited evidence suggests further research would be helpful.

Practical implications and limitations

Similar to other qualitative studies, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a wide range of populations; however, HR professionals at research-intensive universities or research centers who work with DPs or individuals who characterize outstanding academic career success might gain insights from our findings to attract, accommodate, or (for individuals) redirect star performer efforts. We showed that the DPs were passionate about their work and

wanted to have an impact on their fields of research. Based on this finding, it might make sense to reduce organizational initiatives that tend to leverage extrinsic motivation among highly successful academics, and instead create work environments that facilitate up-to-date research and cutting-edge projects, and allocating more resources to DPs' research. Being mindful of intense periods when individuals might need external support to manage their WFI, may also contribute to healthier long-term employment arrangements.

In addition, scholars who aspire to be extremely successful in their academic careers and to make an impact in their field of study might find our findings useful. We have illustrated seven commonalities among 28 scholars who shared their stories about managing WFI while securing successful academic careers. We showed that in some cases, in order to manage their WFI and simultaneously attend their work and family demands, the DPs were both intrinsically motivated and willing to sacrifice their sleep or personal time. In addition, their spouses were supportive of their work. These findings might help scholars seeking the DP path to realistically and mindfully plan their work, family and career lives.

Our research has four limitations. First, although familiarity with the participants' responsibilities and the research context helped us relate to the participants, it might have caused bias. For example, through our reflections and the reflexive journal (kept by the first author), we realized that we might tend to overestimate the discretion of the DPs in their academic choices. In other words, the DPs' passion might have shadowed the fact that the DPs were to some extent accountable to their institutions and professions to work hard and publish. Furthermore, being academics ourselves, we might have taken for granted the characteristics of academic careers such as flexible work hours.

The second limitation of this study was that the majority of the research participants in this study were male. The presence of women in the study was consistent with the percentage of female DPs at the target university. However, we acknowledge that imbalance between the number of male and female participants might not have allowed us to illustrate a comprehensive picture of female DPs' WFI. Third, we examined the WFI only from the DPs' perspectives, but this phenomenon cannot be fully described unless we add perspectives of the DPs' spouses, family members, co-workers, and friends. Understanding such perspectives, listening to their stories, and gaining insight into their experience is an untouched avenue for future research. Notwithstanding the described limitations, we attest that this study has significant implications for both work-family and career success scholarship.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Would you please describe a typical day in your life? Please be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. How about weekends? How would you describe your typical weekend?
3. How has the pattern of your typical day changed during your professional life/career? (for example, when you were going for tenure, when you had children, when your worked on a specific project).
4. Please describe how your professional life has affected your family life?
5. Please describe how your family life has affected your professional life?
6. How would you describe the relationship between your work and family life?

7. If one of your graduate students, who has the intention of being successful in his/her academic career, seeks your advice about work-family interface, what would you say?
8. Is there anything about your work-family interaction that I did not ask and you would like to add?

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