PROFESSIONAL WOMEN’S
CONSTRUCTION OF COMPETING WORK
AND NON-WORK DEMANDS: A TENSION
PERSPECTIVE

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Coping strategy, non-work domain, perceived tension, professional women, tension, work domain
Abstract

This study explores how professional women perceive and cope with the tensions arising from the competing demands of their work and non-work lives. The tendency for professional women to broadly interpret such demands as experiences of either resource depletion or resource generation—or both—is well-established (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). However, a deeper understanding of how the competing demands of simultaneously enacted work and non-work roles are perceived and managed is overdue. This omission inhibits a clearer understanding of how diverse—and even competing—coping strategies are differentially employed by professional women. In an increasingly less patriarchal world that will see increased numbers of professionally qualified women entering the workforce, illuminating these strategies could have far-reaching implications.

The potential of a tension perspective (Smith & Lewis, 2011) was utilised to explore professional women’s interpretations, as the ongoing efforts required to work through competing elements described in the tension literature imply a more complex process for constructing tensions during work and non-work interactions. Thus, the two research questions that guided this study were:

(1) How do professional women perceive tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

(2) How do professional women cope with tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

To address these questions, relativist ontology was adopted in this study. Consistent with the ontological assumption that knowledge is co-constructed, a subjectivist epistemology is used to understand the meanings individuals attach to social phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In particular, an abductive research strategy and in-depth interview design were used to collect and analyse professional women’s accounts. Three key findings emerged: (1) persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands; (2) professional women orient themselves in one of four ways to these persistent tensions, with coping strategies contingent upon their orientation; (3) perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally impact
each other, implying that the four orientations are not fixed, and thus do not specify templates for conformity.

The original contribution to knowledge offered by these findings is the delineation of four orientations to work and non-work tensions. Work-oriented professional women perceive the source of salient tensions as deriving from the non-work domain, while their Non-work-oriented counterparts perceive the work domain to be the source of tensions. Dual-oriented professional women do not have a clear orientation to either domain, and fall into one of two sub-categories: Paralysed Dual-oriented individuals feel a sense of paralysis when their internal standards and external demands are misaligned; whereas Pragmatic Dual-orientated professional women are more accepting of their own limits, and are able to differentially adjust self-expectations when tension arises. For each orientation, persistent tensions are managed by a distinct combination of coping strategies.

These four orientations challenge and fuel sustainable work and non-work engagement among professional women, and their identification suggests a more refined conceptualization of competing demands than previous theories have envisioned. Crucially, the four orientations reveal nuances that have practical implications for the way professional women—and their role-related partners—understand and manage competing work and non-work demands.
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Definitions of Key Terms

_Boundary_ is defined as the “physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities as separate from one another” (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000, p. 474).

_Boundary work_ is defined as the process of creating and maintaining the physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries between various work and non-work roles (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Boundary preference for _integration_ refers to a high degree of overlap during cross-role interactions where aspects of work and non-work roles are often combined via fluid boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000; Winkel & Clayton, 2010).

Boundary preference for _segmentation_ signifies boundaries that are more inflexible and roles that are rigidly conducted at specific places and times, where work and non-work roles are defined by clear, thick boundaries (Kreiner et al., 2009).

_Condict_ is defined as the difficulty experienced by individuals in simultaneously meeting role demands from two domains, though demands need not be incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

_Demands_ are defined as any resources working adults consider to be required in fulfilling various work and non-work roles. Under the focus of the current study, demands not only carry prescriptive messages about how people should behave towards other role related partners (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), but also serve to reflect professional women’s interpretation of these prescriptive messages (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

_Dialectic_ refers to “a constant and perpetual interaction between two or more concepts or entities…where a thesis and antithesis are resolved eventually by a synthesis” (Wendt, 1998, p. 367).

_Dilemma_ refers to the distinctions between polar opposites, which can be solved by weighing pros and cons between two competing alternatives (McGrath, 1982; Smith & Lewis, 2011).
**Domain** is defined as the cognitive space designated to each role, and boundaries delineate domains from one another (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006).

**Enrichment** is defined as “the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p. 73).

**Non-work** is defined as activities encompassing family, as well as other salient areas of social engagement (e.g., personal development, recreation, volunteering, and community activities) (Stoner, Robin, & Russell-Chapin, 2005).

**Paradox** is defined as contradictory, yet inter-related elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p.382).

**Professional women** in this study refers to women who enjoy considerable work autonomy due to their particular knowledge and skills to perform the role of a particular profession (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

**Resources** are defined as the physical, social, intellectual, and psychological assets that women use to productively perform work and non-work roles (see Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010), as well as the tangible and intangible personal assets and rewards gained during work and non-work interactions.

**Tensions** in this study are defined as “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p. 3).

**Work** is defined as “instrumental activity intended to provide goods and services to support life” (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000, p.179).
Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: June 2016
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Dedication

This study, and the time, effort, and support it took to complete, is dedicated to all those women who have struggled, continue to struggle, and will struggle in the future with the patriarchal attitudes that paradoxically make their experience of competing work and non-work demands a step in the right direction.
Chapter 1: Introduction: Professional Women’s Experience of Competing Work and Non-work Demands

This chapter outlines the background of this study (Section 1.1), followed in Section 1.2 by a discussion of the area of concern—and the motivation for—this study. The research purpose is presented in Section 1.3, together with the research questions. The contributions of this study (Section 1.4) are followed in Section 1.5 by a statement about the research design. Finally, an outline of this study’s remaining chapters is provided in Section 1.6, with the aim of orienting readers to how the purpose of this study will be achieved.

1.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1.1 Professional women’s experience of competing work and non-work demands

Work-life balance (WLB) has attracted significant recent academic investigation (e.g., Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) and is an increasingly prominent part of daily discourse that reflects people’s desire to live fulfilling personal and professional lives. Though lacking a unified definition, WLB has generally been associated with equilibrium or harmony between work and non-work life (Voydanoff, 2005). Hence, the balance metaphor captures the endeavour of avoiding being workaholics on the one hand, or settling for less challenging work or opting out of the workplace due to domestic responsibilities on the other (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Slaughter, 2012).

Though the challenges of balancing work and non-work life is not specific to either sex, given the distinctive life paths taken by women and men, the literature recognizes variations between the sexes in how competing demands are brought into awareness, as well as in their respective coping efforts (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Rothbard, 2001). By focussing on women
exclusively, this study is therefore able to disambiguate sex as a complicating factor in drawing conclusions from the findings.

In particular, the literature recognizes that the experience of meeting multiple role demands varies by sex (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Lewis, 2009), and that role multiplicity is more salient for professional women (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012). Moreover, due to the increasing proportion of women in the workforce, and the corresponding change in gender role expectations and family life, recent literature has specifically explored the competing demands encountered by professional women (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Huhtala, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012).

Furthermore, recent research indicates that the challenge of balancing work and non-work domains for professional women is more complex than a matter of family interruptions (Cabrera, 2007; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). For example, significant research on WLB has been undertaken in the Australian context to help workers reconcile competing responsibilities (e.g., Burgess & Connell, 2006; Fujimoto, Azmat, & Hartel, 2012; Pocock, 2005). Many work-life policies and interventions have been put forward by state governments and organizations to facilitate professional women in balancing competing work and non-work commitments, other than just family interruptions (Brough & O’Driscoll, 2010). These policies include various flexible work options, such as: part-time work, flexible hours arrangements, work from home, and telecommuting (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005; Morgan & Milliken, 1992). Flexible leave options (e.g., study or sporting commitments, lifestyle choice) that accommodate many non-work related needs for both male and female employees have also been created to improve workplace equality and performance (Abbott, de Cieri, & Iverson, 1996; De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005).

In addition, merging research has criticized previous work and non-work studies for overemphasising the tensions between meeting work and family demands (see Kamenou, 2008; Pichler, 2009), and for too narrowly defining the various life roles that working women embrace beyond work as either ‘home’ or ‘life’ (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Indeed, in the last four decades, the diversity and availability of choices with respect to employment and education have changed women’s lifestyle dramatically. Consequently, the
experience of workplace participation has not only increased the complexity of how working women assess the value of their work and its effects on their interaction with people around them (Lewis, 2009), but also the difficulty of managing multiple roles that include work, family, and all other areas of commitment (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

Thus, whereas most empirical studies to date have only explored the work and family interaction, in reality, roles are held simultaneously and interconnect (Ladge et al., 2012; Trefalt, 2013; Hall, Kossek, Briscoe, Pichler, & Lee, 2013). Therefore, regardless of their family responsibilities, this study specifically explores professional women’s simultaneous enactment of work and non-work domains, where the latter includes unpaid work, personal development, recreation, volunteering, and other community activities (Grawitch, Maloney, Barber, & Yost, 2011).

Furthermore, the importance of incorporating multiple work and non-work activities goes beyond the challenges faced by professional women in developed countries like Australia. As a Chinese citizen whose country has gone through period of significant recent change, the researcher is aware of how millions of educated women are beginning to challenge traditional patriarchal values by developing personal interests in different aspects of work and non-work domains. As they do so, they will inevitably encounter tensions between their work and non-work activities that include work, family, and all other areas of commitment. Moreover, the process of pursuing a PhD in a foreign country while at the same time experiencing first time motherhood assisted the researcher to better understand how other women interpret the dynamic of simultaneously enacting multiple work and non-work roles.

Therefore, confronting multiple—and even competing—work and non-work demands is a common experience for many working adults (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975; Kaiser, Ringlstetter, Eikhof, & Pina e Cunha, 2011). In recognizing that the way work and non-work roles affect each other can impacts the well-being of individuals and their families, as well as work-related outcomes (Cohen & Abedallah, 2013; Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011), studies exploring effective work and non-work interactions have divided their attention across several levels of intervention: the national level (e.g., Tammy, Laurent, Spector, & Poelmans, 2014), the organizational level (e.g., Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Kirchmeyer, 1995), the
group level (e.g., Demerouti, 2012; Major & Morganson, 2011), the individual level (e.g., Shockley & Allen, 2014; Ilies, Schwind, & Heller, 2007; Voydanoff, 1988), and multiple levels (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Golden, 2009; Paustian-Underdahl, Halbesleben, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2013; Sturges & Guest, 2004).

While acknowledging the importance and contribution of studying the work and non-work relationship at other levels of analysis (see Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005), this study specifically focuses on how professional women reason about tensions surfacing from the work and non-work interaction. Professional women were chosen due to the likely greater intensity of their exposure to contradictory work-non-work demands compared to non-professional women. This intensity of experience can better reveal the cognitive processes that are the focus of this study. Three reasons support this claim:

1. First, work demands for professional women are likely to be greater than for non-professional women. Consequently, professional women are more likely to receive higher levels of support from their organisations to help manage work and non-work conflicts (e.g., Fujimoto & Azmat, 2014).

2. Second, professional women, as a result of their professional education, are inclined to have higher levels of cognitive complexity (Granello, 2010), a degree of which is required to manage contradictory demands (e.g. Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

3. Finally, as professional women tend to be more assertive in actualizing their self-needs in both work and non-work domains, instances of responding to competing demands during work and non-work interactions are likely to be readily observable in—and salient to—this study’s demographic focus (Lee, Reissing, & Dobson, 2009).

Therefore, the specific research questions embedded within Section 1.3 address professional women in particular. A clear definition of this demographic is provided in Chapter 3. Three theoretical perspectives relevant to professional women’s experience of the work and non-work interaction are reflected in the literature, thus forming the foundations for this study’s exploration of professional women’s subjective experience of competing work and non-work demands. These three
theoretical perspectives—conflict-depletion, enhancement-enrichment, and boundary—are now be introduced.

1.1.2 Three theoretical perspectives of the work and non-work interaction

A conflict-depletion view highlights the competing demands of combining work and non-work roles, in which resources are pulled in opposing directions. In the context of this study, conflict refers to opposing pressures arising from simultaneous participation in different roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). More specifically, this study adopts a view of work and non-work conflict that includes interference or spill over of negative affects between work and non-work roles (see Fisher, Bulger, & Smith, 2009). The underlying assumption of the conflict-depletion perspective is based on the principles of human energy scarcity (Goode, 1960) and resource drain (Piotrkowski, 1979), in which devoting attention to one role depletes the resources available to invest in other roles (Goode, 1960).

Following this logic, when working adults actively limit their engagement in one role to meet the demands of another (see Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990), work and non-work literature has conceptualized such coping strategies as compensation, accommodation, or segmentation (Champoux, 1978; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). Thus, where conflict is perceived, the work and non-work nexus is managed by investing resources in roles that yield more rewards than costs (Barnes, Wagner, & Ghumman, 2012; Lobel, 1991; Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000).

Alternatively, the enhancement-enrichment perspective rests on the assumption of role expansion (Mark, 1977) and accumulation theory (Sieber, 1974), which consider resources to be expandable (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). In contrast to conflict, enrichment refers to the potential benefits of engaging in multiple roles, whereby a positive spill over of affect or other personal resources is directly or indirectly transferred from one role to another (Carlson, Ferguson, Kacmar, Grzywacz, & Whitten, 2011; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Kacmar, Crawford, Carlson, Ferguson, & Whitten, 2014). Indeed, given that researchers have noted the existence of role congruence or overlapping values when working women strongly identify with multiple roles simultaneously (Ashforth, 2000; Callero, 1985; Egan & Greer, 2012),
increased non-work demands need not necessarily decrease work performance (Marks, 1977; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

Moreover, enrichment can be stimulated by positive self-evaluations (Karatepe & Demir, 2014; Westring & Ryan, 2010). Similarly, when multiple congruent roles are co-activated, people experience positive emotions, which have been identified as a critical factor for enrichment to occur (Rothbard, 2001; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009; Lobel, 1991). Therefore, at times of perceived enrichment, resources such as skills and knowledge are more likely to be transferable (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and the work and non-work relationship perceived as synergistic (Kirchmeyer, 1992; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

A third theoretical perspective—the boundary view—emerged from the recognition of conflict and enrichment’s coexistence, as well as concern for a balance or fit between work and non-work lives (Ashforth et al., 2000, Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Boundary refers to the “physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities as separate from one another” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p.474). The notion of a boundary in this regard has served as a device for analysing how working adults respond to the depletion and expansion of resources during role combinations (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2012).

Furthermore, the boundary perspective has explicated the conflict-enrichment dichotomy by emphasizing that working adults striving to reduce conflict may simultaneously hinder enriching opportunities when combining work and non-work roles (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Importantly, boundary theory operationalizes different degrees of permeation in the deployment of physical, temporal, and psychological resources as the boundary preferences that delineate the degree to which individuals favour role integration or segmentation (Nippert-Eng, 1996). In this case, integration is associated with a blurred boundary between roles, where congruent aspects of two roles are more likely to enrich each other.

However, a blurred boundary also stimulates conflict, so segmentation can occur simultaneously. The assumption here is that integration is better used to maximize the opportunities of work and non-work enrichment, and that segmentation is more efficient at minimizing the depleting impact of work and non-work conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000). Therefore, integration and segmentation have been widely accepted as ongoing endeavours that occupy polarities on a continuum, along which
it is implied working adults constantly move backward and forward (Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012).

The three theoretical perspectives outlined above have inspired researchers to make significant advances in investigating how professional women interpret competing work and non-work demands. For example, whereas some studies find that work and non-work roles reciprocally influence each other (e.g. spill over), others indicate that they are independent, such that conflict and enrichment between work and non-work roles can be experienced in parallel (e.g., Powell & Greenhaus, 2006; Rothbard, 2001; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003). Still others report that conflict and enrichment have an interactive relationship, acting as a kind of buffer, or by balancing each other (e.g., Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990; Gareis, Barnett, Ertel, & Berkman, 2009). In other words, diverse interpretations of the competing demands surfacing from work and non-work interactions exist (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Maertz & Boyar, 2011).

However, empirical evidence for these perspectives of how people perceive conflict and enrichment has stemmed mostly from analysis of survey responses to items such as time allocation, and makes assumptions about the extent to which role obligations might interfere with one another (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Rothbard, 2001). According to Guest (2002) “any objective indicators such as working hours are themselves reflections of subjective social values” (p.259). In other words, family or other non-work involvements can be stressors, as well as sources of support for working adults. What may seem like conflict to one individual may not to others (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). Therefore, a more in-depth and individualized exploration is required regarding how professional women differentially interpret competing work and non-work demands.

In addition, although the three perspectives outlined have identified various strategies for coping with competing demands (Annink & den Dulk, 2012; Cederholm, 2014; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2014; Trefalt, 2013), how diverse strategies are differentially employed in response to the ongoing process of confronting resource depletion and generation has yet to be explained by these views (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2009).

Recent theoretical papers advocate utilising a tension perspective, as it offers a process view of perceiving and coping with persistent competing demands, which
may help to illuminate the subtleties of individuals working through contradictory experiences (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). As a tension perspective is adopted here to explore professional women’s subjective experience of competing work and non-work demands, a brief introduction to the tension literature is provided in the next subsection.

1.1.3 Perceiving and coping with competing demands through a tension lens

As a lens through which incompatible demands can be studied, a tension perspective has already been utilised across many disciplines (see Poole & van de Ven, 1989; Lewis, 2000). For example, studies about how individuals respond to organizational or workgroup tensions have been conducted in the fields of identity (Langley, Golden-Biddle, Reay, Denis, Hébert, Lamothe, & Gervais, 2012), leadership (Cate, 2013; Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Quinn, 1988), communication (Quinn, Hildebrandt, Rogers, & Thompson, 1991; Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007), and various change initiatives (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Leslie, Manchester, & Dahm, 2013).

Consistent across these studies is the assumption that tensions do not necessarily signify barriers to productivity, but rather represent an ongoing process of working through the “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3). Lewis and Smith’s (2014) definition of tension underscores two core features of tensions, namely that contradictory elements: (1) are ubiquitous and persistent forces, and (2) challenge and fuel long-term success. These two features imply a complex cognitive capacity to perceive and cope with persistent tensions, which this study argues can facilitate an understanding of the subjective dynamic beneath professional women’s construction of competing work and non-work demands.

In management literature, the traditional response to incompatible demands is characterized by either/or thinking, or encapsulated by the notion of a best fit, which entail making decisions that eliminate other options (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Nadler & Tushman, 1992). Alternatively, tension studies suggest that it is possible to attend to competing demands simultaneously (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009). In particular, research has shown that individuals are capable of managing tensions, and that this ability is related to organizational effectiveness (Denison et al.,
Smith and Lewis (2011) reviewed the tension literature and proposed a dynamic equilibrium model, integrating several attributes that facilitate competing cognitive frames, and thereby the effective management of tensions.

According to Smith and Lewis (2011), competing cognitive frames are enabled through individuals’ emotional equanimity, cognitive complexity, and behavioural complexity. Cognitive complexity is the ability to recognize and accept the interrelated relationship of underlying tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Behavioural complexity refers to the ability to engage in multiple, contradictory behaviours (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992), “while still retaining some measure of integrity, credibility, and direction” (Denison et al., 1995, p.526).

Crucially, by exhibiting cognitive complexity, individuals are able to take advantage of persisting tensions and fuel long term success. Working adults capable of exhibiting behavioural complexity and emotional equanimity tend to be more likely to accept uncontrollable, paradoxical tensions, where coping behaviours and interactions of tension categories reinforce contradictions, and often lead to “ironic outcomes in which efforts to manage the tensions produce the exact opposite of what was intended” (Putnam et al., 2013, p. 417).

In other words, a tension lens acknowledges the potential for a synergistic relationship between work and non-work roles (Kossek, Noe, & Demarr, 1999), yet also accepts the inevitable depletion of resources in confronting the simultaneous presence of work and non-work pressures (Mickel & Dallimore, 2009). The strategies for managing such tensions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, including: acceptance (e.g., Lewis, 2000), resolution (e.g., Smith & Lewis, 2011; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), and transcendence (e.g., Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabringer, & Townsend, 2008; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004).

Further, the various coping strategies required tend to be entangled (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), rather than simply facilitating positive spill over of affects or opportunities to generate resources. This view implies a less clear cut process for experiencing the enriching aspects of role multiplicity, which distinguishes it from the enhancement-enrichment perspective.
The tension perspective is also distinct from the conflict-depletion perspective, insofar as it acknowledges that pervasive tensions are neither inherently harmful nor demand resolution. Rather, tensions or opposing demands potentially represent “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3).

In addition, a tension perspective does not consider that conflict and enrichment are polar opposites in need of finding a balance, and is therefore also distinct from the boundary perspective. Indeed, research indicates that conflict and enrichment are perceived as orthogonal to one another, such that some working adults have been found to score highly in both conflict and enrichment self-perception (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006; Rothbard, 2001; Tiedje et al., 1990). In other words, variations exist with respect to how tensions provoked by the coexistence of resource expansion and depletion are brought into awareness (Marshall & Barnet, 1993; Mickel & Dallimore, 2009).

In particular, a tension perspective advocates a process view of how individuals become conscious of competing elements. Indeed, empirical evidence indicates that individuals are not only able to recognize organizational tensions (Hatch & Erhlich, 1993; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991; El-Sawad, Arnold, & Cohen, 2004), but also enact a process of coping that evolves from perceiving less complex tensions to a mindset change and complete reframing (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Westenholz, 1993). From this standpoint, tensions between work and non-work roles are both evolving and intertwined with the tensions existing within each domain.

To summarize, a tension perspective offers an alternative in which contradictory elements present an opportunity to stimulate development and growth (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Lewis & Smith, 2014). Therefore, unique among the perspectives discussed above, a tension view implies a more dynamic construction of the work and non-work relationship (Rothbard, 2001).

Following the proposition that tensions can be meta-theoretical perspectives (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), this study utilizes a tension lens through which to explore and elucidate the complexity of constructing competing work and non-work demands. However, there are potential problems with
directly transferring insights of framing and coping with tensions to a work and non-work context. These issues are further addressed in the next section.

1.2 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

As indicated in Section 1.1, from a tension perspective, competing demands are persistent (Tracy, 2004; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Such a perspective emphasizes the simultaneity of opposing ideas or actions, whereby contradictory elements are considered mutually interdependent. Hence, a tension lens is especially appropriate for exploring professional women’s perception of, and coping with competing work and non-work demands. Moreover, the competing demands from work and non-work domains have been the theoretical foundation for the two most dominant concepts in work and non-work literature: conflict and enrichment (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014).

Significantly, emerging research in work and non-work literature recognizes that professional women’s diverse interpretations of resource depletion and expansion might trigger perceived conflict and enrichment (e.g., Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009). Furthermore, empirical studies have shown that professional women tend to differentially interpret conflict and enrichment, despite common experiences of resource depletion and generation during work and non-work interactions (e.g., Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Tiedje et al., 1990). This suggests that conflict and enrichment are not merely perceived as resource subtraction or aggregation. The implication here is that discrete consideration of reducing conflict or promoting enrichment only provides a partial understanding of the complexity underlying resource investment decisions.

However, the potential impact of coexisting resource depletion and expansion for how competing work and non-work demands are perceived and managed has been neglected. This omission in work and non-work literature inhibits a clearer understanding of how diverse and even competing coping strategies are differentially employed by professional women (Kreiner et al., 2009).

In other words, work and non-work literature has identified what these competing demands are, such as the type of conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), or the level and episode of conflict (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). However, how coexisting conflict and enrichment impacts professional women’s perception and coping with
competing demands is not yet known (Bagger & Li, 2012). Therefore, more research is needed to unpack the process of how individuals move beyond the experience of competing role demands as obstacles to progress, and begin to foster personal growth.

Indeed, recent research has called for further exploration of individuals’ complex reasoning and management of tensions in the context of the work and non-work interaction (Mickel & Dallimore, 2009; Putnam et al., 2013). The ongoing efforts required to work through competing elements described in tension literature imply a more complex process for the construction of work and non-work tensions.

To date, a tension lens has only come to prominence in the management of organizational issues (Eisenhardt, Furr, & Bingham, 2010; Smith & Berg, 1987; Smith & Tushman, 1995). Until now, a tension lens has not been used to illuminate the perceiving and managing of tensions associated with simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles. The rationale for adopting a tension lens is discussed in the next section, which outlines this study’s research purpose.

1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to deepen understanding of the dynamics underlying diverse interpretations of competing work and non-work demands as constructed by professional women. While theoretical discussion exists on a process view of conflict and enrichment (e.g., Maertz & Boyar, 2011), and the ongoing tensions while enacting work and non-work roles (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009; Langley et al., 2013), work and non-work literature has mainly focused on specific strategies that are useful in reducing conflict and promoting enrichment. Little attention has been given, therefore, to how professional women utilize these strategies in light of the coexistence of resource depletion and expansion, and how these experiences subsequently impact professional women’s perception of competing work and non-work demands.

Instead of searching for a best fit among alternatives when encountering competing demands, a tension perspective advocates an ongoing cycle of recognizing and responding to the interrelatedness of contradictory demands. In other words, rather than a sudden shift of mindset, work and non-work interaction viewed through a tension lens is perceived and managed as a long-term process. Furthermore, the
ability to perceive enrichment during this process may have flow on impacts on subsequent perceptions of tension, which has yet to be explored. Building on the diverse frames of competing work and non-work demands, and the various competing coping strategies identified in the work and non-work literature, this study proposes to utilize a tension lens to seek deeper understanding of professional women’s construction of tensions.

It should be noted that utilizing a tension perspective is not intended to supplant the explanations offered by the three perspectives outlined in Section 1.1.2. However, these existing perspectives have considered competing demands that require immediate coping responses, whereas this study intends to explore professional women’s interpretations of contradictory demands that require ongoing efforts to work through.

In conclusion, empirical and theoretical insights from the tension literature point to the potential benefits of viewing competing work and non-work demands through a tension lens. Unlike the three established perspectives (see Section 1.1.2) that seek a solution or best fit in order to eliminate contradictory experiences, a tension view proposes that accepting and engaging with tensions can lead to short term performance benefits and long term sustainability (Lewis & Smith, 2011). A tension approach, therefore, has the potential to provide a more comprehensive framework through which the dynamic of various perceptions and management of competing work and non-work demands can be elucidated.

However, research has not as yet substantiated or challenged the applicability of a tension perspective for illuminating the perception and management of tensions associated with simultaneously enacted work and non-work roles. Therefore, a study of professional women’s perception and coping with tensions in such a context offers an opportunity to test the underlying assumption of a tension perspective: that persistent, contradictory forces inevitably challenge, but at the same time fuel, long term success (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Two research questions are thus proposed:

RQ1: How do professional women perceive tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

RQ2: How do professional women cope with tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?
1.4 CONTRIBUTION

By addressing the two research questions proposed above, this study will make two key contributions to work and non-work literature. First, this study can advance understanding of the complexity underlying professional women’s perception of competing work and non-work demands. To date, few studies have considered multiple interpretations of coexisting resource depletion and generation (see Marshall & Barnet, 1993; Tiedje et al., 1990), or how such interpretations might impact the perception of, and subsequent coping with, competing demands.

One reason for this limited attention is the literature’s narrow focus on the non-work domain as family, which tends to omit the interactive effects of multiple roles during work and non-work interactions. To capture important aspects of professional women’s situations and experiences, as well as how they construct competing demands and ascribe meaning in relation to their multiple work and non-work roles, this study adopts a broader view of multiple work and non-work roles in both domains.

In most instances, previous work and non-work literature has focused primarily on identifying the objective factors that determine the perceptions of episodic conflict or level of conflict (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). This study shifts the focus from how much and explores how the coexistence of perceived conflict and enrichment gradually impacts the evolving perception of tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions. To achieve this, a tension perspective is adopted, which emphasizes an evolving process of recognizing and working through interdependent contradictory elements. By so doing, this study scrutinizes how well current work and non-work theories capture the subjective experience of tensions at the individual level of analysis, thus answering the call for additional work to be undertaken that “[deals] with such temporally evolving issues as careers, work-family balance…from a process perspective” (Langley et al., 2013, p.10).

The second key contribution is to a more nuanced understanding of how diverse coping strategies have been differentially deployed and improvised by professional women. Thus, this study aims to move beyond the elusive goal of achieving a balance between work and non-work roles via a systematic exploration of how professional women select the appropriate strategy, or combination of
strategies, through which the utility of their repertoires can be amplified. By answering the two research questions, this study will contribute empirically grounded insights into the ongoing challenges of combining work and non-work roles. Thus, this study will have responded to the appeal from Kreiner et al. (2009) for more attention to be given to “the criteria people use to decide what aspects of life to integrate or segment” (p.719).

From a methodological standpoint, this study will contribute the novel integration of two research streams: tension and work and non-work research. The successful synthesis of these two interrelated fields for this study’s purpose would offer future studies additional scope in their efforts to elucidate the work and non-work relationship. Furthermore, by adopting a tension lens, this study can demonstrate the utility of using a tension perspective to illuminate the challenge of simultaneously enacted, but contradictory, roles at the individual level. The significance of adopting these two novel approaches lies in their potential to break new ground, and thus to enhance or challenge existing theoretical perspectives.

Beyond the theoretical and methodological, this study can also make a practical contribution. If addressing the research questions provides a more nuanced understanding of how work and non-work tensions are perceived and managed, then mutual benefit to employees and employers in terms of workplace expectations could be facilitated. For example, greater knowledge of employees’ individual differences in perceiving tensions, and the adjustments they make in response, could allow for more proactive decision-making in the implementation of policies that promote workplace equality, such as flexible working options (e.g., combining work with family, study, sporting commitments, or different lifestyle choices) (Fujimoto et al., 2012; De Cieri et al., 2005). Further, incorporating these individual differences in constructing tensions into workplace mentoring and training programs has the potential to reduce workforce anxiety.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

An in-depth interview design was undertaken to gather and analyse data appropriate for addressing the research questions. Thus, it was important that data provide rich descriptions and explanations of working adults’ reasoning of the ongoing encountering of tensions, a necessity well-served by an emergent qualitative
approach (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). For this purpose, data collection was via the purposeful sampling of 19 professional women who had undertaken a long period of professional engagement at the time of data collection. Therefore, they self-identified as being experienced in dealing with intense tensions resulting from work and non-work combinations. Participants were subject to in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

The analysis of interview transcripts was in accordance with the principles of an abductive research strategy (Blaikie, 2007, 2011), which involves constant comparison between existing theoretical concepts and emerging themes, and, based on these comparisons, revised coding and analysis. Methods adopted by previous work and non-work studies have yet to provide an in-depth exploration of the plausibility of applying a tension perspective to understand competing demands in a work and non-work context. Thus, it is premature to adopt either deduction to test or induction to evaluate (Van de Ven, 2007) the utility of a tension lens in the work and non-work context. For this reason, the abductive research strategy was chosen to explore propositions of the generalizability of a tension perspective to work and non-work interactions.

With respect to the analytic procedure, the researcher observed the different meanings participants gave to various work and non-work roles. Preliminary suppositions generated from participants’ interpretation of their experiences of tensions were then compared with existing conceptualizations of tensions in work and non-work and tension literature. Not only is the abductive research strategy appropriate for a study aimed at illuminating the subjective experience of coping with persistent tensions, it also addresses concerns about the validity of using perceptual measures to understand the complexity of constructing the work and non-work nexus (Casper et al., 2007; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The process of iterating between existing theoretical concepts and emerging themes facilitates the challenging of concepts previously held by the researcher, while also acknowledging the influence of present theoretical assumptions about tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions. Therefore, this process gradually builds up the researcher’s understanding of how participants’ subjective experiences connect with prior knowledge of tension-related constructs, and how those experiences are analytically compatible with existing theoretical concepts.
1.6 THESIS OUTLINE

The dissertation consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 2, two broad fields of inquiry within the literature are addressed: tension and work and non-work research. The literature points to the utility of a women-specific focus, where social, biological, and historical factors indicate that instances of tension in a work and non-work context are likely to be more readily observable, and salient to, professional women. Explicit attention is given to the four different perspectives of conceptualizing competing demands and their corresponding coping strategies, namely: conflict-depletion, enhancement-enrichment, boundary, and tension perspectives. The different conceptualizations of competing demands reviewed in this chapter are referenced and compared during subsequent data analysis and discussion (see Chapters 3-7). By fusing the tension and work and non-work literature in Chapter 2, two research questions are identified that specifically explore the dynamics of professional women’s perception and coping with work and non-work tensions.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used to answer the stated research questions. More specifically, this chapter is a justification for both the adoption of an abductive research strategy, as well as the choice of in-depth interviews to elicit participants’ perceptions of how enacting multiple work and non-work roles are in tension. Adhering to the principles of abductive reasoning, Chapter 3 also serves to explain the analytic procedure of constantly iterating between inductive coding and existing theoretical concepts in order to interpret participants’ hidden assumptions and beliefs, as well as their reasoning for perceiving tensions. This process of constantly comparing existing theoretical concepts with emerging themes serves two purposes: first, it facilitates sufficient immersion in the participants’ sense of reasoning about their social world; and second, the interaction of data and theories enhances the researcher’s sensitivity to the theoretical connection between the participants’ subjective experience and existing conceptualizations of competing demands.

As the first of three data analysis chapters, an overview of three key findings relating to the two research questions is presented in Chapter 4. This provides a foundation for a more detailed analysis and discussion of these findings in Chapters 5 and 6. The first key finding is that persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and
external demands. The way professional women respond to interactions between internal and external demands impacts how they perceive and cope with tensions, which leads to the second key finding: that professional women orient themselves in one of four ways to these persistent tensions, with coping strategies—or combinations of strategy—contingent upon their orientation. The third key finding is that perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally impact each other, as the way in which tensions are managed gradually influences how latent tensions become salient.

In Chapter 5 the perceived tensions—and corresponding coping strategies—for Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants are explored and explained. Work-oriented participants perceived the source of salient tensions as deriving from the non-work domain, and perceive tensions as a ‘tug-of-war’ and ‘overwhelming’. Conversely, Non-work-oriented participants perceived tensions as ‘encroachment’, derived from the work domain. In terms of coping, Work-oriented participants used a ‘cost-benefit’ strategy for managing the ‘tug of war’ and ‘overwhelming’ tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles. Non-work-oriented participants, on the other hand, adopted a ‘give and take’ strategy to cope with the perceived ‘encroachment’ of work demands on their non-work lives. Chapter 5 also discusses how the persistent nature of the tensions reflected in participants’ perception and coping strategies is consistent with the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

The perceived tensions—and corresponding coping strategies—of Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants are explored and explained in Chapter 6. Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants perceived tensions between work and non-work roles as an ‘everlasting ebb and flow’, whereas Paralysed Dual-oriented participants perceived tensions as ‘submersion’. While Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants accepted their own limits with respect to changing external demands, they were able to differentially adjust their self-expectations. They adopted an ‘elasticity’ strategy to cope with the ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ of tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles. On the other hand, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants constructed internal standards to align with expectations from work and non-work role-related partners, and experienced paralysis when internal and external demands were misaligned. Consequently, they adopted a ‘grass is
greener on the other side’ strategy for coping with the ‘submersion’ of the tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles.

Further, the perceived tensions and coping strategies adopted suggest that professional women explicitly emphasize the interactive effects of internal and external demands. Several researchers have sought to explain these ongoing interactions by utilising the Yin-Yang symbol (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Indeed, the symbol is adopted in this study to reflect the ongoing interplay between internal and external demands, which leads to the reciprocal relationship between perceived tensions and coping strategies (see Figures 7.2-7.5). In particular, the virtuous and vicious cycles proposed by tension literature (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014) are used to explain the positive and negative self-evaluations observed in Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants respectively.

The analysis is completed in Chapter 7, with an elaboration of the four orientations to persistent work and non-work tensions, and clarification of the reciprocal relationship between perceiving and coping with these persistent tensions. The theoretical implications of this study’s findings are discussed, thus illuminating the nuance that underlies professional women’s construction of competing work and non-work demands. To this end, this study achieves its purpose of deepening the understanding of the dynamics underlying professional women’s perception of, and coping with, competing work and non-work demands. Chapter 7 also presents the practical contributions made by this study’s findings, together with its limitations and related suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review: Competing Demands and a Tension Perspective

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 1, in this study, professional women’s subjective experience of competing work and non-work demands are explored through a tension lens (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Consequently, the tension and work and non-work literature are reviewed in order to clarify how previous research has viewed professional women’s interpretation of the challenges of enacting roles in both work and non-work domains. Of equally importance, this review is undertaken to consolidate understanding in the tension and work and non-work literature concerning the dynamics that underpin perceiving and coping with tensions. Indeed, the perception and management of tensions are reflected in the research questions emanating from this review.

As tensions are explored in this study through professional women’s experience, a justification for using this demographic is provided by first reviewing research where the competing demands encountered by professional women during work and non-work interactions have been investigated (Section 2.2). In this context, three theoretical perspectives reflected in the work and non-work literature in relation to perceiving and coping with competing demands are reviewed to support the claim that the individual dynamic of constructing competing, multiple work and non-work roles is deserving of further research attention. First, Section 2.3 reviews two competing perspectives of the work and non-work relationship—conflict-depletion (Section 2.3.1) and enrichment-enhancement (Section 2.3.2). Thereafter, attention is given to a boundary perspective, in which conflict and enrichment coexist (Section 2.3.3). Section 2.3.4 provides a critical summary of these three perspectives, suggesting a complexity in the subjective experience of competing work and non-work demands that has yet to be explored.

Section 2.4 provides a critical review of the tension literature as an alternative lens through which to explore professional women’s perception and coping with
competing work and non-work demands. To provide a context for the utility of a tension lens in work and non-work research, the theoretical assumptions of the tensions underlying organizational research are also discussed. Particular attention is given to the complexity of perceiving (Section 2.4.1) and working through (Section 2.4.2) the various types of tension proposed by organizational research. More specifically, it is the evolving nature of working through the persistent tensions emphasized by the tension perspective that has the potential to allow a finer-grained exploration of the complexity of subjective experiences of tensions in a work and non-work context.

Section 2.5 comprises a discussion of the theoretical leverage afforded by adopting a tension perspective to understand the complexity of perceiving and coping with the competing demands emerging during work and non-work interaction. An attempt is also made to explicate the difficulty of effectively applying insights from research on organizational tensions to the context of work and non-work interactions. To conclude the review, Section 2.6 provides research questions that aim to elucidate the nuance of professional women’s perception and coping with tensions.

2.2 PROFESSIONAL WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE OF COMPETING DEMANDS DURING WORK AND NON-WORK INTERACTIONS

As an increasingly prominent topic of daily discourse reflecting people’s desire to live fulfilling personal and professional lives, interactions between work and non-work life spheres attract significant academic attention. Although the wish for both productive work and non-work lives is not specific to either gender, given the distinctive life paths of women and men, the literature recognizes that the experience of the work and non-work interaction varies by gender (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

Due to the increasing proportion of women in the workforce, and the corresponding change in gender role expectations and family life, recent literature has specifically explored the competing demands encountered by women in employment (Huhtala, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012; Losoncz & Bortolotto, 2009; Skinner, Van Dijk, Elton, & Auer, 2011). For example, research has investigated women’s juggling between the so-called ‘double shift’ of paid work and domestic duties, as well as the conflicting identities between professionalism and entrenched
gender stereotypes (Martin, 2004; Buzzanell et al., 2005; Cabrera, 2009). Professional women with heavy family responsibilities have also been a major focus, with the assumption that women with careers who are also caring for young children or elderly family members are more likely to experience intense competing demands between different life roles; hence, making work and non-work interactions more challenging (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009; Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Given their heavy investment in professional training and education, professional women are more likely to engage in demanding and intellectually challenging work than other job holders, and are therefore also more likely to encounter competing work and non-work demands (e.g., Beham, Drobnič, & Präg, 2011; Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). However, professional women often enjoy considerable work autonomy and are capable of constructing a dynamic view of their experiences of work and non-work interaction (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009). Thus, the complexity of professional women’s responses to competing work and non-work demands attracts ongoing research attention (Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012; Wattis, Standing, & Yerkes, 2013).

Furthermore, research also indicates that the challenge of role multiplicity for women is more complicated than family interruptions (Cabrera, 2007; Kamenou, 2008; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). Other barriers to effective engagement in both work and non-work domains include a male dominated organizational culture (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Watts, 2009), entrenched social expectations (Gregory & Milner, 2008; Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009), and a lack of role models or personal motivation (Bickel, 2012). In addition, with a growing percentage of women earning professional degrees (Slaughter, 2012), professional women—with or without dependents—are more assertive in pursuing their careers as expressions of personal fulfilment (Sandberg, 2013). Thus, the literature points to the utility of a women-specific focus, where social, biological, and historical factors indicate that instances of competing work and non-work demands are likely to be more readily observable—and salient to—professional women (e.g., Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Hence, in this study, a broader focus is adopted to investigate professional women’s
efforts to enact multiple work and non-work roles, regardless of their family responsibilities.

Indeed, the diversity and availability of choices with respect to employment and education have changed women’s lifestyles dramatically in the last four decades. Further, the changing expectations of the general public and women themselves regarding their work and non-work roles provides a crucial frame through which women engage with society. With these changes in mind, definitions of work as “instrumental activity intended to provide goods and services to support a life” (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000, p.179) become more applicable to women over time. As for the various roles that professional women embrace beyond work, the literature has adopted descriptors such as life, family, or home (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

Pichler (2009) criticized previous work and non-work research for overemphasising the work-related aspects and for narrowly defining non-work as ‘home or family’. It could therefore be argued that insights gained from previous work-family research cannot be generalized to the broader work and non-work spectrum (see Kamenou, 2008). Indeed, it may be that the stronger the emphasis placed on the work and family relationship, the stronger the resentment triggered in women as well as men who are single, child free, or living non-traditional lifestyles (Engler, Frohlich, Descarries, & Fernet, 2011; Slaughter, 2012). Furthermore, it could be argued that narrow conceptualizations of role multiplicity are inadequate for capturing important aspects of professional women’s situations and experiences, thus undermining understanding of how they construct competing demands and ascribe meaning in relation to their multiple work and non-work roles.

To eliminate confusion and be inclusive of all relevant literature during the review process, the umbrella construct of work and non-work is adopted throughout to describe the interaction between paid work and all other unpaid work related activities. Thus, the term non-work encompasses family, as well as other salient areas of social engagement (e.g., personal development, recreation, volunteering, and community activities) (Grawitch, Maloney, Barber, & Yost, 2011).

The literature has specifically explored the dynamic for professional women in perceiving and coping with the competing demands from work and non-work life (e.g., Bowen & Hisrich, 1986; Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000; Syed & Pio,
Three perspectives of the perceived competing work and non-work demands, together with their implications for coping strategies, are reflected in the work and non-work literature (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). As Jennings and McDougald (2007) noted, researchers tend to hold one of two competing views: the dominant conflict-depletion perspective (Rothbard, 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985); or the enrichment-enhancement perspective (Rothbard, 2001; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). A third perspective, boundary theory, considers work and non-work interaction in terms of the intention to reduce conflict and induce enrichment simultaneously (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). All three perspectives are elaborated in the next section to scrutinize the subjective experience of competing demands surfacing from work and non-work interaction.

2.3 THREE PERSPECTIVES OF COMPETING WORK AND NON-WORK DEMANDS

The theoretical origin of competing work and non-work demands is role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), and it assumes that both work and non-work entail multiple roles, each of which places demands on the individual. Kahn et al. (1964) identified roles as an expected pattern, or a set of activities or potential behaviours that exist in individuals’ minds:

The life of an individual can be seen as an array of roles which he plays in the particular set of organizations and groups to which he belongs. These groups and organizations, or rather the subparts of each which affect the person directly, together make up his objective environment. Characteristics of these organizations and groups (company, union, church, family, and the rest) affect the physical and emotional state of the person, and are major determinants of his behavior (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 11).

If the basic assumption of role theory is followed, then human life seems to be composed of interdependent roles and interlocking behaviours (Kahn et al., 1964). Occupants of these roles are exposed to the expectations and social pressures of other members with whom they are interdependent (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975). In other words, competing demands between work and non-work roles can be obligations and
expectations that are both externally and internally imposed (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Similarly, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argued that role pressures are partly produced by role senders, but are also due to self-perceptions of role requirements, which can be based on a person’s beliefs, values, and personality traits.

In order to investigate such a broad range of interactions between different life roles, Near, Rice and Hunt (1980) suggested that conceptualization of the work and non-work relationship should be broken down into components. Hence, researchers have operationalized challenges during work and non-work interactions as the perceived depletion and expansion of various personal resources, as well as the consequent decisions for resource allocation (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lobel, 1991). Therefore, in the context of this study, resources are defined as the physical, social, intellectual, and psychological assets that women use to productively perform work and non-work roles (see Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010). Thus, resources is henceforth a term used to refer to both tangible and intangible personal assets and rewards gained during work and non-work interactions.

By meeting role demands, individuals receive extrinsic rewards from various work and non-work role-related partners (recognition, advancement, and money) and intrinsic rewards during interaction with others (meaningfulness, feeling worthwhile, value that creates incentive to self-invest) (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). These rewards stimulate positive moods and emotions, thus facilitating the development of other tangible or intangible resources. Failure to meet demands activates negative emotions and moods, thereby diminishing opportunities for resource generation. The work and non-work resources identified in the literature are summarized in Table 2.1. How these resources have been operationalized by the work and non-work literature is elaborated in the following three subsections.
Table 2.1
Types of Resources Used during Work and Non-work Interactions (Adopted from Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of resources</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical resources</td>
<td>Physical skills, health, money, house, time, or physical energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social resources</td>
<td>Marriage or partner’s support, social support networks (e.g., support from friends, family members, managers, colleagues and organizational policy, culture).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual resources</td>
<td>Knowledge, intellectual complexity, skills, perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological resources</td>
<td>Personal characteristics (e.g., resilience, optimism, creativity, autonomy (e.g., control, latitude), meaningfulness, feeling worthwhile, value that creates incentive to self-invest, satisfaction, joy, pride.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.1 The conflict-depletion perspective

The underlying assumption of simultaneous engagements in work and non-work domains as conflicting and resource depleting is based on the principles of human energy scarcity (Goode, 1960) and resource drain (Piotrkowski, 1979), which hold that an individual’s time and energy are finite. In this view, devoting attention to one role will limit the resources available to invest in other roles (Goode, 1960). Resource scarcity can be illustrated by a metaphorical pie, in which time and energy (or other resources) are represented by one ‘slice’ of activity, thereby reducing the amount of pie available for other roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996).

By assuming that a polarization exists between work and non-work domains, the resource scarcity perspective sees enacting multiple work and non-work roles simultaneously as incompatible. Thus, work and non-work conflict arises when rewards from both domains are perceived to have equal value, but where individuals are unable to engage both domains for rewards simultaneously (see Figure 2.1). Consistent with this view, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from each domain are incompatible to some degree. This study adopts a broader conceptualization of conflict derived from the interaction of work, family, and other non-work roles.
Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) distinguished three components of work and non-work conflict: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when time pressure in one domain creates difficulty for individuals to engage in another domain. In strain-based conflict, stress in one domain leads to strain symptoms, such as fatigue or irritability, in another domain. Behaviour-based conflict occurs when role expectations from one domain (e.g., detachment or being critical) are incompatible with behaviour expected in another domain (support and warmth). More recently, Greenhaus, Allen and Spector (2006) added a fourth component, energy, which explicitly recognizes that cross-role interference in performance is a necessary condition for conflict to occur. Table 2.2 summarizes the identified sources of conflict and provides examples of the depletion of physical and psychological resources.
### Table 2.2

*Types of Work and Non-work Conflict (Adapted from Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time-based</td>
<td>Time pressure at work may create difficulty for individuals to fulfil non-work roles.</td>
<td>I come home late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strain-based</td>
<td>Stress in either a work or non-work domain leads to strain (fatigue and irritability) on the individual.</td>
<td>I come home cranky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour-based</td>
<td>Role expectations from work (detachment or being critical) are incompatible with behaviour expected at non-work (supported and warmth).</td>
<td>I come home in “work mode”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy-based</td>
<td>The energy level in one role diminishes performance in the other.</td>
<td>I come home tired.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: to maintain consistency with the literature, ‘home’ refers to a broader array of life circumstances other than domestic duty (see Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Kreiner, 2006; Kreiner et al., 2009; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).*

Hence, in the conflict-depletion view, the experience of competing work and non-work demands highlights the incompatible nature of enacting work and non-work roles, in which resources are pulled in opposing directions. An important question for research at this juncture is how individuals approach these competing work and non-work demands under the conflict-depletion perspective. The literature offers several possible constructions.

*Role stress* follows the sources of conflict identified by Greenhaus and Beutell, (1985), and refers to people’s effort to transfer finite resources from one domain to another (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). An alternative approach to the competing work and non-work demands in the conflict-depletion perspective is *negative spill over*, which refers to the negative mood generated in one domain that ‘spills over’ to another during work and non-work interactions (Lambert, 1990; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). *Compensation*, on the other hand, refers to individuals who differentiate their resource investments with the intention of offsetting dissatisfaction in one domain by seeking satisfaction in another (Staines, 1980; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Thus, the basic assumption of approaching competing work and non-work demands that underlies the conflict-depletion perspective is that people generally
seek to reduce competing work and non-work demands by compartmentalizing or segmenting work and non-work domains, thereby preventing role strain generated in one domain from contaminating the other. In the original segmentation approach to work and non-work interaction, it is considered that each role places unique demands on the individual, and that the two domains should be treated as psychologically, physically, temporally, and functionally separate (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Dubin, 1973). Challenging this inherent division between work and non-work, Piotrkowski (1979) demonstrated the purposive separation of domains. According to this stream of research, people disengage psychologically by suppressing work-related thoughts and feelings while in the non-work domain (Kahn et al., 1964), or by setting physical boundaries to prevent one domain from intruding upon the other (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

To date, research has made significant advances in approaching different types of conflict that jeopardize working adults’ satisfaction with work and non-work interaction. For example, in early research, conflict was measured uni-directionally (see Carlson & Frone (2003) for a review), such that only the conflict that occurred as a result of work interfering with family was explored. In later research, conflict was found to be bi-directional in nature, with work domain variables more strongly interfering with the family domain (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991; Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009). Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996) developed and validated a ten-item measure that recognized the bi-directionality of conflict, but not its multi-dimensionality in terms of time, strain, and behaviour conflict (detail items on the work-family conflict scale and family-work conflict scale see Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996, p.410). However, Stephens and Sommer (1996) developed a multi-dimensional scale that included time, strain, and behaviour (after Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), but only from the uni-directional perspective of work interfering with family.

Building on these measurements, Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) developed a six-scale measure of work-family conflict that included the combination of time, strain, and behaviour, as well as the bi-directional nature of conflict (work-family, family-work, detail items for each of the six-scale measure see Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000, p.272-274). Furthermore, recent empirical studies have reported that work interfering with family and family interfering with work are
distinct constructs (Beham, Drobnič, & Präge, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Voydanoff, 2004). The pervasiveness of measures of perceived conflict has inspired other researchers to investigate coping strategies, such as negotiating for flexibility and autonomy in job design, as well as in career development planning (Annik & den Dulk, 2012); prioritizing competing demands by outsourcing domestic work or part-time working (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Watts, 2009); and self-employment (Cederholm, 2014).

However, attributing causality to perceived conflict has relied mainly on self-report measures based on a specific episode between work and family roles (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). It could therefore be argued that scholars’ understanding of how competing work and non-work demands are associated with perceived conflict is potentially obscured by the difficulty of accurately identifying the causality of conflict. As an illustration, researchers have suggested that engaging in an occupation with considerable control over their schedule does not necessarily increase individuals’ satisfaction during work and non-work interactions (e.g., Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009; Warren, 2004; Yerkes, 2009).

Further, in a study examining satisfaction with combining work and family roles among professional and non-professional part-time service sector employees, Beham, Präge and Drobnič (2012) reported that professionals were found to profit less from reduced working hours and experienced lower levels of satisfactory work-family interaction than non-professionals. This finding implies a less straightforward view of which factors lead to conflict for professional women.

Indeed, research has recognized that there are individual differences in terms of how competing demands between work and non-work domains are constructed (Lobel, 1991; Parker, Johnson, Collins, & Hong, 2013). For example, in a meta-analysis of the relationship between work and non-work conflict and burnout, Reichl, Leiter and Spinath (2014) underlined the need for a more differentiated measurement of conflict, as individuals are from different cultures and may interpret moderators such as parental status, marital status, and working hours differently.

One possible reason for this is that flexible work arrangements and other workplace support are not available to everyone, especially women living non-traditional lifestyles (e.g., Engler et al., 2011). Another reason underlying the
individual differences in perceiving sources of conflict was posited by Lobel (1991), who proposed two different perspectives of investing resources to meet competing work and family demands.

The first of these perspectives—a utilitarian approach—suggests that people invest in those roles that yield more rewards than costs (Lobel, 1991), which assumes that people seek to minimize their resource losses and maximize resource gains when encountering competing demands requiring an immediate response. Alternatively, Lobel (1991) suggested that social identity salience speaks to long-term behavioural choices or general tendencies, suggesting that people invest in social groups with which they have a strong sense of belonging, regardless of the perceived costs or rewards associated with competing roles. Following this line of thinking, conflict occurs when the underlying values associated with each role contradict each other.

Although both utilitarian and social identity salience perspectives explicate the different meanings for work and family interaction constructed by professional women, researchers have rarely considered how individuals construct competing demands in the light of roles other than work and family (see Engler et al., 2011; Grawitch et al., 2011). However, it is problematic to exclude other non-work roles, as multiple work and non-work roles are held simultaneously and embedded in the broader social context within which people’s perception of competing demands are formed (Ladge et al., 2012; Trefalt, 2013; Hall, Kossek, Briscoe, Pichler, & Lee, 2013).

Hence, it is argued that specifically building on insights drawn from conflict between work and family might have limited and oversimplified our understanding of how particular episodes of resource depletion impact professional women’s perception of competing work and non-work demands (see also Bono, Glomb, Shen, Kim, & Koch, 2013; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Notwithstanding the alternatives to the conflict-depletion view discussed in the following sections, additional research is required to improve understanding regarding professional women differentially interpret competing work and non-work demands.

2.3.2 The enrichment-enhancement perspective

Rather than seeing the work and non-work relationship as a pie containing slices of finite resources, research has drawn on Marks’ (1977) role expansion
theory, in which resources are considered expandable. Studies have also been influenced by role accumulation theory (Sieber, 1974), which suggests that individuals engaging in multiple work and non-work roles can simultaneously experience both enrichment-enhancement and conflict.

The enrichment-enhancement perspective recognizes the reciprocal impacts of the work and non-work interaction, whereby experiences in one domain will generate effects on the other that result in similarities between the two (Chow & Berheide, 1988; Lambert, 1990; Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980; Voydanoff, 1980). Similarly, Piotrkowski (1987) reported that positive spill over can occur during work and non-work interactions, whereby transferable resources (e.g., positive mood, skills) flow from one domain to the other, thereby increasing the latter’s productivity. Again, it is important to consider how the literature views an individual’s approach to the competing work and non-work demands under the enrichment-enhancement perspective.

Researchers have conceptualized positive work and non-work interactions in various constructs: enhancement (Sieber, 1974), facilitation (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007), positive spill over (Rothbard, 2001; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), and enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne and Grzywacz (2006) clarified the subtle distinction between each of these constructs, emphasizing that enrichment captures people’s active agent role in synthesizing available resources. Hence, in this study, the term ‘work and non-work enrichment’ is adopted to describe women’s attempts to foster a positive work and non-work relationship. Specifically, enrichment refers to “experiences in one role improving the quality of enacting the other role” (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p.73).

Empirical evidence for the circumstances under which enrichment-enhancement might occur during work and non-work interactions was provided by Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer and King (2002), who conducted two studies that explored the relationship between commitment to multiple roles and female managers’ psychological well-being and leadership competencies. By multiple roles, the authors referred to: “a variety of roles outside of occupation, including but not limited to the parent and spouse roles, to which an individual is strongly committed” (Ruderman et al., 2002, p.369). Their research indicated that female managers’ commitment in the
non-work domain generated resources that enhanced their managerial effectiveness. Six types of resources were identified: psychological benefits, emotional advice and support, practice at multi-tasking, relevant background, opportunities to enrich interpersonal skills, and leadership practice. Further, Ruderman et al. (2002) suggested that women can live balanced professional and personal lives by gaining synergy through performing multiple roles.

Apart from empirical support, the concept of work and non-work enrichment has also triggered theoretical discussion aimed at amplifying its positive impact of enacting work and non-work roles. For example, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) developed a theoretical model to illuminate the process by which resources generated and transferred between work and non-work domains can produce enrichment. According to this model, enrichment can occur via two paths. First, the instrumental path, along which resources generated in one domain’s role can be directly transferred to a role in the other domain, thereby promoting enhanced performance in the latter. Second, the affective path, through which positive moods and emotions derived from one domain indirectly promote positive influences in a role from the other.

Echoing one of the key assumptions about conflict, research has shown enrichment to be bi-directional in nature (Shockley & Singla, 2011). Simply put, work to family enrichment occurs when work experiences improve the quality of non-work life; and family to work enrichment occurs when non-work experiences improve the quality of work life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne and Grzywacz (2006) established and validated a self-report measure for both directions of work-family enrichment. Given that the various resources generated during work-family interactions may or may not be applicable across domains (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), Carlson et al. (2006) developed a self-report measure that incorporated multiple dimensions of enrichment, but did not insist that all types of enrichment worked bi-directionally. Carlson et al. (2006) showed that work-to-family enrichment includes development (personal development), affect (mood and attitude gains), and capital (psychosocial resources); whereas family-to-work enrichment includes development, affect, and efficiency (resource gains of time and efficiency).
The bi-directionality of both conflict and enrichment has been well researched, and validated direct measures of conflict and enrichment during work and non-work interactions have been established (e.g., Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Hakanen, Peeters, & Perhoniemi, 2011; Michel et al., 2011). These measures have guided research to explore the relationship between the antecedents, moderators/mediators, and the consequences of resource depletion and expansion (e.g., Grzywacz & Demerouti, 2013; Maertz & Boyar, 2011). However, given the mixed success of social support aimed at reducing perceived conflict and promoting perceived enrichment (Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011), studies have begun to consider the possibility of a more complicated process underlying the construction of the work and non-work relationship.

As an illustration, scholars now suggest that the scope of enrichment be broadened to further enable exploration of how people allocate resources that frustrate as well as facilitate the enactment of work and non-work roles (Carlson et al., 2006; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). According to Powell and Greenhaus (2010), enrichment encompasses synthesizing a broader set of resources that include psychological, social capital, and material resources, while positive spill over emphasizes the specific transfer of positive affect, values, skills, and behaviours (Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006).

Along similar lines, Kossek, Noe and Demarr (1999) described the joint enactment of work and caregiver roles as role synthesis, whereby resources associated with both roles were perceived as beneficial to their healthy functioning. In particular, the authors introduced the concept role embracement to capture the passion that individuals devote to a role, suggesting that role embracement can coexist with severe role compartmentalization or segmentation. Thus, Kossek et al. (1999) hinted at more complex processes underlying the perception of enrichment.

In other words, although enrichment creates a psychological buffer, enacting multiple work and non-work roles inevitably depletes some resources. Demonstrating this, Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity (2009) surveyed over 5000 Irish employees and revealed different responses to four flexible working arrangements: flexi-time, part-time hours, working from home, and job-share. The authors found that participants considered working from home to be a form of work intensification, as it was felt to cause greater intrusion of work into family time.
More specifically, part-time work, flexi-time, and job sharing were found to have different impacts on men and women. According to Russell and her colleagues (2009), only women reported that flexi-time and part-time hours reduced work pressure, but without a significant effect on how conflict was perceived. Job sharing, on the other hand, was not perceived as having a noticeable impact on work pressure among women, but was associated with greater levels of work interfering with non-work life than reported by men. The different responses between men and women raise an interesting question: How do professional women construct competing work and non-work demands when support from flexible working arrangements can expand their personal resources?

In other words, although Russell et al.’s (2009) findings revealed a differentiated response to various working arrangements, they only investigated the self-report of conflict and enrichment in isolation. It is argued that this inattention into how coexisting resource depletion and expansion influence the perception of conflict and enrichment prevents a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics of the subjective experiences of work and non-work interactions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the gender difference in perceived conflict and enrichment observed by Russell et al. (2009) is based on a survey of general evaluations of working arrangements and the four types of conflict (time, strain, behaviour, and energy) suggested by the literature (see Table 2.2). However, it is unclear which elements of personal involvements in both work and non-work domains were associated with gendered responses to perceived conflict and enrichment.

Thus, it could be argued that in-depth explorations are required to further specify what individual attributes distinguish working adults’ responses to competing work and non-work demands. Therefore, the sampling of professional women in this study is an opportunity to collect relevant data to illuminate the underlying complexities of constructing competing demands.

To summarise, the discussion thus far emphasises the importance of investigating the increasing understanding that work and non-work interactions are an ongoing process during which resources are continuously depleted and expanded (Bono et al., 2013; Watts, Standing, & Yerkes, 2013). Therefore, more research is required to unpack the process of how individuals move beyond the experience of
competing role demands as obstacles to progress, and begin to foster personal growth and maturation.

2.3.3 The boundary perspective

Studies investigating work and non-work interaction have moved beyond the conflict and enrichment-based perspectives to consider how these opposing views might work in combination. That is to say, views have emerged in which the enactment of multiple roles both depletes and expands resources during work and non-work interactions (Rothbard, 2001). Within such perspectives, boundary theory provides a useful lens for understanding how individuals allocate limited, yet expandable resources when combining multiple work and non-work roles (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

The boundary perspective has been used in several disciplines to refer to the “physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities as separate from one another” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474). According to Zerubavel (1991), people simplify their interaction with the surrounding environment as different spaces, by socially constructing a mental fence. Nippert-Eng (1996) conceptualized the process of creating, maintaining, and dismantling mental fences as boundary work, through which people transit smoothly between work and non-work domains. As an example of how individuals conduct boundary work, Clark (2000) proposed a border theory, conceptualizing three types of borders between work and non-work domains: physical, temporal, and psychological. Physical and temporal boundaries emphasize the concrete time and locations in which individuals conduct work or non-work activities. The psychological boundary represents “rules created by individuals that dictate when thinking patterns, behaviour patterns, and emotions are appropriate for one domain but not the other” (Clark, 2000, p.756).

In an earlier study, Hall and Richter (1988) proposed the idea of exploring episodic boundary transition to understand the impact that positive and negative effects in both work and non-work domains have on each other. Subsequent research has substantiated this episodic approach to boundary work by operationalizing the three types of boundaries proposed by Clark (2000) as the allocation of various physical and psychological resources to meet work and non-work demands. Examples of such episodic resource allocation strategies include the customization of the timing and location of work (Sonnentag, Kuttler, & Fritz, 2010; Warren, 2004);
using technology, such as teleworking, across work and non-work borders to manage the expectation of important role senders (Clark, 2002; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006); and using support from friends, family members, or hired outside help, prioritizing work and non-work demands, or cognitive reappraisal of perceived resources gained and lost (Wiersma, 1994).

Contrasting the episodic boundary work outlined above, there is evidence of more enduring attempts to explain how the work and non-work boundary is managed. For example, enduring boundary management strategies include negotiating for flexibility and autonomy in job design, as well as in career development planning (Annink & den Dulk, 2012; Li & Yeo, 2011); prioritizing competing demands by outsourcing domestic work or part-time working (Guillaume & Pochic, 2007; Watts, 2007); or via self-employment (Cederholm, 2014). Both episodic and enduring boundary work assume stable role identities (Ashforth et al., 2000).

In an effort to encompass both episodic and enduring boundary perspectives, Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2009) classified four tactics to manage boundaries: behavioural, temporal, physical, and communicative. These strategies include a range of physical, cognitive, and relational resource allocation tactics in which professionals cross work and non-work role boundaries (Kreiner et al., 2009; Wiersma, 1994; Sturges, 2012).

Furthermore, boundary research has specified that individuals develop preferences for role boundaries that exist on a continuum from segmentation, where work and non-work roles have high separation; to integration, where work and non-work roles are often combined (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Segmented boundaries are more inflexible and roles are rigidly conducted at specific places and times. In contrast, integrated boundaries have a high degree of overlap and operate flexibly with cross-role interactions (Ashforth et al., 2000; Winkel & Clayton, 2010). Figure 2.2 summarizes the various types of boundary work that take place along the integration-segmentation continuum, where each strategy is aimed at reducing conflict and inducing enrichment.
The key contribution of the boundary perspective in the context of this study is that it not only extends the purposive segmentation view of work and non-work domains as a way of reducing conflict, but also acknowledges that both domains are inextricably intertwined, enriching each other via integrated boundaries (Clark, 2000). In other words, the boundaries between multiple work and non-work roles are not separate, mutually exclusive spheres of life (Lewis, Rapoport, & Gambles, 2003). Rather, the conceptual boundary distinguishes life into two spheres through a fluid boundary, but without a rigid separation of the two spheres (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) proposed that those who separate work and non-work domains will have difficulty crossing role boundaries, whereas people with high role integration will have difficulty maintaining boundaries. The assumption here is that integration is better used to maximize the opportunities of work and non-work enrichment, and segmentation is more efficient at minimizing the depleting impact of work and non-work conflict.

Recent studies have empirically tested this claim. For example, in an examination of full-time managers’ and professionals’ experience of work-family conflict and enrichment, Powell and Greenhaus (2010) found that role segmentation was negatively related to conflict, as the clear boundary between work and family protected people’s family domain from work-related interruptions. At the same time, role segmentation was found to inhibit the beneficial transfer of positive affect, values, skills, and other resources from work to family. Alternatively, integrating the work and non-work boundary via the use of modern communication technologies (e.g., smartphones, e-mail, etc.) creates difficulties in psychologically detaching one
domain from the other, thus increasing psychological strain (Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011; Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman, & Boswell, 2012).

Significantly, Ilies, Wilson and Wagner (2009) reported the coexistence of work and non-work conflict and enrichment during boundary transition. Integrating boundary theory and spill over theory, Ilies et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the spill over effect of daily job satisfaction onto employees’ family lives. They found both a positive and negative affect can be generated when people try to integrate work and family roles. In the same vein, Paustian-Underdahl, Halbesleben, Carlson and Kacmar (2013) reported family-to-work enrichment in employees who attempted to integrate work and non-work domains, but with the negative impact of reducing supervisors’ ranking for their promotion.

The evidence from boundary research therefore suggests that neither integration nor segmentation alone can effectively reduce conflict and induce enrichment. Consequently, recent boundary studies indicate that enacting multiple work and non-work roles is an ongoing process of finding the ideal mix of segmentation and integration (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009). It should be noted that boundary researchers’ conceptualization of people’s construction of boundary work when encountering competing work and non-work demands assumes a stable role identity. Indeed, Ashforth et al. (2000) suggested that individuals’ choices between integration and segmentation were based in the first instance upon perceived differences between the roles that they identified with.

Building upon role identity theory, boundary studies assume that individuals have multiple role identities that manifest as the multiple work and non-work roles they hold simultaneously (see Stets & Burke, 2000). The greater the contrast between two roles, the more likely segmentation is to be adopted. A second factor impacting individuals’ preference for integration or segmentation is the ease of boundary transition, determined by the external factors that influence individuals to physically or psychologically transit between roles. For example, Kossek, Lautsch and Eaton (2012) argued that an individual’s boundary management strategy is determined in part by the nature of the work being done, and in part by individual differences.

Person-environment (P-E) fit provides a useful framework with which to understand how role identity and the ease of boundary transition jointly influence preferences for integration or segmentation (Kreiner et al., 2009). In this context, ‘fit’
represents people’s cognitive appraisals of having adequate resources to meet the demands from work and non-work domains (Clarke, Koch, & Hill, 2004; Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008). P-E fit emphasizes that both role identity and the ease of boundary transition are co-constructed between the focal person and various work and non-work role related partners, as well as environmental factors such as workplace culture (Bouchikhi, 1998; Barnett, 1998; Kreiner, 2006). By stabilizing role identities and emphasizing the search for fit between domains, concrete boundary work can effectively reduce time, strain, and behaviour-based conflict via the enactment of corresponding temporal, psychological, and physical boundaries between work and non-work roles (see Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Importantly, building on stable role identities and the assumption of searching for a best fit, Kreiner et al. (2009) distinguished boundary incongruence from conflict. They defined boundary incongruence as a mismatch between an individual’s preference for segmentation or integration when faced with competing work and non-work role demands imposed by family members, supervisor/superior, subordinates/staff, customers/clients, and occupations.

Furthermore, based on interviews with 60 male and female priests, Kreiner et al. (2009) specified that such mismatches manifest themselves in two forms. The first form, intrusion, occurs when an individual desires segmentation, but integration is forced by role senders. The second kind of mismatch is distance, which occurs when an individual with a preference for integration is forced to segment. It was found that episodic competing role demands that violate preferred role boundaries can be resolved by boundary work tactics, although the frequency and intensity of episodic violations can go far beyond the event itself and manifest as long-lasting, generalized states of conflict.

Significantly, the distinction between boundary incongruence and conflict indicates that people are not only capable of transfiguring external role demands to effectively resolve boundary incongruence, they are also able to adjust their preference for boundary integration and segmentation to increase their tolerance for boundary incongruence. For example, Kreiner et al. (2009) reported that the male and female priests expressed varied perceptions of the intensity and frequency of boundary violations. Thus, while conflict research has emphasized how external demands impact individuals, boundary incongruence emphasizes individuals’ self-
initiated efforts to push back against external role demands (Maertz & Boyar, 2011; Kreiner et al., 2009).

However, an interesting question remains unanswered: How do individuals create the conditions whereby boundary violations will not evolve into long-lasting conflict, but potentially turn into an enriching experience? According to Kreiner et al. (2009), some priests in the study experienced work and non-work enrichment by “drawing upon meaningful family experiences for sermons”, or “becoming a different kind of person because of the priesthood or family roles, which then had a positive impact on the other domain” (p.727). While this goes some way to answering Kossek et al.’s (1999) call for future research to explore enriching work and non-work interactions (see Section 2.3.2), more research is required to elucidate how work and non-work role synthesis is achieved, and to identify the critical leverage points for the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles.

More specifically, boundary studies indicate that, in practice, individuals never enact integration or segmentation in its complete form. Rather, some elements of integration and segmentation are combined in every attempt. Empirical evidence from Hall and Richter’s (1988) study into how resources are utilized in meeting multiple role demands drew on in-depth interviews with 60 full-time employed dual career couples. Hall and Richter (1988) identified three episodic boundary transition styles: anticipatory (where psychological concern begins before the person physically leaves the current domain), discrete (where psychological concern begins upon arrival), and lagged (where psychological concern begins after the person physically leaves the current domain). It was found that within daily boundary transitions, the anticipatory style was used from home to work, while discrete transitions were used from work to home.

Crucially, Hall and Richter’s (1988) finding indicates that even within an episodic transition, people’s choice between integration and segmentation is not a zero-sum game in which more of one means less of the other. This implies a nuanced differentiation between integration and segmentation that has yet to be fully explored, particularly where inducing enrichment and reducing conflict are considered simultaneously. Nevertheless, some studies have made progress in this direction. For example, Wajcman, Bittman and Brown (2008) reported a directional distinction between attempts at integration and segmentation. Drawing on a
telephone survey of 1,358 participants aged 24 to 55, the authors investigated how mobile phones affect the ease of transition between work and non-work roles. Rather than using mobile phones as an extension of work, it was reported that participants mainly used their mobile phones to connect with family and friends.

In the same vein, Kreiner et al. (2009) found that some priests were able to differentially integrate aspects of the work and non-work domain, while concurrently segmenting other aspects. This indicates that, rather than focusing exclusively on segmentation or integration, the two competing preferences can exist simultaneously. Indeed, to further tease out the nuance between integration and segmentation, Kreiner et al. (2009) suggested more attention be given to “the criteria people use to decide what aspects of life to integrate or segment” (p.719). Subsequently, Kossek and Lambert (2012) reported that employees’ perception of general wellbeing is less than satisfactory, even if they are empowered to negotiate a preferred work and non-work boundary. It could be argued, therefore, that a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying individuals’ responses to competing demands will not only facilitate more efficient boundary management in employees, but also encourage organizations to develop and implement supporting policies.

To summarize, by stabilizing integration and segmentation at both ends of a continuum, current boundary studies have generated rich insights regarding how people differ systematically in their ability to psychologically and physiologically disengage from one role and re-engaged in another (Kreiner et al., 2009; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2014). However, when resources are perceived as constantly depleting and expanding (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), the core assumption that individuals search for an ideal mix of integration and segmentation does not fully capture the dynamics that govern the construction of responses to competing work and non-work demands.

2.3.4 Summary of the three perspectives of competing work and non-work demands

In Section 2.3 three theoretical perspectives of competing work and non-work demands were presented. The conflict-depletion perspective is based on the assumptions of resource scarcity and conflict reduction coping strategies. On the other hand, the enrichment-enhancement approach assumes that resources are expandable and emphasizes the enriching experience of enacting work and non-work
roles. Both perspectives have neglected how the interactive effects of coexisting depletion and generation of personal resources may potentially impact the perception of conflict and enrichment.

This study argues that treating conflict and enrichment in isolation leads to a mechanical view of resources allocation. As indicated by Figure 2.1, the process of enacting work and non-work domains is considered in terms of striving for an equal investment of finite resources. Furthermore, neglecting the coexistence of resources depletion and generation overlooks how enrichment occurs where role synthesis (Kossek et al., 1999) is achieved.

Bringing together these two competing views, the boundary perspective proposes that resources are both depleting and expandable during work and non-work interactions. The boundary perspective concerns the search for the right balance between work and non-work domains through the building of a mental fence between roles in order to reduce conflict and increase enrichment. Specifically, the boundary perspective incorporates two competing boundary preferences—segmentation and integration—which respectively describe individuals’ desire to reduce conflict and induce enrichment.

While the boundary perspective recognizes that combining integration and segmentation of work and non-work roles is an ongoing process, previous research has assumed their mutual exclusivity by presenting them as two ends of a continuum. However, recent studies challenge such a continuum view of deploying competing coping strategies by providing empirical support for a differentiated enactment of integration and segmentation (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2009; Wajcman et al., 2008). Although these empirical studies have revealed the complexity of synthesizing diverse boundary management strategies, subsequent literature has been restricted to a discussion, rather than an empirical illumination of the psychological dynamics governing this process.

To summarize, the three perspectives reviewed thus far do not clarify under what circumstances people make situational attributions to either work or non-work domains when constructing tensions. Furthermore, these perspectives have failed to explain individuals’ differentiated employment of diverse coping strategies in response to episodic conflict, boundary incongruence, and long term or general sense of conflict.
The alternative, emerging stream of tension research offers a process view that may help to illuminate the subtleties of individuals working through contradictory experiences. Therefore, the following section aims to provide a context for the utility of adopting a tension lens to investigate the complexity of perceiving and coping with competing work and non-work demands. To this end, the tension literature is reviewed to underline its untapped potential for elucidating the dynamic of constructing competing demands within the work and non-work perspectives previously outlined.

2.4 A TENSION PERSPECTIVE TO THE DYNAMIC OF PERCEIVING AND COPING WITH COMPETING DEMANDS

2.4.1 Introducing a tension perspective

In management literature, the traditional response to incompatible demands is characterized by either/or thinking, or encapsulated by the notion of a best fit, which entail making decisions that eliminate other options (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Nadler & Tushman, 1992). Alternatively, tension studies suggest that people can attend to competing demands simultaneously. Indeed, considerable research demonstrates that effective management of tensions is related to organizational effectiveness (e.g., Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009; Lewis, Welsh, Dehler, & Green, 2002).

In addition, organization and management researchers have adopted a tension approach to explore issues that are in a conflict of perspectives, values, actions, or principles (Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabringer, & Townsend, 2008; Stoltzfus, Stohl, & Seibold, 2011; Sutherland & Smith, 2011). Furthermore, a tension perspective is of increasing importance as organizational complexity and change initiatives have intensified tensions in the workplace (Sonenshein, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2010; Smith, 2014).

Consequently, the number of organizational tension studies has expanded, leading to a high degree of divergence across definitions in the literature. For example, various concepts used in the literature to describe tensions include conflict, duality, dichotomies, and ambivalence (see Lewis, 2000; Stohl & Cheney, 2001). To avoid confusion in this study, Lewis and Smith’s (2014) definition is adopted, in
which tensions are considered “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (p.3).

Lewis and Smith’s (2014) definition underscores two core features of tensions, namely that contradictory elements: (1) are ubiquitous and persistent forces; and (2) challenge and fuel long-term success. These two features are considered in the next two subsections, which aim to illustrate both the complexity of perceiving (Section 2.4.2) and coping (Section 2.4.3) with tensions. To provide context for situating the dynamics of constructing tensions, the four categories of organizational tension reported in the literature are reviewed in Section 2.4.2. Although these tensions are related to organizational complexity, their inclusion serves to highlight the utility of viewing competing work and non-work demands through a tension lens.

More importantly, researchers have proposed that tension can be used as a meta-theory for understanding multiple competing theoretical perspectives (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). By exploring the complexity of perceiving and working through ubiquitous and persistent tensions, and how these tensions challenge and fuel long-term success, contradictory elements are shown to be mutually interdependent when viewed through a tension lens. Therefore, although tension literature is predominantly of an organizational focus, insights can be leveraged by examining the similarities and differences between the underlying assumptions of tension research and those of the work and non-work literature.

2.4.2 Different perceptions of tension

The assumptions underpinning Lewis and Smith’s (2014) definition are that tensions are enduring forces routinely encountered in daily life, characteristics that highlight the inherent nature of tensions. The ubiquitousness of tensions deriving from organizational decisions is demonstrated, for example, by the choices made between exploration and exploitation, or flexibility and efficiency (Besharov & Smith, 2013; Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006; Quinn, 1988). Moreover, as organizations and their varied subgroups become more complex and adaptive, the internal development of these organizations also becomes increasingly diverse, nonlinear, and unpredictable (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Sitkin, See, Miller, Lawless, & Carton, 2011). It is not difficult to visualize, therefore, how tensions embedded within the organizational environment impact the individual, which is the level of analysis adopted in this study.
As an illustration, Smith and Lewis (2011) identified tensions that derive from three environmental forces, namely: plurality (stakeholders have different interests, which create competing goals), change (incompatible emotions or identities resulting from organizational change), and scarcity (competing for limited finance, temporal, or human resources). It is important to note that these environmental forces occur simultaneously. For instance, changes in organizations coexist with multiple, competing expectations from stakeholders, thus, intensifying the scarcity of finite resources (see Smith & Lewis (2011) for a review). In other words, plurality, change, and scarcity were not experienced discretely by organizational members.

The coexistence of inevitable environmental impacts creates four categories of organizational tension (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The first category, learning tensions, refers to unlearning past knowledge and engaging in new ideas (Fumia, 2003; Lewis, 2000). The second category, performing tensions, occurs when plurality, change, and scarcity coexist to create competing goals and strategies for organizational members (Luscher & Lewis, 2008). The third category, organizing tensions, exists where confusion over how the process of performing competing goals is experienced by organizational members (Lewis, 2000). The fourth category, belonging tensions, is created when learning, organizing, and performing tensions are confronted, which creates competing role expectations in multiple stakeholders (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Lewis, 2000; Luscher & Lewis, 2008).

Importantly, Smith and Lewis (2011) contend that “tensions operate between, as well as within the four categories” (p.384), where the coexistence of categories spurs further tensions of learning, performing, belonging, and organizing, and thus creates a perpetual cycle. Figure 2.3 shows the interactions between the four categories of tension as they are impacted by coexisting environmental forces, thus signifying the ubiquitous and persistent nature of tensions.
Although tensions can take different forms and coexist, researchers have recognized the cognitive and constructivist nature of tensions (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Westenholz, 1993). In other words, not every working adult is aware of the ubiquitous and persistent nature of tensions embedded in the constantly changing environmental forces. Indeed, the relationships between contradictory elements have been the subject of intense scrutiny in tension literature (Eisenhardt, Furr, & Bingham, 2010; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Of particular relevance to the current study, tension literature has explicitly discussed the diversity of people’s perception of tensions (Gibbs, 2009; Benson, 1977; Seo & Creed, 2002; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Indeed, Smith and Lewis (2011) openly discussed the distinctions between three different types of organizational tension as experienced by individuals. The authors visualized the characteristic features of these three tensions (dilemma, dialectic, and paradox), as shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.3. Four Categories of Tension Impacted by Three Environmental Forces (Adopted from Lewis, 2000; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011)

Figure 2.4. Smith & Lewis’ (2011) Visualization of Dilemma (a), Dialectic (b), and Paradox (c)
In Figure 2.4, a dilemma denotes opposing forces that have clear advantages and disadvantages that require individuals to make trade-offs, where the scales emphasize the distinction between polar opposites. Thus, Smith and Lewis (2011) presented dilemmas as competing choices, each with pros and cons, but where choosing one is incompatible and detrimental to the alternative. Viewed as a dilemma, therefore, tensions can be solved by weighing the pros and cons between two competing alternatives and choosing either one side or the other (Mickel & Dallimore, 2009; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Alternatively, a dialectic approach (see picture b, Figure 2.4) is an ongoing process whereby two contradictory forces (A and B) synthesize with a new one (C). Tensions resurface when the new element (C) confronts its opposition (D), thus completing a transfer of tensions from those between A and B to tensions between C and D. Hence, dialectics are a constant and perpetual interaction between polar opposites, where tensions are resolved temporarily by finding a synthesis between two forces (Hyman, 1989). In other words, a dialectic view signifies an everlasting integration of two competing forces, which implies that tensions are never resolved, but rather manifest differently by merging the similar aspects of opposites (Baxter, 1990; Benson, 1977). Thus, by seeking to eliminate contradictions, dilemma or dialectic approaches offer only temporary solutions, as underlying tensions inevitably resurface.

On the other hand, when no choice is made between contradictions and each other’s existence relies on the sustainability of their opposite, A paradox arises (see picture c, Figure 2.4). A paradox is defined as “contradictory yet inter-related elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p.382). As illustrated by the Yin-Yang symbol in Figure 2.4 (picture c), a paradox emphasizes a changing balancing act across opposites (Janasz, Forret, Haack, & Jonsen, 2011). In this view, although the boundary between A and B shows that they are two contradictory elements, they clearly form a unified system. In other words, incompatible forces are perceived as an interconnected whole separated by a fluid boundary.

A paradox view advocates tolerating disorder in contrast to dilemma and dialectic perspectives (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Such a coexistence of opposites is
often characterised in the literature as ‘two sides of the same coin’, which emphasizes the interdependence of incompatible forces (e.g., Lewis, 2000). However, being able to perceive a paradox is not just a sudden shift of mindset or frame-breaking, it is an ongoing commitment to the recognition and interpretation of tensions, or the capacity Westenholz (1993) referred to as ‘paradoxical thinking’. As Ford and Backoff (1988) suggested, a paradox is “some ‘thing’ that is constructed by individuals when oppositional tendencies are brought into recognizable proximity through reflection or interaction” (p.89).

In addition, emerging theoretical and empirical research has discussed how paradoxes may overlap and evolve into—and from—dilemmas or dialectics (Clegg, 2002; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith, 2014). This process implies the potential for individuals to perceive the connection between contradictory elements embedded in organizational life (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Luscher and Lewis (2008) provided empirical evidence of the evolution of perceived tensions by exploring how middle managers made sense of three seemingly inconsistent issues that surfaced during major restructuring. Initially, managers in Luscher and Lewis’ (2008) action research interpreted three issues—changes in roles, relationships with team members, and organizing of tasks—as dilemmas. Specifically, managers considered that they could either be in control or allow others to make decisions regarding their responsibilities for both delegation and productivity.

Through a collaborative process, Luscher and Lewis (2008) developed a form of ‘paradoxical inquiry’. This amounted to a sense-making process during which managers were encouraged to conduct reflexive questioning, and challenge their way of thinking, as well as their current understanding of the relationship between the three issues. Managers became aware of their either/or mindset, and that pulling too far to one side could prove counterproductive. For example, some managers started to see changes in roles, relationships, and organizing of tasks as the paradox of performing, belonging, and organizing, where the development of team members could adversely impact task delivery, but also spark creativity and enhance productivity. In other words, tensions of performing, belonging, and organizing are both contradictory and interrelated, and the coexistence of these tensions stimulates
additional, persistent tensions. In this way, Luscher and Lewis (2008) demonstrated that managing tension does not imply eliminating, fighting, or even resolving tensions, but instead involves tapping the energy of opposing perspectives by shifting managers’ expectations for linearity and rationality.

However, this process of reframing also stimulates new tensions, and enhanced creativity may not necessarily increase productivity in the short term, consistent with a tension lens’ emphasis on the persistent and inevitable nature of competing forces. Crucially, with respect to this study, Luscher and Lewis’ (2008) research is significant as it contextualizes how the coexistence and interaction of performing, belonging, and organizing tensions are experienced by individuals (see Figure 2.3).

Furthermore, it could be argued that where paradoxes overlap and evolve into—and from—dilemmas or dialectics reveals an evolving process regarding how the persistent nature of the three types of tension are brought into awareness: whether contradictory elements are gradually perceived to be simultaneously interrelated, coexisting, and persistent (Smith & Lewis, 2011). It is argued that the diverse framing of competing demands and the potential for evolving perceived tensions can inform the complexities beneath individuals’ subjective experience of tensions in the context of work and non-work interactions, elaborated upon in Section 2.5 of this review.

To summarize, this subsection reviewed individuals’ perception of tensions surfacing from organizational life, providing a context for situating the dynamics of constructing tensions. Particular attention was given to three conceptualizations of organizational tension: dilemma, dialectic, and paradox. The relationship between these tensions drives the potential for individuals to continually develop different perspectives of competing demands. The next subsection discusses how different perceptions of tensions influence the deployment of coping strategies.

2.4.3 Coping with tensions

The strategies for coping with ubiquitous and persistent tensions is reviewed in this subsection, which this study argues can be usefully applied to illuminate the complexity of professional women’s efforts to cope with tensions in a work and non-work context. The discussion regarding coping with tensions begins with a review of how cognitive and behavioural responses vary depending on the three different
perceptions of tensions presented in Section 2.4.1, namely: dilemma, dialectic, and paradox. To help illustrate these differences, Table 2.3 summarises the coping strategies identified by the literature for each of these perceived tensions.

Table 2.3
Coping of Organizational Tensions (Adapted from Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Seo et al., 2004; Smith, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
<th>Explanation of coping strategies</th>
<th>Tensions perceived as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation; Separation (Spatial and Temporal)</td>
<td>Emphasizing the uniqueness of contradictory elements and considering their coexistence as incompatible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizing through integration and accommodation</td>
<td>Juxtapose contradictions cognitively and seeking a solution to accommodate contradictory parties.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercising paradoxical thinking through an iterated process of acceptance, confrontation, and transcendence</td>
<td>An ongoing cycle of accepting the unresolvable tensions, confronting rather than avoiding the contradictions through irony and humour, and transcending dichotomies into a reformulated whole via reframing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously discussed, working adults perceiving tensions as dilemmas or dialectics tend to seek solutions to resolve tensions (see Section 2.4.1). To resolve dilemmas, which emphasize the uniqueness of contradictory forces and the choosing of one over the other, differentiating competing demands and addressing each separately has been suggested as an appropriate strategy (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek 2004). Poole and Van de Ven (1989) theorized two forms of separation: *spatial separation*, which specifies the level distinction when coping with competing demands; and *temporal separation*, which takes into account the time horizon within which two contradictory demands are dealt with in alternating cycles.

*Spatial separation* has been operationalized in the tension literature as handling organizational contradictory demands at different organizational levels or units, exemplified by the term “structural ambidexterity”, whereby organizational divisions
follow different business models to simplify their task assignments (Tushman & O’Reilly, 1996). Alternatively, *temporal separation* suggests a temporal sequencing of allocating attention to competing demands.

_Spatial and temporal separation* emphasize the space and time constraints experienced by organizational members when coping with competing demands, and have been found to effectively reduce task complexity (Markides & Oyon, 2010). Given that the focus of this study is professional women’s subjective experience of competing demands, it is important to consider the implications of a separation approach for the construction of competing demands at the individual level.

According to Poole and Van de Ven (1989), successfully utilizing *spatial separation* requires specifying precisely how different levels connect to each other, and recognizing that this connection is important in avoiding silo problems such as inhibiting the distribution of knowledge (see Lessard & Zaheer, 1996). Furthermore, the successful utilization of temporal separation requires awareness of how a subsequent focus on one pole of competing demands is influenced by a previous focus on the other pole (Fredberg, 2014; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989).

Therefore, successfully engaging in separation requires what Eisenhardt, Furr and Bingham (2010) described as *higher-order expert cognition*, which includes using multiple mental templates to appreciate the unique nature of distinct levels, as well as the capacity to switch perspectives that guide the transition from one strategic orientation to another. However, Sonnentag (1998) raised concerns about how well-developed and highly efficient expertise may reduce people’s willingness to accept opposing alternatives, thereby blinding them to new ideas. In the same vein, the cognitive expertise advocated by Eisenhardt et al. (2010) may lead to what Dane (2010) described as ‘entrenchment’. Cognitive entrenchment arises when high expertise results in rigid thinking, thus constraining people’s creativity and flexibility in problem solving (Dane, 2010).

To date, tension studies have been unable to unpack how individuals can overcome such self-perpetuating cognition by embracing competing frames simultaneously. Recognizing the innate difficulty of studying individuals’ subjective experience of tensions, Poole and Van de Ven (1989) noted that most attempts at separating simultaneous competing demands temporarily resolve tensions, yet leave
the issue of how individuals decide upon the transitioning point during temporal sequencing between two contradictory coping strategies unexplored.

Rather than leaning towards the spatial or temporal separation of opposing poles, synthesis offers an alternative solution that emphasizes the equal value and similarities of competing elements by integrating or accommodating two poles (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Thus, a synthesis approach corresponds with a dialectical perception of tensions (see Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, tension research recognizes that achieving synergy is not simply a matter of compromising at a middle ground, but requires constructing a new perspective or reframing of the existing perception of competing elements (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989).

To further reveal the complexity of deriving a new frame and working through persisting tensions, organizational researchers have advocated paradoxical thinking (Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014; Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014). Indeed, as illustrated in Section 2.4.1, a paradox overlaps with dialectics where two opposing alternatives are not perceived as mutually exclusive, and new tensions surface that can be resolved temporarily (Clegg, 2002; Beech, Burns, de Caestecker, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2004; Smith, 2014). When the valued distinctions emphasized by dilemmas and the similarities emphasized by dialectics are simultaneously brought into awareness, a paradox emerges (Fredberg, 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Lewis (2000) suggested three overarching approaches to operationalize paradoxical thinking: acceptance, confrontation, and transcendence. In the case of acceptance, individuals recognize that attempts to eliminate tensions are impossible, and instead choose to live with, rather than confront, competing demands. For example, in an exhaustive study of eighty professional string-quartet musicians in England and Scotland, Murnighan and Conlon (1991) found that less effective string quartets had ongoing conflicts between first and second violinists. However, the more successful string quartet members were able to accept their own desire for personal autonomy and the authority of the conductor, while at the same time accepting the tensions of autonomy and strong group leadership.

The fundamental difference between the successful and less successful string quartets, Murnighan and Conlon (1991) argued, was their different perceptions about the nature of tensions. Successful string quartets expressed appreciation for the conflicting perspectives about how a piece should be played, but managed to put
these diverse perspectives aside for the sake of a unified performance. In this way, inconsistent perspectives in a group became inconsequential interference, which also stimulated creativity during rehearsals. However, disagreements within the less successful string quartets were reported to be unbearable, and quartet members played the tune their own way in concert.

**Confrontation** reflects the utilizing of communication strategies such as irony and humour to openly construct an accommodating response to contradictory elements (Hatch & Erhlich, 1993; Jameson, 2004). Such strategies implicitly accept that tensions are unresolvable, an acceptance that Lewis (2000) argued facilitates critical examination of entrenched assumptions. This process stimulates construction of a more accommodating perception of contradictory poles, hence, leading to better confrontation of opposing elements, which in turn reinforces greater acceptance. In other words, intertwined acceptance and confrontation leads to awareness of previous mental frames that no longer accurately portray reality, or what Westenholz (1993) described as de-framing, whereby individuals become open to different perspectives.

**Transcendence** emerges from the process of confronting, accepting, and gradually de-framing previous frames of reference, thereby allowing individuals to effectively interact with the dynamic environment (Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabring, & Townsend, 2008; Seo et al., 2004). Based on ten-year observations of employees’ sense-making of an organization’s remuneration system, Westenholz (1993) proposed that “paradoxical thinking is a process through which employees establish a new relationship with the situation they are in” (p. 56). Therefore, **acceptance**, **confrontation**, and **transcendence** form a recursive cycle with no clear starting and end points.

A paradoxical approach should be adopted cautiously, however, as paradoxical thinking and working through tensions creates considerable emotional load (Lewis, 2000; Westenholz, 1993), thus provoking cognitive contradiction in individuals (Eisenhardt, Furr, & Bingham, 2010). Underlining this point, Luscher and Lewis’ (2008) action research illustrated how awareness of paradoxical tension denotes more exposure to paradoxes, which may trigger procrastination and paralyse action for middle managers.

Significantly, the capacity for perceiving and managing paradoxes is not distributed equally in the population, and thus not all individuals adopting
paradoxical thinking will achieve positive outcomes (see Westenholz, 1993; Lewis, 2000). Indeed, experiencing paradoxes frequently engenders anxiety (e.g., Lewis, 2000) and ‘paralysis’ (Westenholz, 1993), and the enactment of strategies can involve considerable effort on the part of individuals that may take a long time to achieve (Lewis, 2000; Luscher & Lewis, 2008).

Therefore, it is important to recognize that paradoxical thinking is an effortful process beyond the abilities of many, and that no assumptions regarding the capacity of the professional women sampled in this study are made. It could be argued that acceptance, confronting, and transcendence reflect the outcome of an individual’s ability to cope with paradoxical tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). To this end, a relatively small but growing body of research has attempted to shed light on the individual experience of confronting and working through tensions.

For example, Smith (2014) observed and interviewed senior leaders from six top management teams with strategic commitments to both exploiting existing products and exploring opportunities for innovation. It was found that three of the six senior leadership teams focused predominantly on either exploration or exploitation success. Importantly, rather than observing senior leaders’ responses to a single event, Smith (2014) engaged her investigation for a longer timeframe during which senior leaders were found to swing between integration and differentiation of exploration and exploitation over time.

Elaborating on the shifting pattern of coping she observed, Smith (2014) found that for those senior leaders who shifted attention between integration and differentiation over time, a deeper understanding of the connection between competing strategic goals was revealed. In this way, senior leaders reported that contradictory coping strategies (integration and differentiation) were not only complementary, but also interdependent in sustaining the coexistence of nuanced distinctions that fuel long term success. Smith (2014) concluded that dilemmas (such as either commitment to exploration or exploitation) and paradoxes (both exploration and exploitation) could be perceived as intertwined. In other words, a tension perspective suggests an ongoing balancing of both/and and either/or thinking (Li, 2012).

By suggesting such a balancing act, it is argued that a tension perspective advocates an ongoing cycle of recognizing and responding to the interrelatedness of
contradictory demands, and thus can assist with better understanding of the complexities beneath an individual’s subjective experience of tensions in the context of work and non-work interactions. Therefore, tension literature offers a more nuanced way manage contradictory demands by empirically and theoretically exploring the cognitive dynamics of individuals attempting to embrace two equally important opposing alternatives. For this reason, adopting a tension lens may help to enhance understanding of the dynamics beneath the construction of tensions in a work and non-work context.

2.4.4 Summary of the individual dynamic underneath the construction of tension

The three perspectives of competing work and non-work demands reviewed in Section 2.3 revealed how the potential impact of coexisting resource depletion and expansion has been neglected at the individual level. This omission in the work and non-work literature inhibits a clearer understanding of how diverse and even competing coping strategies are differentially employed by professional women (Kreiner et al., 2009). The underlying dynamics of working through competing elements described in the tension literature imply a more complex process for constructing tensions during work and non-work interactions.

Rather than searching for a best fit among alternatives when encountering competing demands, a tension perspective suggests the need for constant balancing between coping with the challenging aspects of two opposing alternatives, and recognizing—or even cultivating—the enabling aspects (Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2013; Lewis & Smith, 2014). This dynamic balancing act is formed by the ongoing cycle of: (1) shifting perceptions of relationships between contradictory demands; and (2) shifting patterns of deploying multiple competing coping strategies to work through the recursive and cascading tensions.

The value of a tension lens, therefore, is that it not only acknowledges the different cognitive frames surrounding competing demands, but also emphasises the transformative capacity of people’s perception of tensions, and thus their potential to continually develop different perspectives of competing demands (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, recognizing the connection between contradictory elements requires constant cognitive effort and emotional resilience.
whenever tensions are brought into awareness, together with actions to work through persistent tensions between work and non-work domains.

To date, a tension perspective has only come to prominence in the management of macro-level tensions, although researchers have recently suggested the potential application of a tension lens for addressing competing work and non-work demands at the micro level (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2013). An explanation of how the dynamic of constructing tensions can be applied to understanding individual experiences of competing work and non-work demands is provided in Section 2.5.

2.5 THE UTILITY OF A TENSION PERSPECTIVE TO COMPETING WORK AND NON-WORK DEMANDS

This section of the review focuses on the potential utility of a tension lens to understand competing demands surfacing from work and non-work interactions. In Section 2.5.1, this potential is discussed in terms of what a tension lens can add to the understanding of the complexity of individuals’ subjective experiences of competing work and non-work demands. In Section 2.5.2, the methodological limitations of applying a tension lens to competing work and non-work demands are considered.

2.5.1 Different constructions of tensions during work and non-work interaction

Working adults are not only exposed to the coexistence of organizational tensions (as depicted in Figure 2.3) such as learning, organizing, performing, and belonging (see Smith & Lewis, 2011), but are also required to meet competing demands during work and non-work interaction. In the context of this study, tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles challenge short term success, as this process inevitably depletes some resources available to certain roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). However, it also generates resources to meet other role demands, as the enrichment-enhancement perspective suggests (Kreiner et al., 2009; Rothbard, 2001).

Indeed, tensions are persistent and pervasive not just in organizations, but also within individuals’ non-work lives. Powell and Greenhaus (2006) discussed the circumstances under which the coexistence of conflict and enrichment between work and non-work domains can challenge, as well as fuel, long term success. As an example, Powell and Greenhaus (2006) suggested that having young children at
home can facilitate more effective communication skills that will improve efficiency in the workplace, while at the same time negatively impacting the flexibility available for work demands.

In this case, family-to-work enrichment simultaneously accentuates family-to-work conflict. Similarly, a high-pressure culture in the workplace can increase performance and skill levels that can be successfully applied domestically, but may also have negative affective consequences (e.g., irritability) that can interfere with personal life. Such negative consequences were described by Powell and Greenhaus (2006), who argued that simultaneous attempts to enact multiple work and non-work roles generate their own root of tensions.

In order to simultaneously reduce conflict and promote enrichment, work and non-work research has focused on how to better utilize limited personal resources. For example, ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) provided a work-home resources model to explain how the processes of enrichment and conflict develop over time. They viewed work and non-work conflict and enrichment as processes comprising antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes. As an illustration, changes in personal resources (e.g., time, energy and mood) are identified as linking mechanisms between the two constructs.

According to the model, family and work conflict with—or enrich—each other depending upon on the specific combination of contextual demands and resources. This approach is similar to what Smith and Lewis (2011) referred to as a contingent approach, which “views time as linear and quantitative and change as a predominantly episodic experience. Such efforts require an orientation characterized by risk management and rational decision making” (p.396).

However, it could be argued that viewing conflict and enrichment as resource subtraction or aggregation omits individuals’ diverse interpretations of competing experiences. As discussed in Section 2.3.2, empirical evidence has revealed individual differences in responding to the coexistence of resource depletion and expansion. This is exemplified by Russell et al.’s (2009) findings that suggest a differentiated response to factors that might trigger perceived conflict and enrichment.
Similarly, Grzywacz and Bass (2003) examined three types of relationships between work-family conflict and enrichment. Conflict was operationalized as demands derived from the interaction between work and family domains, as well as from within each domain, and enrichment as resources generated from both work and family domains, or the interaction of the two.

According to Grzywacz and Bass (2003), enrichment eliminating conflicts was conceptualized when family resources enabled participants to frame work-family demands as non-threatening, and no further attention or action was required. Alternatively, although both conflict and enrichment were perceived by participants, generated resources were perceived as insufficient to buffer demands during work and non-work interactions. This independent yet coexisting relationship was operationalized as the independent-effects model of conflict and enrichment. Finally, when demands were perceived as threatening, but were manageable because the perceived resources gained exceeded those demands, the work-family interaction was operationalized as a balance model. This type of interaction between conflict and enrichment explicitly focuses on people’s cognitive appraisal, or a perceived fit with respect to resources gained and lost.

Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that enacting multiple work and non-work roles are perceived by professional women as more than just conflicting and enriching. For example, Tiedje et al. (1990) conducted a two-wave study to examine how working women perceived conflict and enrichment when they took on roles such as mother, professional, and partner simultaneously.

First, the authors interviewed 69 women to develop a scale regarding the extent to which women’s perception of their roles conflicted with—or enriched—one another. The resulting items were used to measure women’s perceived combination of conflict and enrichment. Data from the second wave study drew from a random sample of 158 married women who were college professors and middle-level managers. In a challenge to previous assumptions that conflict and enrichment were mutually exclusive, Tiedje et al. (1990) found that perceptions of both were weakly associated. This supported the authors’ perception typology model, in which four combinations of coexisting conflict and enrichment were obtained by combining scores on these two dimensions (high-high; low-low; high-low; low-high).
Consistent with Tiedje et al.’s (1990) finding, Marshall and Barnett (1993) investigated the experience of combining work and non-work roles by interviewing 300 dual-earner couples in full-time employment. Marshall and Barnett (1993) operationalized conflict as strain and resource loss through workload management, which was measured by hours employed, contribution to housework, number of children, and the age of children. Enrichment was operationalized as resources gained from quality role experience, measured by participants’ perception of support from work and non-work role senders, role commitment, and the rewards of playing a role.

Marshall and Barnett (1993) found that over 25% of participants reported no strain between work and non-work domains. Importantly, couples reported that conflict and enrichment coexisted, with the majority of participants perceiving enrichment. The authors concluded that reducing conflict and increasing enrichment benefitted from high quality work and non-work experiences, as well as the perceived support of role senders from both domains.

Hence, empirical support for perceiving conflict and enrichment reflect individual differences while enacting multiple work and non-work roles, and whereas some interpret multi-role engagement as conflict, others may experience enrichment. Then again, some may perceive the coexistence of conflict and enrichment, with different combinations of the two reflecting individuals’ perceived conflict-enrichment typology (Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Tiedje et al., 1990). The implication is that discrete consideration of avoiding or reducing conflict and promoting enrichment only provides a partial understanding of the complexity underlying resource investment decisions.

In addition, it could be argued that work and non-work research has embraced what Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas and Van de Ven (2013) described as an entity perspective to investigate the process of experiencing the coexistence of perceived conflict and enrichment. In this view the process is understood by identifying a succession of movements of the same entities over time, such as seeing conflict and enrichment as the subtraction or aggregation of pre-existing resources (see ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

Following this logic, work and non-work literature has identified what these competing demands are, such as types of conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and
the level and episode of conflict (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). However, how coexisting conflict and enrichment impacts professional women’s perception and coping with competing demands is not yet known (Bagger & Li, 2012).

One reason for this limitation is the literature’s narrow focus on the non-work domain as family, which tends to omit the interactive effects of multiple roles during work and non-work interactions. It is argued here that a more realistic way of looking at the construction of competing work and non-work demands is to adopt an evolving process view. In this light, past and future interpersonal relationships continue to impact working adults as they construct the infinite composite of conflicting and enriching experiences. Therefore, perceived tensions and coping are now considered from this evolving viewpoint, which, this study argues, will help to facilitate understanding of coexisting contradictory experiences in work and non-work interaction.

**Evolving nature of perceived tensions and coping**

Tension researchers have shed light on the evolving nature of perceiving and coping with contradictory experiences. Westenholz (1993) reported different mental frames of reference among employees that constrained their understanding of each other when discussing the issue of wages. The logical approach can be characterized as unambiguously adopting a particular frame of reference (either/or thinking), whereby employees consider alternative perceptions to be illegitimate (Westenholz, 1993).

Hence, when interacting with others holding different perceptions, the logical group tends to either oppress others or stick rigidly to their own view. On the other hand, Westenholz (1993) found that some employees adopted a pluralistic approach in dealing with contradictory perceptions of how wages should be distributed, whereby they embraced a particular framing, but were aware and tolerant of diverse views.

Importantly, Westenholz (1993) observed that although the logical and pluralistic ways of understanding—and resolving—the wage problem are relatively stable, they are not fixed. Indeed, during her ten-year field work, the author found that some employees occupationally displayed unexpected behaviour that could not be explained by previous interpretations of their current situation.
This observation from Westenholz (1993) is similar to the findings reported by Luscher and Lewis (2008), whereby some may initially perceive contradictory framings as unresolvable when trying to make sense of the existence of multiple framings from others. Over time, however, they develop the capacity to adopt a paradoxical view by reflecting on the socially constructed nature of these contradictions.

These empirical findings (e.g., Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith, 2014; Westenholz, 1993) imply the evolving nature of organizational members’ capacity to deploy multiple competing strategies when ubiquitous and persistent tensions are recognized (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Reciprocally, this evolving process of working through tensions also enables the emergence of the capacity to perceive tensions differently (see Section 2.4.1). Such reciprocity between perceiving and coping with tensions has implications for understanding the way competing work and non-work demands are constructed. These implications are now considered.

In a work and non-work context, people’s perception of the tensions surfacing from competing demands has been found to be subject to environmental dynamics and evolving self-identifications with a work and non-work role (Trefalt, 2013; Kreiner, 2006; Ladge et al., 2012). For example, an individual’s life resources are not fixed, but continually change as working adults interact with various work and non-work role related partners (Trefalt, 2013).

In other words, the degree of freedom within which working adults deploy resources in meeting role demands should not be considered as a fixed variable (see Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009). Thus, people’s cognitive framing of resource depletion or expansion, and the perceived tensions in constructing the work and non-work relationship are constantly evolving.

Following this logic, while tensions surfacing through competing work and non-work demands are ubiquitous and persistent, variations exist regarding how individuals perceive the work and non-work relationship. For example, some working adults may accept that inherent tensions coexist and persist due to their ability to construct competing frames that embrace such tensions, while others might perceive the same contradictions as dilemmas (Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011).
Alternatively, despite accepting the coexistence of inherent contradictions, the assumption of finding a balance, as suggested by the boundary perspective (Ashford et al., 2000), implies that conflict and enrichment might counterbalance each other once the ultimate combination is found. In this case—as Smith and Lewis (2011) suggest—the tensions of finding a temporal synthesis of two opposing forces are perceived as dialectics.

When people gradually acquire the ability to take advantage of the competing expectations from multiple role-related partners, their perception of tensions might change. Thus, resources available for the daily creation and maintenance of physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries are influenced by past, present, and expected future interactions with work and non-work role-related partners. Therefore, from a tension perspective, there is no stable or end state to equilibrium.

Rather, equilibrium exists during the ongoing interactions between contradictory forces. Effectively managing such tensions requires individuals to capitalize the interrelatedness of polar opposites (Lewis, 2000; Fredberg, 2014). For example, Jarzabkowski, Lê and Van de Ven (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to explore how managers responded to coexisting tensions across organizational, group, and individual levels.

The authors found that coping strategies were contingent upon external demands where an immediate response was required, as when managers differentiated products from different divisions in meeting either marketing or regulatory demands. Significantly, Jarzabkowski et al. (2013) revealed how coping strategies were entangled, where choosing one focus escalated conflict and prompted further tensions. Thus, a reciprocal cycle of encountering tensions, coping, new tensions emerging, and further coping is formed.

The potential utility of how a paradox overlaps and evolves into—and from—dilemmas or dialectics lies in the appreciation of how the nonlinear, holistic nature of tensions denotes an ongoing and cyclical process (Lewis, 2000). As visualised in Figure 2.5, there is no obvious one-to-one correspondence between different types of tension and response due to the interdependence of contradictory elements, which jointly contribute to desirable outcomes. Indeed, Cameron and Quinn (1988) claimed that adopting a tension perspective helps individuals to move beyond polarized
perceptions by acknowledging the impacts of plurality and diversity, thus allowing better understanding of disruptive experiences.

In addition, the dynamic equilibrium model has specified the virtuous and vicious cycles as consequences of working through persisting tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The virtuous cycle refers to a productive reaction to tensions in the short term, but also sustainable functioning in the long term (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Vicious cycles refer to a sense of being paralysed by persisting tensions and exhibiting defensive behaviours (Smith & Lewis, 2011), where defensive behaviours are defined as “suppressing the relatedness of contradictions and maintaining the false appearance of order… [that] may temporarily reduce anxiety” (Lewis, 2000, p.763).

In particular, research has shown that individuals are capable of managing tensions, and that this ability is related to organizational effectiveness (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009). For example, the dynamic equilibrium model proposed by

*Figure 2.5. Ongoing Process of Responding to Tensions (Adopted from Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011)*
Smith and Lewis (2011) integrates several attributes identified by the tension researchers that facilitate competing cognitive frames, and thereby the effective management of tensions.

According to Smith and Lewis (2011), competing cognitive frames are enabled through individuals’ emotional equanimity, cognitive complexity, and behavioural complexity. Cognitive complexity is the ability to recognize and accept the interrelated relationship of underlying tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Behavioural complexity refers to the ability to engage in multiple, contradictory behaviours (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992), “while still retaining some measure of integrity, credibility, and direction” (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995, p.526).

Crucially, therefore, by exhibiting cognitive complexity, individuals are able to take advantage of persisting tensions and fuel long term success. Working adults capable of exhibiting behavioural complexity and emotional equanimity tend to be more likely to accept uncontrollable, paradoxical tensions, where coping behaviours and interactions of tension categories reinforce contradictions, and often lead to “ironic outcomes in which efforts to manage the tensions produce the exact opposite of what was intended” (Putnam et al., 2013, p. 417).

To summarize, from a tension perspective, competing demands are persistent (Tracy, 2004; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Such a perspective emphasizes the simultaneity of opposing ideas or actions, as elaborated in Figure 2.5 by the cycle of shifting perceptions of tension (illustrated by the three interlocking gears) and coping strategies. When the transformative capacity of individuals to reframe and embrace contradictory coping strategies is taken into consideration, it transcends conflict into a new frame as tensions become viewed as complementary and interwoven (Lewis, 2000).

Further, the various coping strategies required tend to be entangled (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), rather than simply facilitating positive spill over of affects or opportunities to generate resources (see discussion in Section 2.3.2). This view implies a less clear cut process for experiencing the enriching aspects of role multiplicity, which distinguishes it from the enhancement-enrichment perspective.

The tension perspective is also distinct from the conflict-depletion perspective, insofar as it acknowledges that pervasive tensions are neither inherently harmful nor
demand resolution. Rather, tensions or opposing demands potentially represent “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3).

Thus, unlike boundary and conflict-depletion approaches, which see competing work and non-work demands as problems needing solutions, the tension perspective offers an alternative in which contradictory elements present an opportunity to stimulate development and growth (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Unique among the perspectives discussed above, therefore, a tension view implies a more dynamic construction of the work and non-work relationship (Rothbard, 2001).

Thus, following the proposition that tensions can be meta-theoretical perspectives (Lewis & Smith, 2014; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), this study utilizes a tension lens through which to explore and elucidate the complexity of constructing competing work and non-work demands. However, there are potential problems with directly transferring insights of framing and coping with tensions to a work and non-work context. These issues are further addressed in Section 2.5.2.

2.5.2 Applying a tension lens to competing work and non-work demands

A tension perspective explores ubiquitous and persistent contradictory elements across phenomena such as communication (Wendt, 1998), project management (Lewis, Welsh, Dehler, & Green, 2002), policy (Putnam et al., 2013), and leadership (Cameron & Quinn, 1988; Jensen, 2013). At the same time, organizational researchers explore tensions on multiple levels, such as organizational (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003), group (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991; Smith & Tushman, 2005), and individual (Kreiner et al., 2006; Ibarra, 1999).

This study adopts a tension lens to gain understanding of professional women’s subjective experience of constructing competing work and non-work demands. In particular, a tension lens implies perceived tensions and their associated coping strategies are evolving, as they are created through social interaction and negotiation over time, during which the capacity to accept, confront, and reframe contradictory elements changes (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Trefalt, 2013).
Researchers have applied paradoxical thinking or frames as mental templates imposed by individuals on an environment in order to make sense of contradictory tasks or situations (Westenholz, 1993; Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014). For example, Miron-Spektor, Gino and Argote (2011) conducted four laboratory studies to manipulate and activate individuals’ paradoxical frames. They found that paradoxical frames increases people’s sensitivity to unusual associations by shifting their focus from either/or to both/and thinking. Thus, the acceptance of inherent contradictions was enabled and creativity was enhanced.

Although recent tension studies have revealed the individual cognitive and behavioural dynamic underlying the ongoing coping with competing demands, further insight into these cognitive and behavioural efforts cannot be directly generalised to other individual levels of analysis like work and non-work interactions for two reasons. First, observation of individuals’ competing frames were enabled by external forces, as in the case of laboratory designs (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al., 2011) or the “paradoxical enquiry” invented by Luscher and Lewis (2008) during their action research.

Second, no empirical research has examined how these attributes are successfully applied without the direct impact of organizational factors. As an example, for spatial separation in coping with tensions, Gilbert (2006) explored the competing framing of opportunities and threats in a longitudinal case study of a newspaper organization’s response to digital publishing. The author found that structural differentiation enabled competing frames to coexist, where differentiated subunits allowed individuals within the firm to preserve a frame-consistent response.

Tension researchers recognize that the organizational system of structure, culture, and procedure specifies how tensions are dealt with, as it determines how resources are allocated to meet multiple and changing demands from stakeholders (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Clegg, da Cunha & e Cunha, 2002). However, it is not yet known how important individuals’ cognitive and behavioural efforts are in shaping their response to competing demands when the impact of organizational procedure, routine, and culture are not present (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Although group, organizational, institutional, and multiple levels of analysis concerning how processes change over time are well represented in the literature, as yet none have adopted the individual level as a central focus, even where individuals
are key actors in experiencing and responding to tensions (see Langley et al. (2013) for a discussion). Thus, in the construction of competing work and non-work demands, evidence that cognitive frames are constantly modified, or that contradictory behaviours are demonstrated, would open the door to investigations of how cognitive complexity and behavioural complexity impact individuals’ performance in both work and non-work domains.

Therefore, although the recursive cycle of acceptance, confrontation, and transcendence proposed by Lewis (2000) aims to tap the enlightening potential of paradoxical thinking for synthesizing contradictory coping strategies (see Figure 2.5), there are practical concerns with operationalizing paradoxical thinking. First, spatial and temporal constraints that require immediate responses make it very difficult to simultaneously embrace competing elements. A second concern is the sheer cognitive load required to simultaneously embrace the contradictory elements necessary for transcendence to occur.

In proposing the utility of a tension approach, therefore, it is important to acknowledge that adopting such a perspective is an effortful process. Thus, while organizational research has suggested the adoption of a tension lens to view competing work and non-work demands (Putnam et al., 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011), it is important to recognize that the utility of such an approach requires a full appreciation of the nonlinear nature of tensions.

As an emerging stream of research, the ongoing tensions individuals experience in an organizational context points to the utility of a tension perspective for understanding the perception and management of competing work and non-work demands. Rather than looking for a discrete mix of multiple, even competing coping strategies, or to stabilize paradoxical elements, a tension perspective actively utilizes the interdependence of opposing forces.

Significantly, the transcendence and synthesis proposed by the tension literature denotes the enabling aspects of contradictory forces (Lewis, 2000; Poole &Ven de Ven, 1989). In a work and non-work context, the idea of enrichment is predicated on the ability of individuals to move beyond the experience of competing role demands as obstacles to progress, and to foster personal growth and maturation. Critical reflection and positive reframing of past responses lead people to perceive
current tensions in a more positive light. This in turn impacts how they cope with current tensions, as well as expectations for future engagement with multiple roles.

Thus, viewed through a tension lens, rather than as a sudden shift of mindset, work and non-work enrichment is a long-term reframing process that acknowledges all or nothing thinking, and makes constant efforts to alter an either/or mentality. How tensions are experienced in the context of work and non-work interactions is not yet known. Furthermore, the ability to perceive enrichment during this process may have flow on impacts on subsequent perceptions of tension, which has yet to be explored. Building on the diverse frames of competing work and non-work demands, and the various competing coping strategies identified thus far, this study proposes utilizing a tension lens to seek deeper understanding of how women construct tensions.

It should be noted that the tension perspective is not intended to supplant the explanations that the three perspectives offer for understanding professional women’s response to competing work and non-work demands. As reviewed in Section 2.3, however, the three perspectives identified by the work and non-work literature have considered competing demands that require immediate coping responses. Instead, this study intends to explore professional women’s interpretations of contradictory demands that require ongoing efforts to work through.

To conclude, the theoretical discussions and empirical studies of responses to tensions indicate that current understanding of professional women’s construction of competing work and non-work demands lacks nuance and complexity. It is therefore argued that only by adding this depth of understanding can research elucidate how professional women specifically—and working adults more generally—interpret tensions and choose appropriate strategies when resource depletion and generation are experienced simultaneously.

As yet, such evidence of coping with—and even benefitting from—tensions at the micro level has not been empirically verified in a work and non-work context. Therefore, a study of professional women’s perception of and coping with tensions in such a context offers an opportunity to test the underlying assumption of a tension perspective: that persistent, contradictory forces inevitably challenge, but at the same time fuel, long term success (Lewis & Smith, 2014).
Two research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do professional women perceive tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

RQ2: How do professional women cope with tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

2.6 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this review was to consider how both work and non-work literature and tensions research has addressed working adults’ interpretation of the coexistence of competing experiences. Unlike the three perspectives that advocate a best fit approach to competing demands, the tension perspective emphasizes the mutual dependency of contradictory elements. Such emphasis on the connection between competing elements reflects as: (1) the coexistence of multiple perceptions of competing elements; and (2) the differentiated deployment of competing coping strategies.

To better understand how competing work and non-work demands are perceived—and how strategies are used—by professional women, this study argues that tensions created by the coexistence of resource depletion and expansion are consistent with a recent definition of tensions as “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3). Despite tension becoming prominent in the broader discussion of coping with competing demands, little attention has been paid to the application of a tension lens to explore work and non-work interactions. Hence, the potential of a tension perspective to elucidate work and non-work issues remains untapped.

Following a tension perspective, recognizing and working through ubiquitous and persisting competing work and non-work demands involves more than reducing conflict and inducing enrichment. It is argued that a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of confronting ongoing competing demands requires consideration of how the potential interactive effects of work and non-work conflict and enrichment are constructed by individuals.

Despite being an emerging stream of inquiry, most of existing tension research has focused on individuals’ experience of managing tensions in the organisational
context (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). This study argues that given that individuals’ responses to tensions are deeply influenced by organizational structures, culture, and leadership (Heracleous & Wirtz, 2014; Johnson, 2014), such organizational embeddedness leaves the impact of individuals’ cognitive and behavioural efforts to work through recursive and cascading tensions unknown.

It is not surprising, therefore, that little is known regarding the underlying processes through which these tensions evolve, are brought into awareness, or develop at the individual level (Langley et al., 2013). Thus, how individuals perceive and work through tensions in general, and how they attempt to resolve tensions over time, merits further empirical attention (Clegg, 2002; Fredberg, 2014; Jameson, 2004).

To summarise, two bodies of literature have been brought together in this review via a connecting theme: competing demands. While the tension literature itself continues to generate interest, thus far, research has focused almost exclusively on the organizational context. On the other hand, work and non-work literature has been investigated extensively at all levels, but has yet to fully utilize a tension perspective for investigating the subjective experiences of unresolvable tensions. An opportunity therefore exists to contribute to the literature by exploring professional women’s perceptions of and coping with competing work and non-work demands through a tension lens.

Chapter 2 reviewed the various conceptualizations of how individuals experience competing work and non-work demands. Building on several theoretical perspectives in the literature, research questions were presented that aim to illuminate individuals’ cognitive dynamic of perceiving and managing competing demands arising from work and non-work interactions. In Chapter 3, the research design chosen to address the stated questions is described.
Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Methodology is “the process of how we seek out new knowledge, the principles of our inquiry and how inquiry should proceed” (Schwandt, 2007, p.190). The review of the literature in Chapter 2 indicates that existing perspectives fail to adequately capture professional women’s construction of tensions surfacing from work and non-work roles. Building on rich descriptions of perceived competing demands and coping strategies in the work and non-work literature, together with suggestions in the tension literature, the aim of this study was to explore individuals’ subjective dynamic of perceiving and coping with competing demands through a tension lens.

Chapter 3 is structured as follows: in Section 3.2 the philosophical assumptions underlying this study are discussed, including the ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions of this research. In Section 3.3 the research design is detailed, with the aim of demonstrating how the two research questions guided the choice of an abductive research strategy and the design of the in-depth interviews. Section 3.4 outlines the procedure by which the method was implemented, including the sampling strategy. In Section 3.5, a discussion of how the data was analysed is provided. Section 3.6 discusses the strategies used to fulfil four criteria for trustworthiness and rigor under the constructivist paradigm. Finally, a chapter summary is provided in Section 3.7.

3.2 THE CONSTRUCTIVISM PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Differences in paradigm assumptions can be traced to their particular ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Blaikie, 2009). The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand professional women’s subjective experience of managing various work and non-work role demands. The scientific paradigm appropriate within this area of
inquiry is constructivism, whereby an understanding of the work and non-work relationship can be gained by interpreting subjects’ perceptions. A justification for adopting a constructivist approach follows, based on ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions.

Constructivism embraces relativist ontology and considers multiple realities to exist (Guba, 1996). The goal of such inquiry is toward more informed and sophisticated reconstructions while remaining open to new interpretations, with people gradually becoming more aware of competing constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Relativism suggests that realities are co-constructed and that these constructions are “subject to continuous revision, with changes most likely to occur when relatively different constructions are brought into juxtaposition in dialectical context” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.113).

As detailed in Chapter 2, previous work and non-work research recognises that variations exist regarding professional women’s subjective experiences of the tensions surfacing from simultaneously enacted work and non-work roles. While some interpret combining multiple work and non-work roles as either conflict or enrichment, others may perceive the coexistence of two competing experiences. By emphasising the relational and evolving nature of tensions, current researchers’ binary interpretation of the work and non-work nexus is acknowledged in this exploratory study. It should be noted that the framing of tensions around work and non-work roles is for the sake of convenience. This facilitates initial description and does not necessarily indicate that work is the primary source of tensions for professional women combining multiple work and non-work roles.

Consistent with the ontological assumption that knowledge is co-constructed, a subjectivist epistemology is used to understand the meanings individuals attach to social phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, within a constructivist paradigm, researchers are not detached from the knowledge they co-construct with participants. Indeed, Mason (2002) argued that a researcher should seek to understand and articulate their role in the research process, or what is more correctly termed axiology—a discussion of the researcher’s view of the role of values in research (Saunders et al., 2009).

Heron (1996) argued that researchers should demonstrate axiological skill through the articulation of how their values have guided what they are researching,
and how inquiry should proceed. The value position of current study not only guided the topic selection, but also the stance taken towards the research process and interaction with participants, which is active reflexivity (Mason, 2002). Reflexivity is more than self-consciousness, and involves critical self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the research process (Blaikie, 2009). The practice of reflexivity in this study is demonstrated by adopting the abductive logic of discovery (discussed in detail in Section 3.4), which not only required the researcher to challenge previously held concepts, but also to acknowledge the influence of present theoretical assumptions about tensions.

While recognising that tensions are evident in managing work and non-work role demands, the literature assumes that individuals either manage conflict resulting from tensions, embrace tensions and turn them into an enriching experience, or seek a balance between two competing experiences (Kreiner et al., 2009; Ilies et al., 2009). By invoking binary language, conflict and enrichment become further understood as being unproblematic and determined a priori. Indeed, based on a review of the methodological deficiencies of work-family research, Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood and Lambert (2007) raised concerns about the validity of perceptual measures. In other words, rather than taking these assumptions for granted, reflexivity highlights the risk of reifying or unintentionally legitimising general assumptions about the existence of fixed frames of reference, as well as the opposing but mutually-reinforcing conceptualisations. With this in mind, the researcher remained open to the nuances and vicissitudes of how professional women constructed the competing work and non-work demands.

The above stated ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions provide a context for the discussion of the methodological choices underpinning this research. In the next section, a brief discussion of the major characteristics of four research strategies is provided, followed by a justification for choosing an abductive strategy. The rationale for employing an in-depth interview method is also provided.

It is important to note that varying choices of research paradigms—as well as ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions—have been found for researchers advocating an abductive strategy (Blaikie, 2007; 2009; Van de Ven, 2007). Blaikie (2007, 2009) embraced a particular view of the world for the adoption of an abductive approach, suggesting interpretivism as a research paradigm, and
proposing a subtle realist ontology with a constructionist epistemological position. However, Blaikie (2007) himself noted that “it is not possible to establish by empirical enquiry which of the ontological and epistemological claims is the most appropriate” (p.25). In this study Guba and Lincoln’s (1989, 2001) interpretation of a suitable research paradigm was adopted, together with their ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. These are the constructivist research paradigm, relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and the active reflexivity axiological position.

3.3 ABDUCTIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

3.3.1 Research strategies and justification of choice

A starting point for answering research questions regarding professional women’s subjective experiences of perceiving and managing tensions was to choose a research strategy consistent with the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions made (Blaikie, 2007; Saunder et al., 2009). Blaikie (2007, 2009) argued that research strategies provide the logic for social enquiry, suggesting four possible alternatives: inductive, deductive, reproductive, and abductive. Table 3.1 provides a brief summary of the core features of these four research strategies, indicating how each offers a different way of answering research questions.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Inductive</th>
<th>Deductive</th>
<th>Ret productive</th>
<th>Abductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Develop generalised explanations</td>
<td>Validation and prediction</td>
<td>Explanation and prediction or change</td>
<td>Conceiving a theory from unexpected experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research questions answered</td>
<td>What</td>
<td>Why</td>
<td>Why</td>
<td>What and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Use generalisations as patterns to explain further observations</td>
<td>Develop hypothesis from theories and test hypothesis derived from data</td>
<td>Develop hypothesis on structures and causal mechanisms and testing their existence</td>
<td>Move beyond lay concepts to understand the interpretations of social reality that individuals hold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1

*Core Characteristics of Four Research Strategies (Adopted from Blaikie, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007)*
The logic of inductive discovery begins with collecting data from which generalisations can be derived (Blaikie, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007). An inductive strategy is most suitable when validated insights already exist, and, building from a body of surrounding theory, induction provides descriptions that are limited in time and space (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). As Van de Ven (2007) noted, induction is normally used for evaluating a theory regarding “how well the operational model of a theory fits observation of the world” (p.102). Such operational models of theories are derived through the process of deduction, where hypotheses are generated and tested (Mounce, 1997).

Deductive strategies begin by formulating a theoretical argument, then testing the theory by developing hypotheses from it, which then guide data collection (Blaikie, 2007; 2009; Van de Ven, 2007). A retroductive research strategy also answers ‘why’ questions; however, explanations are gained through testing hypotheses about structures and mechanisms that are assumed to produce social phenomenon (Blaikie, 2007; 2009).

An abductive research strategy is suitable when answering research questions in which inquiries can be conducted from the participants’ language (Blaikie, 2009). Following an abductive logic, a social phenomenon is perceived and experienced by participants whose accounts and language contain the meanings and interpretations they use to construct their world (Blaikie, 2009). Therefore, the first step of an abductive research strategy is to develop descriptions that are grounded in the language and meanings of those being researched. In this respect, an abductive approach is similar to inductive strategies.

Furthermore, the purpose of abductive enquiry differs from deductive and retroductive research strategies. Whereas abduction concerns initiating a theory or the discovery of a social phenomenon, retroduction and deduction answer ‘why’ questions by providing explanations or causes of observable social phenomena. In other words, induction shows that something is actually operative, and seeks theoretical and empirical examination of relevant contingencies; deduction strengthens theoretical and statistical generalisability by seeking confirmation of intended explanations; while abduction merely suggests that something may be in effect by developing hypothetical inference (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008; Van de Ven, 2007).
To date, a unified and valid conceptualization of tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions is missing from the literature, due to little research applying a tension lens to explore competing demands in a work and non-work context. For example, tensions can be interpreted as conflicts or trade-offs, emphasising the contradictions of two elements (Mickel & Dallimore, 2009; Reichl, Leiter, & Spinath, 2014); or dialectics or paradoxes, emphasising the relational and evolving nature of two competing elements (Lewis, 2000; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). As discussed in Chapter 2, this is partially due to the cognitive complexity of constructing the work and non-work nexus (Bagger & Li, 2012). Hence, it would be premature to adopt either testing (deduction) or evaluating (induction) when tensions are central to the research goal.

For the above reasons, an abductive research strategy was adopted to explore how professional women perceive and cope with tensions surfacing during the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles. The next section discusses how the abductive research strategy guided the design of in-depth interviews, where the emergent and ongoing features of this qualitative method are highlighted.

### 3.3.2 Emergent in-depth interview design and protocol

The purpose of this study was to uncover professional women’s interpretations of tensions surfacing from simultaneous work and non-work involvements. Thus, awareness of subjective experiences was crucial to the research questions regarding perceptions of, and coping with tensions between work and non-work domains. As discussed in Chapter 2, positive (enrichment) and negative (conflict) experiences in combining work and non-work roles are relational rather than intrinsic qualities. Thus, eliciting professional women’s perceptions of how work and non-work involvements are in tension, together with the reasoning of their responses to these tensions, necessitated two methodological considerations. First, data collection techniques were required to enable participants to engage in critical reflection upon the past experiences that led them to where they are now; second, participants were encouraged to clarify their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurred.

With this consideration in mind, it was vital to design a method that could capture the nuance and subtlety of women’s subjective responses to multiple role demands, a necessity well-served by the in-depth interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).
In particular, according to Vogt, Gardner and Haeffele (2012) using the in-depth interview method is appropriate when the research aim is (1) to obtain subjective knowledge from participants, (2) to obtain in-depth responses not readily obtained by other methods such as surveys, (3) where in-depth, subjective knowledge is more important than generalising to a larger population, and (4) where interviewees need time to reflect and elaborate on their responses.

For these reasons, semi-structured, in-depth interviews allow the researcher to interact flexibly with participants throughout the data collection process (Kvale, 1996). For example, when participants respond enthusiastically to some questions, the researcher can encourage further detail and elaboration of the topic. This may lead to changes in the order and wording of interview protocols. To ensure non-directed interaction during interviews, open-ended questions are used, mostly initiated with what, which, and how. In order to prevent defensive responses, whenever further elaboration is needed, participants can be asked “what do you mean by…”, or “could you explain that a little bit more?”, rather than “why …” (McCracken, 1988).

The main interview questions elicited the overall work and non-work role demands perceived by professional women—as well as their strategies for managing them—by encouraging participants to discuss each of the roles they played in their lives. Here, strategy refers to the professional women’s actions as well as their emotional preparations in pursuing and executing those actions. For example, a professional woman may prioritise her work demands over other personal commitments, or consciously prepare herself to suppress her career ambitions to devote herself to her family.

However, to elicit the underlying assumptions through which participants understand and explain their world, interview questions need to maintain neutral, rather than containing value-laden phrasing (Wengraf, 2001). With this consideration in mind, and in order to give participants full voice, the challenges of combining work and non-work lives were presented as multiple role demands; and evocative, judgmental phrases such as compromise, conflict, and trade-off were avoided.

Hence, the initial interview question was: what is it like living with multiple roles as a working woman? This question provided participants with the opportunity to raise issues, or direct the researcher’s attention to significant aspects of their lives.
that explained how they understood the world. With the aim of gaining a broad portrait, and to elicit what specifically needed to be explored in-depth as the interviews progressed, follow-up questions were seldom used at this point.

Instead, particular attention was paid to unusual usage of words and to the stories that might have conveyed underlying assumptions. Following Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) suggestion, numerous probe questions were used to encourage participants to further elaborate the meanings they ascribed to each of their life roles. Probes also allowed participants to offer explanations or clarifications regarding the thoughts and feelings revealed while discussing their strategies for managing work and non-work demands. Thus, richer information was provided about participants’ decision-making and problem solving. Table 3.2 provides details of the different types of probes.

Table 3.2
*Type, Function, and Examples of Probes Employed during in-depth Interviews (Adapted from Rubin & Rubin, 2005)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of probe</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication probes</td>
<td>Encourage participant to keep talking on the present subject</td>
<td>Repeat part of what has been said by participant but with a questioning intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration probes</td>
<td>Ask for more detail or explanation of a particular concept or theme that speaks to the research concern</td>
<td>Can you say more about that? What do you mean by…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification probes</td>
<td>Ask for an explanation for something that the researcher did not follow, (technical issues such as the participant’s job were not required clarification)</td>
<td>Could you run that by me again – I’m afraid I didn’t follow it? Or simply raise eyebrow to encourage further clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence probes</td>
<td>When participant provided a broad statement or general conclusion, the researcher asked how she knew and how she had come to that conclusion</td>
<td>How did you find that out? Could you give me some examples?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asking what strategies participants used to manage role demands, questions were worded in ways that encouraged answers based on their experiences
and perceptions (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, academic jargon such as *conflict* or *enrichment* were not introduced to participants. Instead, open-ended questions were asked, such as:

- Could you tell me under what circumstances you have found particular difficulty managing work and non-work demands?
- Are there any circumstances in which you did/do particularly well in managing work and non-work demands?

Questions of this kind not only provided the data needed to draw out nuanced understandings about participants’ decision-making when managing work and non-work relationships, but also gave participants an opportunity to reflect upon role expectations normally taken for granted. Further, these open-ended questions enabled the elicitation of examples of the concepts and themes central to the participants’ understanding, and therefore to seek elaboration where appropriate.

Potential problems relating to subject bias and retrospective sensemaking in interviews (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) were not an issue in this study for two reasons. First, numerous researchers have recognised that people’s feelings and perceptions are particularly difficult to access other than through self-reported information (Silva, Clegg, Neves, Rego, & Rodrigues, 2013; Kim, McFee, Olguin, Waber, & Pentland, 2012). Second, as working through tensions between work and non-work life is an ongoing process during which resource allocation is not a onetime event, people can make retrospective sense of tensions through reflection (Weick, 1988; Ford & Backoff, 1988). The underlying assumption is that, rather than being out there awaiting discovery, people’s interpretation of work and non-work demands is formed by how they interact with complex social stimuli. Simply put, the relationship between people’s perception and actual tensions is relational and evolving, rather than immediately obvious. Thus, questions should elicit experiences of daily life in a natural, spontaneous context, but not be restricted to short-term processes and everyday actions.

For these reasons, critical incident techniques can also be employed to capture how participants have dealt with work and non-work role combinations, while focusing on the recollection of critical incidents within a longer time-frame. Critical
incident analysis is a systematic, inductive method of data collection that provides concrete descriptions of incidents relevant to the activity under investigation (Flanagan, 1954). With this in mind, participants can be asked to describe critical events that they consider to have significantly impacted their personal and professional lives. Where there is evidence of confusion or misunderstanding, (e.g., “critical events”), an alternative question can be used to clarify the information required. For example, “Could you describe times in the last five or ten years when you have found particular difficulty fulfilling various demands from your personal and professional life”. Thereafter, detailed examples are sought by using various probes and follow-up questions.

Questions with the aim of eliciting opinions are asked near the end of the interview. If opinion questions are asked too early, participants may try to maintain consistency throughout the interview, thereby restricting reflections on a range of examples and ideas that may otherwise have revealed contradictory instances or subtleties (McCracken, 1988). Bearing this in mind, evaluative questions to stimulate participants’ thoughts and ideas were also asked closer to the end of the interview. For example:

- How would you describe your effort of managing these multiple roles over the years as a working woman?
- How, in your mind, do you see the concept of work-life balance?
- If you could start all over again with your life, would you change anything? If so, why? If not, why not? (This question was only asked when the interview was running on time, or when participants were willing to provide extra time to elaborate their thoughts on this question.)

Figure 3.1 shows the main interview questions outlined above. As explained previously, these interview protocols can be improvised upon where appropriate or necessary.
Responses generated from such an open-ended structure can vary immensely in terms of the themes most salient and meaningful to participants. Sometimes the flow and direction of a conversation can be unpredictable, requiring greater flexibility on the part of the interviewer. Therefore, being able to improvise and change questions on the basis of what is learnt in the course of interviewing is critical, thus challenging the interviewer’s skills and ability to investigate all of the relevant options with care and completeness. These challenges support Wengraf’s (2001) argument that a semi-structured interview has to be particularly well prepared: “to go into something in depth is to get a sense of how the apparently straightforward is actually more complicated, of how the ‘surface appearances’ may be quite misleading about depth realities” (p.8).

Therefore, trial and error practice is built into the interviews in order to explore emerging themes in detail, reflecting the necessity to be able to go back and forth between data collection and analysis. Though interviews are frequently used to answer exploratory or descriptive research questions, Vogt et al. (2012) argued that this method can also be used to test any propositions derived from previous data by asking targeted questions. Furthermore, it is often these back and forth moves that
foster the reflections of the researcher, as well as enhancing theoretical sensitivity in terms of gaining insights beneath the surface of participants’ experiences (McCracken, 1988).

To summarise, a flexible research design is required to not only elicit subjective knowledge, but also to allow perspectives to emerge, and for constructed meanings of work and non-work roles to unfold. Thus, seeking stimulation of participants’ interpretive capacities via interview raises two key data collection issues. First, the interview design should not only elicit in-depth construction of participants’ experiences, but also allow for the refinement of data collection. Second, the procedure by which the method is implemented must allow for modification and improvisation. The research procedure is detailed in the next section, including the sampling strategy and the implementation of flexible data collection via emergent, in-depth interviews.

3.4 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

3.4.1 Sampling strategy

This study was concerned with gaining rich insights into the subjective experiences of professional women in their construction of competing work and non-work demands, rather than seeking a representative sample for statistical generalisation. For this reason, professional and managerial women who were willing and able to reflect upon and share their perspectives of working through the simultaneous presence of work and non-work demands were purposefully sampled. Purposive sampling is considered an appropriate form of sampling for in-depth interviews: “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p.169). Several practical and methodological considerations guided this sampling strategy.

First, to approach an inquiry from a constructivist viewpoint is to yield multiple perspectives of the research concern (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To collectively reflect a variety of perspectives, participants for this study needed to be diverse in cultural background, age, responsibilities, and personal experience in combining their work and non-work roles. In addition, for knowledge generated to have broader implications, interviewees needed to be selected in ways that enhanced confidence in extending findings beyond the immediate research setting (Rubin &
Rubin, 2005). Thus, professional women from non-traditional family structures, different cultural and economic backgrounds, and representing diverse modes of employment were included in this study.

Second, effectively conducting in-depth interviews depends not only on thorough questioning, but also on carefully selecting participants who have sufficient life experience and are able to explain and reflect on how they perceive work and non-work role demands. Therefore, women who had completed tertiary education, and were diverse in age and cultural background were targeted. Another practical consideration for targeting tertiary educated women was this group’s heavy investment in their education, and their tendency to take on jobs perceived as more demanding (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Given that multiple units of analysis exist, such as individual perceived tensions, coping strategies, and the triggers of tension (see Chapter 4), it was also beneficial to this study’s purpose that the sample described tended to have significant exposure to competing work and non-work demands. Nevertheless, the need for sample diversity with regard to life stages and latitude over work and non-work arrangements can be satisfied by choosing participants varied in age, an important factor impacting how tensions are perceived and managed (Balogun, Huff, & Johnson, 2003).

Third, to ensure sufficient breadth and depth of perspectives, the purpose of this study was framed in a neutral way during the initial interaction with potential participants. While confronting multiple, and even competing work and non-work demands, some women may not necessarily define these competing demands as tension or conflict—as they tend to be conceptualised in the literature. Thus, with regard to how and why women take on multiple work and non-work roles with respect to their own circumstances, neutral wording was needed to reduce the risk of attracting women with a particular perspective of simultaneous enactments of work and non-work roles.

To satisfy these sampling requirements, participants were drawn from a networking event that recognised women from diverse backgrounds for their achievements in higher education. Attendees were female postgraduates from Queensland University of Technology (QUT), who participated in the 2013 International Women’s Day Event hosted by QUT Student Support Services. Through casual dialogue, the researcher made initial approaches directly to
participants during the networking event. For those expressing interest, secondary contact was then made by phone or email in order to ascertain their availability, and to confirm that potential participants met the required demographic diversity and criteria (e.g., age, cultural background, past and current occupations).

Ten tertiary-educated women agreed to participate in this study during the initial phase. As data collection progressed, snowball sampling techniques were utilised as a means of identifying the connections of key informants with the potential to offer rich insights (Higginbottom, 2004). Snowball sampling is able to ensure diversity of work and non-work experience—even with similar specialities or non-work responsibilities—by identifying participants with diverse employment histories (e.g., different organisational settings, working in the same job over differing time-frames, varied modes of employment). In total, 19 professional women participated in in-depth interviews. An overview of the demographic information for the 19 participants is provided in Table 3.3.
## Table 3.3

**Demographic Information for the 19 Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Profession (full-time/part-time)</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>No. of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Owner of business consultancy (full-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Computer programmer (full-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Senior university administrator (full-time)</td>
<td>De facto</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Career counsellor (full-time)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Trainee psychologist (full-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Nurse (full-time)</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Psychologist (full-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>IT consultant (part-time)</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>University professor (full-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Director of finance and admin. (full-time)</td>
<td>De facto</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Clinical psychologist (part-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>HR Manager (full-time)</td>
<td>Same sex relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Reflexologist (part-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Librarian (part-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>University researcher (part-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Marketing manager (part-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Director of administration (part-time)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Senior internal auditor (full-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>Organizational analyst (part-time)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PGD - *Postgraduate Diploma*; PhD - *Doctor of Philosophy*; M - *Master’s Degree*
3.4.2 Research sequence and procedure

The purpose of this study was to delve in-depth into the complex process of constructing tensions surfacing from simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles. This requires a good understanding of how participants ascribed meaning to multiple roles that first builds upon answers to ‘what’ questions (Blaikie, 2009). Thus, the first step in answering research questions is to gain descriptions of the work and non-work demands perceived by professional women, as well as their emotional and actionable responses to such role demands. For this reason, interviews were semi-structured and in-depth to elicit professional women’s narratives and stories.

Building on participants’ interpretations, the second step of the abductive process seeks to generate the abstract or technical concepts that capture what makes combining work and non-work roles problematic (Blaikie, 2007). Although the cognitive dynamic in constructing the work and non-work nexus could not be directly observed, Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that personal values could be understood by asking about daily events and deducing the underlying values and perspectives from such descriptions.

However, piecing together participants’ subjective reasoning of work and non-work roles points to the challenge of researchers entering “the social world of our research subjects [to] understand their world from their point of view” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.116). For this study, in order for the researcher to be reasonably sure that her interpretations and understandings would accurately capture the participants’ worldview, time and practice were needed to prepare and rehearse the interview protocol for alignment with the research questions. In particular, an effort was made to gauge how interviewees would respond to questions, and to identify evidence contradicting the researcher’s interpretation.

Prior to the main data collection stage, five preliminary interviews were undertaken with the aim of gaining a broad understanding of how tensions were perceived by professional women when confronting work and non-work demands. According to Yin (1994), pilot studies are “used more formally, assisting an investigator to develop relevant lines of questions—possibly even providing some conceptual clarification for the research design” (p.74). The selection of interviewees for this pilot phase was based on two criteria being satisfied. First, the five
managerial and professional women sampled were required to have rich experience in managing work and non-work challenges. The second criterion concerned the convenience, access, and geographic proximity of the interview location.

The first two pilot interviews were unstructured, each lasting over two and a half hours. Here, participants were encouraged to tell their stories of how they responded to various work and non-work demands. Only when they had finished their narratives did the researcher ask questions about points brought up in the interview that the researcher felt needed further elaboration. As these pilot interviews were conducted with the goal of immersion into the participants’ world view, the researcher adopted a role more like that of an active participant engaging in casual conversation, than an interviewer.

These initial unstructured interviews revealed that the duration of participant’s narratives and storytelling of perceived competing work and non-work demands would last around 50 to 60 minutes, and that participants exhibited tiredness when responding to questions requiring reflection and reasoning regarding their approach to these competing demands. This indicated a need to reduce the time for participants’ descriptions of their work and non-work interactions in order to allow more time and scope for their reflections. Furthermore, there was mutual agreement between the researcher and all participants that two hours would be the maximum time for formal interviews. Consequently, to provide some structure for participant’s narratives and storytelling, the final three interviews of the pilot phase were semi-structured, and lasted between 70 and 120 minutes.

During the pilot phase, questions were reworded whenever they made it difficult for participants to match their experience to the interview question (for example, where participants rephrased or altered the question asked). Where the hoped-for depth was not forthcoming it was subsequently discovered that key opportunities were missed where incomplete answers should have been met with second or third questions to follow up. For example, transcripts identified places where the researcher accepted a general response without additional enquiry, and where the participant answered briefly or cautiously without sufficient encouragement to elaborate. A particular dilemma encountered during interviews was when questions appeared to provoke stress in the participant, at which time duty of care considerations caused the researcher to prematurely back away from
important topics. Therefore, the five sensing interviews proved to be an effective tool for identifying necessary changes to the wording of the interview questions, as well as for refining the researchers’ interview technique.

In addition, the last three interviews revealed that participants need longer than expected to reflect on questions around their own evaluation of the way they combined work and non-work roles. Indeed, the daily language people use to construct meaning is often delivered in a taken-for-granted, unreflective manner (Blaikie, 2007, 2009). The task of the researcher, therefore, was to encourage participants’ reflection (Van de Ven, 2007). This was achieved in two ways. First, formal interviews were conducted in conference rooms in participants’ workplaces, or in their offices after working hours. These formal interview sites were chosen to reduce distractions, and provided participants with a private environment that facilitated their reflections.

Second, a week before commencing the formal interviews, participants were invited to complete a drawing exercise with simple instructions. Demographic information was collected at the same time to allow more time for participants’ narratives in recorded interviews. A copy of the drawing exercise and the demographic questionnaire are provided in Appendix A. The drawing exercise was designed with a big circle representing the participant, who was then asked to draw smaller circles within it and label them with different roles fulfilled in their work and non-work lives. The position and size of the smaller circles was to reflect how participants viewed the relationship between the roles they played, and the significance of these roles. Participants’ drawings also served as an effective ice-breaker, as the initial questions for the formal interviews were based on elaborations of the circles drawn (McCracken, 1988). Before commencing formal interviews, all 19 participants completed and returned the drawing exercise.

The richness of an interview depends on the participant’s willingness to engage in a deep discussion of their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). To develop openness and trust between the participants and the researcher, participants were well informed with respect to research confidentiality, duration, sequence, and the purpose of the research prior to turning on the recorder. Participants were also given

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1 The five pilot participants were not included in the sample of 19 professional women.
the opportunity to ask any further questions, either about the purpose of the research or the interview procedure. To reinforce their sense of competence and confidence, participants were assured that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions asked. In line with Ethical Conduct in Human Research (ECHR) procedures, participants were informed that they could stop recording information about which they felt uncomfortable, or suspend the interview at any time. In all cases, no pause occurred during data collection.

The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes, and were conducted in accordance with QUT policy and the National Statement on ECHR (the Information Sheet and Consent Form are provided in Appendix B, Approval Number 1300000147). Although there were slight variations in the order and phrasing of the interview questions, all interviews followed a similar template. Just before participants left, they were asked for any recommendations with regard to individuals they might know who they thought could contribute further insight to this research. Table 3.4 summarises the research procedure.

Table 3.4

Research Sequence and Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase and objectives</th>
<th>Specific tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase 1. Preparation /Recruitment | • Develop research focus and research questions  
• Ethical clearance for research involving human participants  
• Sourcing and recruiting participants, approaching participants in person  
• Disseminate drawing exercise and demographic questionnaire |
| Phase 2. Pilot exercises | • Conduct 2 sensing interviews to practice probing techniques and control timing  
• Conduct 3 pilot interviews to revise and fine tune interview protocols |
| Phase 3. Ongoing interviews and analysis of data intertwine | • Collect stories on specific events of confronting competing demands, participants’ thoughts and feelings  
• Develop a thorough familiarity with the expression of the participants and their narratives  
• Go beyond lay language to understand their values, assumptions, and how they interpret their interaction with social stimuli |
3.5 DATA MANAGEMENT FOLLOWING THE LOGIC OF ABDUCTION

As discussed in Section 3.2, the reflexive stance and the abductive logic of reasoning adopted in this study have significant implications for how the interview data was analysed. An important aspect of the in-depth interview is the role of the researcher as an instrument in collecting and analysing data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Of particular relevance to this study, participants’ reasoning of their thoughts and feelings regarding competing work and non-work demands were interpreted by the researcher, who inevitably drew on her own experience (McCacken, 1988). Given that bias and assumptions are often so deeply ingrained that analysts are unaware of their influence, a vital process of the data analysis was to thoughtfully apply analytic tools that fostered awareness of the role of the researcher and her perspective in the process of the generation and interpretation of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mason, 2002).

In addition, working within a constructivism paradigm, knowledge was generated from the language provided by participants, which required the researcher to have sufficient immersion in the participants’ sense of reasoning about their social world (Ong, 2012). Hence, it became essential not to impose existing theories or perspectives on the subject matter. Thus, the abductive approach to data analysis differs from that of grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006), which suggests that coding and categorisation procedures are informed by prior knowledge of existing frameworks, an advantage Strauss (1987) suggested enhanced theoretical sensitivity.

However, the abductive logic of discovery goes further than just discovering and reporting participants’ interpretations (Blaikie, 2007, 2009). Rather, the researcher is heavily involved in the construction of meanings regarding interacting with and presenting the participants’ interpretations (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995; Van de Ven, 2007). Indeed, Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) suggested that following an abductive logic, the researcher is an active player who selects the “best from among competing explanations, and the de facto criteria for best are defined by pragmatic virtues such as interestingness, usefulness, simplicity, or conservativeness” (p.319). That said, the researcher has to walk a fine line between faithfulness to participants’ subjective experiences and an awareness of the
influence of the theoretical frameworks that guide their inquiry (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

Therefore, concern for an overly individual interpretation led to iterative moves between participants’ accounts and existing theoretical perspectives and concepts (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). In the same vein, for empirical findings generated via abductive logic to be applicable for future research, Chamberlain (2006) suggested that the process of abductive reasoning has to demonstrate a connection with existing theoretical concepts, and analytical compatibility with existing theoretical frameworks. In other words, the researcher had to maintain an open mind to participants’ lay language in retaining the integrity of participants’ views, while consciously comparing the lay language with present theoretical concepts. Figure 3.2 illustrates this iteration between emerging concepts, the researcher’s reflexive position, and existing theoretical concepts. This iterative process guided the researcher’s decision to collapse codes and progressively move from initial inductive codes to emerging themes. A detailed explanation of this process is provided in Chapter 4.

Figure 3.2. An Illustration of the Iteration Process of an Abductive Research Strategy

Initial coding was conducted for all 19 participants, with incidents that rendered tension between work and non-work life salient as the unit of coding. As little research has applied a tension lens when exploring competing demands in a work and non-work context, a unified and valid conceptualisation of the tensions surfacing from enacting work and non-work demands is missing from the literature. Thus, as the first step of an abductive approach, the process of exploring professional
women’s interpretation of work and non-work tensions are presented in this section. Findings relating to the process of navigating coding under the abductive path are presented in Chapter 4. The criteria for assigning tension codes to the transcribed interview data are detailed below.

According to Lewis and Smith (2014), tensions refer to two contradictory, yet interrelated elements, which represent “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (p.3). For the purpose of this study, ‘tension’ emphasised the presence of two opposing elements, such as ideas, expectations, principles, or actions. Although the resulting discomfort is common, it does not necessarily lead to incongruent behaviours or negative emotions and reasoning. For example, the idea of work and non-work enrichment is predicated on the ability of individuals to move beyond the experience of competing role demands as an obstacle to progress, and to foster personal growth and maturation (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Furthermore, variation exists with respect to conceptualisations of tensions, such as duality (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Farjoun, 2010), dilemma (Engler et al., 2011), dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), and paradox (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the definition of tension in this study is framed to include inter-role conflict, which denotes negative consequence (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and is extended to include any perceived clash of elements during work and non-work interaction that cannot be eliminated. This broad conceptualisation implies that not only is tension an inherent experience during work and non-work interactions, but it also entails either positive or negative implications for individuals’ subjective reasoning.

It is important to note that tensions are pervasive not just in the work domain, but also within individuals’ non-work lives. In addition, attempts to combine work and non-work life generate their own root of tensions connected to social interaction (Trefalt, 2013). As the purpose of this study was to deepen understanding of the construction of competing work and non-work demands, within-domain tensions were only coded when described by participants as stimuli requiring adjustment in order to prioritize their activities appropriately during work and non-work interactions.
For the above reason, lines of transcribed interviews were assigned with a tension code under one of two possible circumstances: (1) when participants explicitly used words or phrases such as “conflict”, “tug of war”, “tensions”, “torn between”, or “pulled in different directions” in describing their experience of combining work and non-work roles; and (2) when either negative or positive emotions or reasoning were responses to the incompatibility of combining various work and non-work roles.

As this study delved in-depth into the complex process of meaning construction for tensions, a good understanding of how participants ascribed meanings to multiple roles was required. It should be noted that although participants’ drawings facilitated data collection, they didn’t reflect differences across 19 participants in terms of how competing work and non-work demands were perceived and managed. For this reason, the drawings were not analysed.

To avoid leading beyond or glossing over participants’ meanings, the coding of each tension incident contained large chunks of text, including circumstances or situations where tensions arose. Thus, coded incidents included, for example, participants’ reasoning of—and their emotional response to—tensions, or their own evaluations of their responses. Particular attention was given to participants’ accounts that preceded and followed identified tension incidents, as these have a contextual bearing on the meaning of the opposing elements constructed during interviews. In this way, Charmaz’s (2006) concerns about “coding out of context”, where the researcher is “overlooking how people construct actions and processes” (p.69) could be addressed.

Therefore, to preserve the fluidity of their experiences, initial codes contained detailed context for each tension incident. For example, participants’ descriptions of their routine and concrete actions regarding work and non-work activities were coded at this stage to provide a general sense of their preferences, or their perceived investment in various work and non-work roles. As an illustration, participant #03, a 30-year-old registered psychologist in her final month of pregnancy, considered that work and non-work engagements were both important, with the main focus on non-work, “I’m not on this earth to work, I don’t think. I’m on this earth to live”. She also thought ‘work’ and ‘life’ to be distinct ‘lifestyles’ that can be in tension. For example:
…when I’m at work I’m at work, when I’m at home, I’m at home. … in terms of the head space required to be at work and the pressure, I don’t like that encroach to my life, and I don’t like to be at work 80 hours a week, and I don’t care how much money I’m getting paid. I want to be here 40, 45 max, in a full time capacity. And I don’t want that to encroach on my personal time. #03

As outlined in Section 3.3.2, an emergent research design implies the necessity of being able to go back and forth between data collection and analysis. The flexible design of the interview protocol (discussed in Section 3.3) and the intertwining of data collection and analysis (discussed in Section 3.4) enabled the researcher’s suppositions that was inductively generated from participants’ interpretation to be incorporated into forthcoming interviews for participants to comment on. In this way, the researcher was able to improvise subsequent interviews on the basis of what was learnt in the course of the data collection and analysis, which facilitated exploration of emerging themes in more detail. Thus, abductive logic shares some similarities with the constant comparison principle of grounded theory, which in turn involves the simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

However, distinct from the line by line coding of grounded theory, the units of coding in this study were incidents that rendered tension between work and non-work life salient. Because people’s interpretation of tensions surfacing from work and non-work combinations is formed by how they interact with complex social stimuli, relationships between people’s perception and actual responses are not immediately obvious. Thus, a larger unit of coding provides the necessary context. The abductive path followed during data analysis is made clear in Figure 3.3. Themes emerging from this path are addressed in Chapter 4, along with greater detail of the application of this process.
Figure 3.3. The Abductive Path Followed During Data Analysis (Based on Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Ong, 2012; Blaikie, 2009)
3.6 RESEARCH RIGOUR

To strengthen confidence in their findings, qualitative researchers have developed criteria for trustworthiness and rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). As a paradigm is a particular philosophical understanding of the nature of knowledge, and of how social scientific knowledge can be generated (Creswell, 1994), the quality of scientific research should be judged within its specific paradigm (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Sandberg, 2005).

For example, the positivist research tradition embraces the existence of objective reality, with research designed to measure the extent to which instruments correspond to that objective reality and whether the results can be duplicated under identical conditions (see Enerstvedt, 1989). Therefore, under a positivist paradigm, internal and external validity, reliability, and generalisability are considered indispensable for judging the quality of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

However, constructivists refuse to accept “any permanent, unvarying standards by which truth can be universally known” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.119). In other words, the constructivist research tradition rejects the notion of absolute truth, considering instead that agreement on what represents valid knowledge is subject to ongoing negotiation (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998). Therefore, situated within a constructivist paradigm, four methodological criteria for trustworthiness and rigor were used in this study to shape and direct the research during its development (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In satisfying credibility, researchers must ensure that the phenomenon under scrutiny is appropriately identified and described; and in addressing transferability, sufficient detail of the context within which research is conducted should be provided for others to decide whether the findings are applicable to similar situations or populations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Dependability requires that researchers should “account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.203), but at the same time provide an in-depth methodological description to allow the study to be repeated (Shenton, 2004). Finally, satisfying confirmability requires that researchers strive to ensure “findings are the result of the experiences and ideas
of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p.72).

Recognising the uniqueness and plurality of how qualitative research can be conducted, many researchers have discussed the unworkability of any definitive set of criteria against which all qualitative research should be judged (e.g., Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal, & Smith, 2004; Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998). Following this line of thinking, the researcher took into account the distinct features of this study when considering the appropriateness of evaluating it. In particular, through the process of interacting with participants and interpreting their accounts, the researcher came to appreciate how intricately the four quality criteria interrelated, and how difficult it was to address each in isolation.

In other words, these criteria can be viewed as mutually reinforcing. For instance, when findings lack credibility and confirmability, research has no dependability, and, therefore, its transfer to alternative research settings becomes pointless. Hence, the strategies employed in this study that aimed to satisfy the quality criteria were woven into every step of the research design. Figure 3.4 outlines the key research design steps undertaken during this study. Given that a relativist ontology assumes the existence of multiple realities, the key to achieving the four quality criteria in this study was to demonstrate transparency in both methodological and interpretation procedures.
In terms of the methodological procedure (see Figure 3.4) the criteria for selecting participants, sample size, participants’ characteristics, and the setting and method of data collection are detailed in this chapter. The appropriateness of sampling and data collection strategies were justified in previous sections. Importantly, participants remarked upon the significance of this study in terms of its relevance to their own lives during the interviews, and were highly motivated to share their experiences and thoughts. This willing commitment and openness to critical self-reflection from participants was vital for facilitating an in-depth exploration of individuals’ interpretation and perception of competing work and non-work demands.

All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed to ensure the accurate recording of participants’ accounts. These detailed descriptions of how the researcher collected data not only improve credibility, but also facilitate the readers’
assessment of how the design and implementation of the methodology is both dependable and transferable to other settings.

In terms of the interpretative procedure, concern for an overly individual interpretation led to the adoption of an abductive approach to data analysis. Not only is abduction appropriate for a study aimed at illuminating the subjective experience of perceiving and coping with persisting tensions, it also addresses concerns about the validity of perceptual measures in understanding the complexity of constructing work and non-work interactions (Casper et al., 2007; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In particular, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) had questioned previous researchers’ propositions about the bi-directional nature of conflict and enrichment, suggesting that “the directionality of work-family conflict is perceived only after a response to the conflict situation is made” (p.84). In responding to this concern, perceived tensions and coping strategies were coded simultaneously.

Thus, to further improve the credibility of findings, the researcher’s suppositions of codes for perceived tensions and coping strategies were generated inductively from the participants’ accounts, whereby they were subject to constant comparison with theoretical concepts during data analysis. This process not only fostered the reflections of the researcher, but also the ongoing scrutiny of any assumptions made about the nature of competing demands. By so doing, the researcher’s understanding of how participants’ subjective experiences connected with prior knowledge of tension-related constructs was gradually built up. Further, by considering how these same experiences were analytically compatible with existing theoretical concepts, the dependability of the findings were thus enhanced.

It should be noted that the personal experiences of the researcher also strengthens the credibility of the data analysis. During the course of this PhD project, the researcher went through the pregnancy, birth, and care of her first child. This personal experience improved the quality of interpretation, as it facilitated immersion into the participants’ worldview of tensions, and hence fostered a better understanding of the participants’ hidden assumptions, beliefs, and values. In addition, the confirmability and credibility of this research were strengthened through many debriefing sessions between the researcher and her supervisors during the process of naming and categorising codes.
To summarise, situated within constructivist inquiry, this chapter has detailed how findings were grounded on a suitable methodology, as well as sufficiently authentic processes of interpretation. Due to the tension perspective in which the researcher chose to situate this study, the researcher recognises that attempts to address the quality criteria also stimulate analytical tensions. These are discussed in the next section with respect to this study’s methodological limitations.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The research design was outlined in this chapter, including the choice of a qualitative in-depth interview for data collection and an abductive approach to data analysis. Particular attention was given to the place of an abductive research strategy within a constructivist paradigm, which guided the practical conduct of this inquiry and the interpretation of emerging themes. This process involved exploration of unexpected accounts through a continuous process of comparing existing theoretical concepts and emerging themes. In addition, the four methodological criteria for trustworthiness and rigor: credibility, confirmability, consistency, and transferability were discussed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By specifying the rigorous design and implementation of the abductive process, a systematic approach to illuminating the construction and reconstruction of tensions stemming from simultaneously enacted work and non-work roles was provided.

Having detailed the research design and method, the themes that emerged through the application of the abductive approach described will be presented in Chapter 4. A detailed analysis and interpretation of these themes will be provided in Chapters 5 and 6. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings will be discussed in Chapter 7.
Chapter 4: Overview of Key Findings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to provide an overview of the key finding of this study. In particular, four different orientations to work and non-work engagement are outlined, whereby participants are categorised according to their responses to demands from others during work and non-work interaction, as well as their adjustments to self-constructed standards about how to enact both domains simultaneously. These orientations have important implications for understanding how tensions were perceived and managed differently by the women chosen to participate in this study.

As discussed in Chapter 2, tensions are defined as “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3). The persistent nature of tensions sets them apart from work and non-work conflicts, or violations of preferred boundaries between work and non-work roles. More specifically, such conflicts and violations assume amenability to solutions by problem solving (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), whereas tensions are persistent and can’t be eliminated (Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011). By reviewing a tension perspective within this body of work, the following research questions were identified in Chapter 2:

RQ1: How do professional women perceive tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

RQ2: How do professional women cope with tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

An abductive research strategy was adopted to proceed with investigation of these questions. Following the coding strategies described in Chapter 3, variations in how tensions are perceived and managed by professional women were revealed. To further explore the patterns underlying these variations, the emerging themes during the coding process are discussed in the context of the theories reviewed in Chapter 2.
As illustrated in Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3 (Chapter 3), the process of developing codes is not a discrete stage, but rather a continuous aspect of the analytic nature of the abductive approach. Therefore, the outcome of applying the coding strategy outlined in Chapter 3 required a process of ongoing comparison with the literature before the patterns underlying the perception and coping with tensions emerged. For this reason, before presenting the key themes and findings, Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of reducing the codes relating to the two research questions.

The remainder of Chapter 4 is structured into three sections. First, in Section 4.2, the process of comparing the themes that emerged from coding professional women’s perception and management of tensions with existing theories is presented. This section serves to justify the categorizing of 19 participants into four groups (Work-oriented; Non-work-oriented; Pragmatic Dual-oriented; and Paralysed Dual-oriented). Presented in Section 4.3 is an overview of the key findings relating to the perceived tensions and coping strategies contingent on the four orientations identified. Finally, a chapter summary is provided in Section 4.4.

4.2 FINDINGS FOLLOWING THE ABDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

The research questions ask how tensions are perceived and managed by professional women. As a first step toward answering these questions, this section presents the outcome of applying the coding strategy outlined in chapter 3. As described in Chapter 3, abduction explores unexpected accounts through a continuous process of comparing existing theoretical concepts with data emerging as the researcher observes the different meanings participants give to various work and non-work roles.

By making a tentative assumption that was inductively generated from participants’ interpretation of their experiences of combining work and non-work roles, the researcher consciously compared preliminary suppositions with existing conceptualizations of tensions, as well as the strategies identified by tension-related research and work and non-work literature. This process of comparing the themes emerging from the interview data and existing literature is delineated in the next three subsections.
4.2.1 Perceiving internal and external triggers for tensions

The coding strategies outlined in Chapter 3 identified 123 triggers, which reflect how tensions were rendered salient between work and non-work domains. Thus, the identification of triggers for tensions provided a starting point for exploring the two research questions. Each trigger was assigned descriptive codes of perceived tensions and coping strategies that either derived from the participants’ own terms (in vivo codes), or the researcher’s interpretation, which stayed as close as possible to participants’ words.

For example, “blurred boundary” between work and non-work was the description participant #07 used to explain how she perceived tension triggered by a highly stressful day at work, which lead to irritation during interactions with her daughter. Similarly, perceived tensions triggered by affect from one domain spilling over to another, or incidents in one domain having a direct impact on the functioning of the other, were coded as ‘spill over’, ‘trickle down’, or ‘cascading’.

This process generated 123 descriptive first-order concepts for perceived tensions and 403 descriptive first-order concepts for coping strategies. Although the process of analysis started with the perception of tensions, followed by coding for coping strategies; coding for perception and coping strategies continued in parallel as analysis ensued. During this process, individual coping strategies were sometimes found to match several perceived tensions.

For example, in vivo codes such as ‘walking’, ‘jogging’, ‘doing yoga’, or ‘self-care’ as coping strategies were collapsed into the single code ‘doing exercise’, which was found to match codes for perceived tensions such as ‘spill over’, ‘overwhelming’, ‘diminished control’, and ‘tug of war’. The 403 descriptive first-order concepts for coping strategies were combined in different ways as responses to the coded perceived tensions. Examples of triggers for tensions and the corresponding codes for perceived tensions and coping strategies are provided in Appendix C.

Following the logic of abductive reasoning, the analysis followed a cycle between the 19 interview transcripts, the emerging categories for perceived tensions and coping strategies, and the literature in order to develop categories to link findings.
to more generalizable concepts. These emerging themes are delineated and compared with the literature below.

Table 4.1
_Depleted and Generated Resources in Comparing to Theoretical Concepts_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived depleted resources (participants)</th>
<th>Aggregated themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical skills, health (#04, 05, 06, 13, 14)</td>
<td>Physical resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time, physical energy (all 19 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (#01, 04, 06, 13, 17, 19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships (#01, 10, 18)</td>
<td>Social resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics [e.g., resilience (#14, 16); optimism (#01, 11, 14, 16); creativity (#12)]</td>
<td>Psychological resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived generated resources (participants)</th>
<th>Aggregated themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income (#02, 03, 07)</td>
<td>Physical resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time, physical energy (#5, 06, 07, 09, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual complexity (#2, 03, 04, 05, 07, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17)</td>
<td>Intellectual resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills, knowledge, perspectives (e.g., meaningfulness, feeling worthwhile, value that creates incentive to self-investment) (all 19 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships, social support networks, valued bond with significant role-related partners (#04, 06, 08, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17)</td>
<td>Social resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics [e.g., resilience (#02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17), optimism (#4, 05, 06, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17), creativity (#04, 06)]</td>
<td>Psychological resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy (all 19 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Kahn et al. (1964), a role is an expected pattern or a set of activities or potential behaviors that exist in individuals’ minds. Occupants of various work and non-work roles are exposed to the expectations and social pressures of other members with whom they are interdependent (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975). The initial codes for perceiving and coping with incidents of tensions were found to share
similarities with the theoretical concepts of resource depletion and generation in the work and non-work literature (see Table 2.1, Chapter 2). Adhering to the principles of abduction, analysis then progressed to using the depleted and generated resources to frame the identified triggers and corresponding perceived tensions and coping strategies (see Table 4.1, left hand column). This process lead to the aggregated themes of physical, psychological, social, and intellectual resources (see Table 4.1, right hand column).

The aggregated themes in Table 4.1, such as the depleted physical and social resources, suggested that tensions were triggered by role overload, whereby expectations from various role-related partners were perceived to exceed participants’ abilities to meet them due to inadequate personal resources (Harrison, 1978). These incidents of role overload echo environmental forces identified by the tensions literature, such as plurality of incompatible expectations regarding performance and organizing, resources scarcity, and changing expectations regarding role identities (see Smith & Lewis, 2011).

However, codes for perceived tensions and coping strategies indicate more than external demands. In addition to obligations and expectations that are externally derived, tensions can also be triggered by dissatisfaction resulting from people’s desire to pursue certain resources during work and non-work interaction. For example, tensions were perceived when participants had fewer opportunities to utilize available personal resources, this type of tension was internally triggered. In other words, apart from carrying prescriptive messages about how one should behave towards role-related partners, work and non-work roles also serve to reflect women’s interpretation of these prescriptive messages, as well as their own expectations of enacting these roles (see various psychological resources identified in Table 4.1).

For this reason, perceived tensions can be interpreted as internally triggered, externally triggered, or both. Internal triggers refer to deviations from internal standards about how to perform work and non-work roles. External triggers refer to competing demands from work and non-work role-related partners. Furthermore, external triggers were found to be compatible with three of the four categories of tension identified by Smith and Lewis (2011). Specifically, tensions of performing exist where working adults experience competing goals; tensions of organizing occur
as incompatible expectations regarding how to achieve these goals; and tensions of belonging manifest as deviations in how the self should be connected to others.

Significantly, these external triggers were found to correspond with violations of internal standards with respect to the pursuit of certain physical, psychological, and social resources. This observation was integrated into the analysis of internal and external triggers, from which three aspects of discrepancy between desire for and the actual availability of personal resources emerged. These internally and externally derived discrepancies are illuminated in Table 4.2: the left-hand column summarizes the perceived external triggers, the middle column shows the three aspects of discrepancy between ideal and actual enactment of work and non-work roles, and the right-hand column shows the perceived internal triggers.

Table 4.2
Three Aspects of Discrepancy between Ideal and Actual Enactment of Work and Non-work Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived external triggers</th>
<th>Three aspects of discrepancy (External VS Internal)</th>
<th>Perceived internal triggers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incompatible expectations from various role-related partners with respect to what to do or goals to have.</td>
<td>Performance VS Competence</td>
<td>Deviation from the desire to control the outcome and experience mastery in terms of allocating physical and intellectual resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatible expectations from various role-related partners with respect to values, and how to connect to the social categories to which the focal person belongs.</td>
<td>Belonging VS Role identity</td>
<td>Deviation from the desire to express personal values, and uniqueness while enacting multiple work and non-work roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatible expectation from various role-related partners with respect to how occupant of these roles should perform.</td>
<td>Organizing VS Autonomy</td>
<td>Deviation from the desire to be causal agents of ones’ life in terms of allocating psychological resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The identification of both external and internal triggers echoes the two factors comprising the person-environment (P-E) fit theory, whereby people’s perception of fit in conducting work and non-work roles is jointly influenced by personal factors and environmental impact (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). However, in
contrast to current work and non-work research emphasizing the stable role identity and environmental structural factors that influence individuals’ perception of fit (see Chapter 2 for a discussion), analysis in this study revealed how environmental and personal factors that influence perception of tensions constantly change due to the interaction between external and internal triggers.

In particular, the corresponding internal and external triggers were found to compete and complement each other simultaneously during work and non-work interactions. The competition between triggers is reflected in the depleted resources perceived by participants (e.g., energy, time, physical availability, as illustrated in Table 4.1). The complementary interactions are reflected as the perceived generated resources that buffer competing demands from both domains (e.g., perspectives, social support, skills, as illustrated in Table 4.1).

With respect to episodes of generated and depleted resources, explanations can be traced to research on work and non-work enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) and conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). For example, incidents of tension due to resource scarcity or role overload are consistent with Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) time-based conflict. Additionally, enacting multiple roles vies for energy, corresponding with both Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) strain-based conflict and Greenhaus, Allen and Spector’s (2006) energy-based conflict.

The coexistence of competing and complementary interactions between internal and external triggers is evidenced by incidents in which an immediate resolution was perceived as not required. This can be attributed to work and non-work interactions being perceived as depleting resources and generating resources simultaneously, thereby acting as a sort of counterbalance where multiple salient tensions were confronted. Such a finding can be explained by what Grzywacz and Bass (2003) described as a balance model of work and non-work interaction, where demands were perceived as threatening, but were manageable because the perceived resources gained exceeded the perceived threat.

Although no further attention or actions were required for some tension incidents, the generated resources and perceived enrichment during work and non-work interactions were not perceived by participants as eliminating tensions. To illustrate, even when participants perceived enriching experiences during interactions
with various work and non-work role-related partners, they also expressed concerns regarding a lack of time when performing work and non-work roles.

Therefore, tensions are not perceived as occurring in isolation by professional women, but rather as “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3). For example, further comparison of participants’ accounts of incidents of tensions indicates that external triggers, such as competing role expectations from others, activated tensions related to identifying with multiple work and non-work roles. These external triggers coexist with internal triggers, making displays of competence, autonomy, and role identities in both work and non-work roles incompatible (see Table 4.2). Thus, episodic conflicts and enrichments not only coexist but are ongoing, leading to persisting tensions that cannot be resolved. A detailed exploration of how the three aspects of internal and external demands interact is provided in the next two chapters.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Smith and Lewis (2011) incorporated the environmental and individual factors that render latent tensions salient. This study specifies the interaction between these two factors by revealing how latent tensions become salient when internal and external triggers interact and aggravate each other. During the process of coping with internally and externally triggered tensions, participants perceived that resources were not only depleted, but also generated. In particular, the competing and complementary interaction between internal and external triggers implies that the process of responding to triggers can generate resources to retain the latency of certain tensions. Thus, the ongoing iteration between salient and latent tensions distinguishes work and non-work competing demands from conflict during interactions.

In other words, although conflict and enrichment might coexist during this process, efforts to resolve episodic tensions may alleviate, but not eliminate tensions. Thus, interpreting tensions as “ubiquitous and persistent forces” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3) better explains the ongoing interactions between different aspects of internal discrepancy and external demands. With respect to professional women’s perceptions of competing work and non-work demands, analysis thus far indicates that the evolving nature of contradictory elements proposed by the tension literature facilitates a more complex understanding than the theoretical concepts suggested by work and non-work research.
It should be noted that the three aspects of internal and external triggers for tension were considered important by participants of this study; however, some aspects were considered more important than others. In other words, individual differences should be taken into account when analysing how different approaches to the coexistence of internal and external triggers impact the perception of tensions and coping strategies. The next subsection further elaborates perceived tensions and coping strategies. This also involves consideration of participants’ varied interpretations related to internally and externally derived discrepancies.

### 4.2.2 Two different priorities to tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions

In the previous subsection, two features of perceived tensions were revealed: (1) tensions were triggered by both internal and external demands; and (2) both internal and external triggers were perceived as coexisting and persistent. In addition, participants were found to differ in their decisions to allocate generated and available resources when responding to internal and external triggers. The individual differences in satisfying internal and external demands were integrated into the revised coding for perceptions of—and coping with—tensions, thus helping to categorize the first-order concepts of perception and coping strategies. The process of codes reduction is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Some participants ascribed greater meaning to certain roles from work and non-work domains than might be expected by role-related partners. Hence when allocating resources they tended to prioritize what they perceived as satisfying their internal standards of how work and non-work roles should be enacted. Ninety-five codes for perception of tensions and 314 codes for coping strategies were grouped as internally-focused (see Figure 4.1).

On the contrary, some participants perceived the discrepancies between desire and the actual availability of social, intellectual, physical, and psychological resources (see aggregated themes in Table 4.1) could be better dealt with if external demands were met. As illuminated in the first green box in Figure 4.1, 28 codes for perception of tensions and 89 codes for coping strategies were grouped as externally-focused.
Furthermore, 35 codes for perception and 129 codes for coping strategies in the internal-focused category share some similarity with codes in the externally-focused group. Although differing in internal and external focus, these professional women considered attending to both work and non-work demands better satisfied their chosen focus. These two groups were collapsed into a broader theme, labelled the *Dual-oriented group*, as illustrated in Figure 4.1 as three green boxes.

In this way, codes for perception of tensions were reduced from 95 to 60, and codes for coping strategies were reduced from 314 to 185 in the internal-focused category. The professional women in this category reported episodic tensions similar to Kreiner et al.’s (2009) boundary incongruences, or the different types of conflict (time, strain, or behaviour-based) described by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). However, they differed in their long-term approach to discrepancies that were internally or externally triggered. More specifically, their chosen internal focus was perceived as better satisfied by prioritizing one domain over the other, as illustrated in Figure 4.1 by the blue box.
In this way, the internally-focused group was divided into two subgroups: one with a dominant priority, labelled the Dominant-oriented group; and the other with dual priorities to work and non-work demands, combined with externally-focused professional women to form the Dual-oriented group.

To summarize, this subsection presents an overview of the two emerging groups for prioritizing commitments to work and non-work domains. Analysis then progressed to focused coding within the two different prioritizing approaches to further revise the perceived tensions and coping strategies. The findings from focused coding within the two different prioritizing approaches are presented in the next subsection, which further specify how tensions are perceived and managed. This also involves consideration of how professional women differ in their decision to express a sense of belonging and to meet external demands to perform and organize role-related tasks; as well as internal standards for displaying competence, autonomy, and role identity.

4.2.3 Four orientations to tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions

Focused coding of the Dual-oriented and Dominant-oriented groups ascribed 60 first-order concepts of perceived tensions and 185 first-order concepts of coping strategies to the Dominant-oriented group. Sixty-three first-order concepts of perceived tensions and 218 first-order concepts of coping strategies were found in the Dual-oriented group (as illustrated in Figure 4.1). First-order concepts and coping strategies for Dominant-oriented participants were then recoded in order to further delineate differences between them.

Those with a Dominant orientation were professional women who valued both work and non-work domains in their lives. However, when tensions between domains became salient due to conflicting external demands and deviations from internal standards about the enactment of work and non-work roles, they tended to emphasize involvement in either (1) work over non-work, or (2) non-work over work. Thus, two different attitudes emerged from the Dominant-oriented group: Work-oriented and Non-work oriented.

As discussed in the previous subsection, although both work and non-work engagements were important to all participants, they differed in how they oriented themselves to internal and external triggers. Orientations were conceptualized
contingent upon two considerations. First, how did participants allocate personal resources to meet external demands from work and non-work domains? Second, how did participants perceive internal standards better satisfied through either work or non-work engagement, or both?

Therefore, rather than assuming the directionality of conflict or enrichment a priori, the attribution of directional influence was identified inductively. Consequently, Dominant-oriented participants were identified as either Work-oriented or Non-work-oriented. When defining the attribution of directional influence, the joint consideration of both perception of tensions and coping strategies is supported by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) proposition that “the directionality of work-family conflict is perceived only after a response to the conflict situation is made” (p.84).

Similarly, recoding was undertaken for first-order concepts and coping strategies for those with a Dual orientation, thus drawing a distinction between Pragmatic-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants. Unlike Dominant-oriented participants, however, those with Dual-oriented participants made deliberate efforts to ascribe equal value to both work and non-work domains. This category of participants tended to perceive self-constructed standards and external demands as best achieved by orienting personal resources to both work and non-work domains.

Two different attitudes also emerged within the Dual-oriented group. First were the Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants, who accepted their own limits in dealing with competing external demands during work and non-work interactions, and differentiated those personal limits from their sense of self-worth. However, the second subgroup of Dual-oriented group—Paralysed Dual-oriented participants—indicated feelings of being constrained by their dual priority, and expressed perpetual discontent with their coping strategies. Table 4.3 provides a comparison of how each sub-group under both Dominant-oriented and Dual-oriented respectively, positioned themselves with respect to work or non-work domains.
### Table 4.3

**Different Orientations to Work and Non-work Domains**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>General approach to work and non-work demands—example quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-oriented</td>
<td>“…if I didn’t have work, I would not have any ‘me time.’ Sometimes I’d like to be working full time and I would like to be the main breadwinner and then my husband takes two days off a week. That’s a personal thing that I would really like to happen at least once, so that I can develop my career.” #19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-work-oriented</td>
<td>“I made my decision based on what is important to me and that is why I’m in this role and not working 80 or 60 hours a week in other roles.” #03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic Dual-oriented</td>
<td>“[Work] is an important role in my life, but it is not the only role that I have in my life that is important…there is not much difference between them (the diverse roles she plays), really, they are all somewhat equally important… So, work's a priority, but it's just as important as these other roles.” #09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paralyzed Dual-oriented</td>
<td>“And I was starting a new job and it was a very difficult time because I was learning so much on the new job…it is for me that I’m doing this, for my intellectual stimulation, and for my fulfilment, but then there was that—not so much guilt, but that priority at that time, it had to switch from my professional development to my kids. I just couldn’t do it all at the same time…yeah, I was letting everybody down because I wasn’t performing at my best.” #08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, *Work-oriented* participants reported 29 descriptive first-order concepts for perceived tensions, corresponding with 87 episodic coping strategies (see Appendix D for a full list of descriptive first-order concepts for perceived tensions and episodic coping strategies). Participants with a *Non-work* orientation reported 31 descriptive first-order concepts for perceived tensions, corresponding with 98 episodic coping strategies. *Pragmatic Dual-oriented* participants reported 35 descriptive first-order concepts for perceived tensions, corresponding with 129 episodic coping strategies; and those with a *Paralysed Dual orientation* reported 28 descriptive first-order concepts for perceived tensions, corresponding with 89 episodic coping strategies.

As discussed previously, the four identified orientations reflect not only differences in perceived tensions, but also coping strategies. Thus, the process of justifying the categorization of 19 participants into these orientations requires
simultaneous consideration of perceived tensions and the combining of multiple coping strategies. Significantly, broadly similar perceived tensions were found to be managed by multiple coping strategies. For example, although similar perceived tensions such as ‘tug of war’ and ‘difficult call’ were found in several interview transcripts, they matched different combinations of codes for coping strategies. For example, under a Pragmatic Dual orientation, strategies ‘emphasizing non-work activities over work involvements’ and ‘re prioritizing work activities over non-work activities’ were found to be used in iteration with coping with tensions perceived as ‘difficult call’. For Work-oriented participants, on the other hand, coping with ‘tug of war’ involved a combination of ‘doing exercise’, and ‘juggling with work’ as the dominant focus and non-work as the subordinate focus.

During focus-coding, codes of perceived tensions that were repeated several times throughout each interview transcript (or seemed synonymous with codes from other interview transcripts) were grouped together for further analysis. For example, descriptive codes such as ‘chaos’, ‘crisis’, and ‘meltdown’, were all grouped as ‘overwhelming’. This step yielded successively more abstract and robust descriptions of perceived tensions. Details of these themes will be further elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6. An overview of the key findings relating to the perceived tensions and coping strategies contingent on the four orientations identified is provided in the next section.

4.3 OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS WITHIN THE FOUR IDENTIFIED ORIENTATIONS

Three key findings relating to the two research questions were identified. The first key finding is that persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands. External triggers refer to incompatible expectations from various role-related partners regarding performance, organizing, and belonging. External triggers resulted from resource scarcity, leading to episodic tensions where work and non-work demands vied for limited personal resources, such as time, energy, and attention. Internal triggers refer to deviations from internal standards about how to display competence, autonomy, and role identity. To orient the reader to theoretical
discussion in the next three chapters, Figure 4.2 provides an overview that summarizes the key findings relating to the two research questions.

Figure 4.2. An Overview of Key Findings

These internal and external demands were acknowledged by all 19 professional women participating in this study. More importantly, professional women in this study explicitly emphasized the interactive effects of internal and external demands. In particular, the interactions between internal and external demands were found to be simultaneously competing and complementary, thus resulting in their persistent nature.

The competing interaction between internal and external demands occurs where external demands aggravate deviations from internal standards, and the resultant dissatisfaction intensifies the pressure to meet incompatible external demands from work and non-work domains. However, in coping with these cascading tensions, professional women reported that resources were also generated, which served as a buffer against certain internal and external triggers. In this way,
some tensions remain latent and do not require immediate resolution, hence their identification as a complementary interaction between internal and external demands.

The way professional women respond to interactions between internal and external demands impacts how they perceive and cope with tensions, which leads to the second key finding: that there are four different orientations to the tensions triggered by internal and external demands, with different ways of combining coping strategies in response to perceived tensions contingent upon orientation.

Professional women’s interpretation of the interaction between internal and external triggers is further explored in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Specifically, perceiving and coping with tensions under Work and Non-work orientations is explored in detail in Chapter 5; Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants’ perception and coping with tensions is explored in detail in Chapter 6.

Work-oriented women tended to perceive tensions between work and non-work roles as a ‘tug-of-war’ and ‘overwhelming’, derived from the non-work domain. The five women grouped under this orientation (participants #02, 06, 07, 17, and 19) reported that their internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities were better satisfied through work engagement. Thus, they perceived that discrepancies between ideal and actual functioning of work and non-work domains could be better handled by emphasizing work when there was tension between work and non-work engagements.

Non-work-oriented women tended to perceive tensions as ‘encroachment’, derived from the work domain. The five women grouped under this orientation (participants #03, 05, 11, 12, and 15) reported that their internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities were better satisfied through non-work engagement. Thus, they perceived that discrepancies between ideal and actual functioning of both domains could be better handled by emphasizing non-work over work when tension existed between the two.

Pragmatic Dual-oriented women tended to perceive tensions between work and non-work roles as an ‘everlasting ebb and flow’. The five women grouped under a Pragmatic Dual orientation (participants #04, 09, 10, 13, and 16) considered mutual engagement in both work and non-work domains as a better fit with internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities. Thus, they
perceived that discrepancies between ideal and actual functioning of both domains could be better handled by emphasizing both domains when tension existed between the two.

Distinct from the other three orientations, the four Paralysed Dual-oriented women (participants #01, 08, 14, and 18) tended to embrace an external standard for displaying performance, organizing, and social identities as a benchmark for the ideal functioning of work and non-work domains. Furthermore, this group of professional women considered mutual engagement in both domains as a better fit with external demands about displaying performance, organizing, and social identities. Hence, Paralysed Dual-oriented women tended to perceive tensions as ‘submersion’.

Therefore, in answer to the second research question this study found that multiple coping strategies are combined by professional women, and that specific combinations are contingent upon their orientation to the tensions surfacing from simultaneous enactment of work and non-work domains. Work-oriented professional women tended to use a ‘cost-benefit’ strategy to cope with the ‘tug of war’ and ‘overwhelming’ tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles. Non-work-oriented professional women tended to adopt a ‘give and take’ strategy to cope with the ‘encroachment’ of work demands on non-work life.

Similarly, Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women approached harmony between work and non-work domains by embracing internal values of displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities. This group of professional women adjusted external demands from both work and non-work roles to align with self-constructed standards. Thus, they tended to adopt an ‘elasticity’ strategy to cope with the ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ of the tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles.

On the other hand, due to the uncontrollable nature of external standards for displaying performance, organizing, and social identities, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants were less content with their self-evaluations. For instance, they considered themselves to be passively reacting to demands from work and non-work domains. Consequently, they tended to adopt a ‘grass is greener on the other side’ strategy for coping with the ‘submersion’ of the tensions perceived between work and non-work roles.
The third key finding is that perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally impact each other due to ongoing interaction between internal and external demands. The reciprocal impact between perception and coping of tensions implies an ongoing process of working through ever-present and ever-changing interaction of internal and external demands. In addition, the reciprocal relationship between perceiving and coping with tensions indicates that an individual’s orientation is relatively stable—but not fixed—over time. In other words, the way in which tensions are managed gradually influences how latent tensions become salient.

As noted above, the four orientations are not fixed approaches to the competing demands encountered during work and non-work interactions. Rather, professional women’s orientation is an expression of a conscious decision that suits their current life circumstances. In addition, the four orientations found in this study do not specify templates for conformity. Instead, their function is to indicate the challenges perceived by professional women as they strive to manage the demands between their work and non-work lives.

### 4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

As the first of three data analysis chapters, an overview of the key findings regarding tensions surfacing from simultaneous enactment of work and non-work was presented to build a foundation for a more detailed analysis and discussion of these findings in Chapters 5 and 6. Details of the data reduction process as a justification for the grouping of 19 participants into four distinct orientations was first presented.

Specifically, this process identified the different aspects of internal and external demands that triggered tensions salient. Three types of internal triggers refer to deviation from internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities while enacting multiple work and non-work roles. Correspondingly, three types of external triggers for tensions refer to expectations from work and non-work role-related partners concerning performing, organizing and displaying a sense of belonging. These internal and external demands were considered to coexist and jointly impact participants’ perception of and coping with tensions during work and non-work interaction.
These three findings are: (1) that persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands; (2) that there are four different orientations to these persistent tensions, with different ways of combining coping strategies in response contingent upon orientation; and (3) perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally impact each other, as the way in which tensions are managed gradually influences how latent tensions become salient.

In addition to providing an overview of this study’s findings, this chapter supports and facilitates the structuring of subsequent data analysis and discussion chapters (Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, the following two chapters are designed to delineate the individual differences across all participants as they constructed tensions between work and non-work domains. More specifically, Chapter 5 focusses on responses from participants with a Dominant-focus orientation, and Chapter 6 focusses on responses from participants with a Dual orientation. The significance of these categories of orientation and their implications for understanding persistent tensions in the context of the work and non-work interface are discussed in Chapter 7.
5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 two categories of orientation were identified in the data. The first, Dominant-oriented, were professional women who valued both work and non-work domains in their lives. However, when tensions between domains became salient due to the interplay of internal and external triggers, Dominant-oriented participants emphasised either: (1) work over non-work, or (2) non-work over work (henceforth, called Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented, respectively). The second category of professional women was those with a Dual orientation. These women also valued both work and non-work domains, but responded to salient tensions by simultaneously prioritizing work and non-work engagements. For these professional women, a dual focus on both work and non-work domains was considered to better satisfy internal (displaying competence, autonomy and role identity) and external (displaying performance, organizing and sense of belonging) demands.

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to explore and explain the perceived tensions between work and non-work domains—and corresponding coping strategies—for professional women with a Dominant orientation. Within this group, Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants are considered individually. The chapter is structured into six sections. Following the introduction (Section 5.1), background information is presented for both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants in Section 5.2, which provides the context for understanding how each subgroup perceived and coped with tensions. The analysis in Section 5.3 relates to the tensions perceived by Work-oriented (5.3.1) and Non-work-oriented (5.3.2) participants, and Section 5.4 analyses their corresponding coping strategies (5.4.1 and 5.4.2 respectively). Theoretical explanations for the reported perceived tensions and coping strategies are provided in Section 5.5, including a comparison of Work and Non-work orientations in order to better understand the different patterns of
perceiving and coping with tensions. Finally, the chapter summary is provided in Section 5.6.

5.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR DOMINANT-ORIENTED PARTICIPANTS

5.2.1 Work-oriented participants

As with all participants, Work-oriented participants (#02, 06, 07, 17, and 19) valued both work and non-work involvement. However, when internally constructed and externally imposed demands made tensions between work and non-work roles salient, they tended to favour involvement in work over non-work activities. For example:

So, it was continually doing work, work, work… As I said, I enjoyed work, I’m happy to have done what I have done. I’m really happy that how I achieved these, but I know there has been sacrifices…The sacrifice is that I lived in a different house to my family, my husband and my daughter, especially my daughter, in her teenage years, she was without mum basically, and my husband was a mother and a father. So those sacrifices were made for me to be able to pursue my academic career. #07 (university professor, age 64, no dependent children)

How Work-oriented participants perceived and coped with tensions made salient by the interaction of internal and external demands are explored in detail in the next two sections. Table 5.1 summarizes the background details of participants with a Work orientation to provide additional context for this analysis of perceived tensions and coping strategies.
Table 5.1  
Background Information for Participants with a Work Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (highest degree)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#06 (PGD)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>A single mother, who had been a nurse in intensive care for over 30 years, then spent over seven years changing her career to librarianship after sustaining a back injury. Currently works as a liaison librarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#02 (PGD)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>A senior administrator at a university, who was a teacher and school principal for over 10 years. Since exiting the education field, she has been the director of HR departments in various universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#07 (PhD)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>A university professor, with a husband who is also a professor in the same field, #07 described herself as the minority within a minority: an immigrant in Australia whose mother language is not English; and one who developed an academic career in a male dominated field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#17 (M)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A single mother, who was a project advisor in federal parliament before motherhood. She took time off to look after her son who has a mental illness. In addition to being the breadwinner and home-maker, participant #17 also takes on other roles such as student, sessional academic at university, and project manager for a non-profit organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#19 (PGD)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>An organizational analyst, had a very diverse professional profile prior to having children, and emphasized that she is discontent with her current part-time status due to the need to stay at home to breastfeed her youngest. Has taken some time off to recover from a back injury sustained during childbirth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PGD - Postgraduate Diploma; PhD - Doctor of Philosophy; M - Masters Degree

The average age for participants with a Work orientation was 55, and with the exception of participant #19, who had two young children, all indicated a less demanding non-work life compared to their work domain. However, when these participants reflected on the period when their own children were young, demanding non-work roles were perceived as interruptions to their work engagement, just as participant #19 currently orients herself towards work, despite heavy domestic duties:

I think if you have a crappy job or a hard job, or a difficult job, there’s never gonna be any kind of happiness or pleasure at all. You know you’re not gonna break your personal—your family life—and when you’re in your
family life, you’re sick of your work. You’re always thinking how horrible my job is. For me it means finding the right job, career, is the most important thing, rather than trying to kind of make a crappy job work for you with your work. #19 (organizational analyst with 2 dependent children, age 38)

It is important to acknowledge here that, the generalizability of these 19 professional women’s perceptions to other populations is untested (as discussed in Section 3.7), which may limit the full portrait of the perception of tensions and coping strategies. In addition to a small sample size, participants in this group had all undertaken a long period of professional education. Thus, a high level of commitment to their work engagements— independent of their non-work activities— would be expected, compared to those not in managerial or professional positions.

5.2.2 Non-work-oriented participants

Participants with a Non-work orientation (#03, 05, 11, 12, and 15) were a group of professional women heavily involved in both work and non-work relevant activities. However, when internally constructed and externally imposed demands rendered tensions between work and non-work roles salient, they tended to favour involvement in non-work over work domains. For example:

There is an opportunity to apply for a higher level role recently. I would really like to go for the higher level role, but I didn’t, because if I did, it means that my little son has to go into before school care, and he hates that. So, I couldn’t get that role, it wasn’t worth it, at this time of my life. #15 (manager in banking with 3 dependent children, age 35)

I want work to be a place that I went to, did work, and then left, and then didn’t think much about it. #03 (registered psychologist in her final month of pregnancy, age 30)

If a person is struggling, especially in the personal front, I guess it’s hard for the person to cope with professional life. For me, that’s been the reality. If things were not good at home, I will not be able to work, or I won’t be able to be as functional as I am in my professional life. But on the contrary, if something is wrong with my professional life, it’s not as damaging in my personal life because I cope – my family is a big, huge support figure to cope with. #05 (clinical psychologist with a dependent child, age 37)
Table 5.2 summarizes the background details of participants with a Non-work orientation to provide additional context for this analysis of perceived tensions and coping strategies.

### Table 5.2

**Background Information for Participants with a Non-work Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (highest degree)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#05 (PGD)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Currently training to be a clinical psychologist. Originally from India, has a diverse professional life, being both a university lecturer and a project manager in two international corporations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#03 (PhD)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>A registered psychologist, married, and in her final month of pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 (PGD)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full-time employed middle-level manager in a same sex relationship. The carer of two children, aged 8 and 15, being the birth mother of the former.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 (M)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Before her present occupation as a reflexologist, was an artist in a theatre, a hospital worker, and a court social worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15 (M)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Was a manager in banking for three years before taking on her current job as a librarian, which she is passionate about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PGD - *Postgraduate Diploma*; PhD - *Doctor of Philosophy*; M - *Master’s Degree*

### 5.2.3 Differences between Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants

The average age for the Non-work-oriented participants presented in Table 5.2 is 40, which is younger than the average for Work-oriented participants (55 years). This difference requires further consideration, as it is likely that orientation is—at least in part—a function of participants’ age and experience (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). That said, both Non-work-oriented and Work-oriented groups clearly invested heavily in their professional development.

However, the perceived demanding nature of their non-work life implies that Non-work-oriented participants are likely to encounter tensions at an increased level of intensity during the work and non-work interface compared to their Work-oriented counterparts. A possible factor in such heightened tension is illustrated in Table 5.2, in which all participants with a Non-work orientation are shown to have dependent...
children (participant #3 was a mother-to-be). This observation is supported by work and non-work research, which has found that age and number of dependent children determine the level of parental responsibility (Michel et al., 2011; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994; Staines & O'Connor, 1980).

On the other hand, Work-oriented participants were found to express stronger negative emotions and react more aggressively when tensions became salient compared to those with a Non-work orientation. Table 5.3 provides a comparison of emotional responses to salient tensions from both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented groups. More specifically, within a Dominant focus, the differences between Work and Non-work approaches are reflected in the first order concepts and second order themes that capture each group’s perceived tensions and coping strategies. Further details regarding these themes are provided in the next two sections.

Table 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Emotional response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-oriented</td>
<td>1. “So, you always feel guilty when you are at home because there wasn’t the staff to take over…you feel guilty for not giving your child a proper childhood because you are too tired. So, guilt on both sides” #06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “I get cross. And there is nobody to get cross at. I just get cross about the situation. I behaved like a cross person.” #02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “So, as a woman, if you stay at home you feel bitter and twisted, because you think ‘Oh, I would have been this, I could have done that’. When you go away, and do other things as I did, you feel guilty... you are never 100% comfortable and content with where you are.” #07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-work-oriented</td>
<td>4. “I don’t know whether I would use the word great difficulty, because I think that is just life…There are times that are more difficult than others, but I just don’t think about it. I just think you’ve just gotta do it…I don’t have time to get depressed. I don’t have time to worry and get really angst.” #15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. “…we all have duties and responsibilities. It’s your call as a person to see that as being a slave or as being part of the whole circle of life.” #12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. “It’s not about what you have or what you don’t have. It’s about seeing it in a different light and perceiving it and being contented. So, there is a way to deal with this because you can’t change the society; you have to deal with that. There’s no way out of it. Or what you can do is you can change yourself, the way you think, so that it makes less impact to your psychological state, isn’t it? So you feel less stressful; so that there is less psychological cost involved, isn’t it?” #05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 FINDINGS: PERCEIVED TENSIONS

In this section the first research question is addressed, namely: how are tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles perceived by (1) Work-oriented, and (2) Non-work-oriented participants? These perceived tensions are explored via a discussion of how Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants made sense of salient tensions that were internally and externally triggered. Several first-order concepts were derived from responding to these internal and external triggers, which served to elaborate the second-order themes for both Work and Non-work orientations.

5.3.1 Perceived tensions under a Work orientation

For Work-oriented participants, tensions become salient when work performance was impeded by non-work demands, leading to simultaneous deviations from internal standards (displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities) and external demands (displaying performance, organizing, and sense of belonging). In particular, two second-order themes seemed to capture these moments of perceived tension. First, tensions between work and non-work domains were perceived as a ‘tug of war’, whereby difficult choices associated with performing multiple, incompatible work and non-work roles impeded work performance. The second, ‘overwhelming’, refers to the tensions perceived when difficulties regarding identification with multiple work and non-work roles impeded work performance.

In total, the Work-oriented group reported 29 episodic triggers. The same number of descriptive first-order concepts of perceived tensions were identified, from which second-order themes ‘tug-of-war’ and ‘overwhelming’ emerged. Table 5.4 provides representative quotations describing the selected first-order concepts from which these two second-order themes were elaborated.
Table 5.4
*Work-oriented Participant Quotes Representing First-order Concepts from which ‘Tug of War’ and ‘Overwhelming’ were derived*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of second-order theme</th>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tug of war:</strong> Perceiving difficult choices regarding how performing incompatible work and non-work roles have impeded work performance.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diminished control</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. “When the hospital would want me to work more, I had to say no because there is no one to look after my daughter, at the same time we needed the money.” #06</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. “…to sit on the floor and just play, when you’d much rather be doing your reading for your course. So, you are trying to half read and play at the same time, and she said ‘mummy, you are not playing, you are not playing’.” #06</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. “Just fitting it in would almost be impossible. If you take yourself away from this job...you can bring somebody in to act in it for a while, but you develop such responsibility for the role. I found that hard to do too, to say that I’m not going to be here for a while...Because I’m ultimately still responsible for what is happening in that position.” #02</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. “The other aspect of insecurity that you may feel that I’m not adequate for a job because I have demands on me—mental demands on me from my family that may impede on my abilities to deliver work, so that I think is a concern.” #19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. “So, you always feel guilty when you are at home because there wasn’t the staff to take over. So, someone calls in sick, there is no one to look after the patients. There is guilt for family too, because you are too tired, constantly tired in nursing. So, you feel guilty for not giving your child a proper childhood because you are too tired. So, guilt on both sides” #06</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. “If it is 7 pm and I’m still here, I ring my partner and say: I’m just about to leave, sweetie. I feel terrible. I often say sorry to him and he often tells me ‘you don’t have to say sorry, you just get home.’ But I say sorry, because I feel [sigh] 7pm, I shouldn’t be here, I should be at home. It is a tension, that time thing is a real tension. And this job is hard, if I plan to leave at 5.30, let’s say. If I have crises that afternoon, then we have to deal with it. Depends on the nature, how urgent that we need to attend to them. Any plan to leave at 5.30 can just go out the window. That can be frustrating.” #02</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. “Everybody has to get some form of income to support themselves. And how do I deal with that tension? Well, the reality is, these sorts of things, I need to work and I need to perform and I need to do the job to the best of my ability, because if I don’t perform, then the likelihood of me getting another job is reduced. But apart from all of that, the professional development and the need I want to pursue a professional career once I finish my research or make that decision about where I’m going is also very, very important.” #17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Description of second-order theme</td>
<td>First-order concept</td>
<td>Sample quotations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overwhelming: Perceiving difficulty in identifying with how multiple work and non-work roles have hampered work performance.</td>
<td><a href="#8">Overwhelming</a></td>
<td>“...when you’ve actually been thrown from working as a single person to being—to developing your career, you can make your own decisions about where you go and you know that the only person you’re affecting is yourself. But once you have children and a family and mortgage and the like, you have a certain level of security around you or need for security. When you start talking about jobs that are a bit risky or jobs that are a bit more stressful, it can leave you in a bit of an insecure position. When you think ‘That may threaten my existence. That may threaten my ability to keep things as they are.’ That’s where the insecurity comes into it as well.” #19</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="#9">Blurred boundary</a></td>
<td>“…if you can orchestrate your drive home to do that, it is the best thing to do. But many, many years ago somebody told me that the moment you pull up at home, you are in a different context and you shouldn’t bring the day of work into that context. It’s not fair on anybody else, and you should make a deliberate effort to do that. It does get hard.” #02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#10">Trickle down</a></td>
<td>“I guess when you are a school, everybody wants a piece of you all the time, seven days a week…if you don’t want to be seven days a week, then being a school principal probably isn’t the job for you.” #02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#11">Trickle down</a></td>
<td>“…the problem of being a single parent is you are very isolated, and you got three big problems - is the isolation, and is lack of money, and is constant tiredness. I think that would define being a single parent…I think on top of that is that if you have a series of bad things happen, like the car breaks down, a lot of cars in an accident, and then this happens, that happens, that is very hard, I think. Just too overwhelming, because I was already coping with, to the maximum that I could cope with” #06</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#12">Trickle down</a></td>
<td>“…trying to do all my study and do the work as a tutor is often a tension for me, because with both of them you have to actually dedicate time and you’ve got to sit there and you’ve got to apply yourself and you’ve got to get into that zone and you’ve got to get into that space. And it does cause me quite a lot of distress because I just say to myself, ‘Which is more important to me?’, and I often think ‘God, I’d like to just not do this tutoring, I shouldn’t have done it’. I certainly think that there is a reduction in emphasis because if I know I have to go out and find work, then finding work is actually a lot of energy. And finding work, putting in job applications, walking around trying to promote yourself at places, and that takes time. It also takes time just to research on the internet organizations, and put your applications and, you know, some of this can take four or five hours. And it is about kind of looking at the company and stuff like that, I mean, you’ve just got to dedicate the time. So, you do shrink some of the other areas, there’s no choice.” #17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#13">Trickle down</a></td>
<td>“So, that was all Thursday. The email communication went on all of Thursday night. We reconvened a recovery group on the Friday. Everybody had a task to do, all of that is OK. That is part of my work. Thursday, Thursday night, Friday, all weekend, Saturday, Saturday night, and Sunday, the matter still went on, via email communication, given direction by phone, and so on... by the time I got to Sunday night, and you realized that you’ve lost your whole weekend. I get cross. And there is nobody to get cross at. I just get cross about the situation. I behaved like a cross person.” #02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first second-order theme ‘tug of war’ is illustrated by two first-order concepts: ‘diminished control’ and ‘incongruence’. Quotations 1 to 4 in Table 5.3 illustrate how perceiving ‘diminished control’ was triggered by resource scarcity in terms of the physical presence, time, energy, and attention needed to perform and organize work and non-work roles simultaneously. For example, participant #06 spent over seven years studying and working as a librarian after a back injury necessitated a career change. Quotations 1 and 2 reveal how participant #06’s roles as a single mother and a student vied for time and attention, revealing concerns about a lack of autonomy in maintaining work performance, while simultaneously meeting non-work demands due to resource scarcity.

Alternatively, participants #02 and #19 expressed dissatisfaction with the need for displaying competence in the work domain due to constraints from the non-work domain. For example, quotations 3 and 4 illustrate frustration due to a sense of ‘diminished control’, whereby participants expressed dissatisfaction with deviations from internal standards for work roles while meeting non-work demands. Figure 5.1 visualizes the scarce resources reported by participant #06, who, at one stage, simultaneously played the roles of single mother, nurse, student, and librarian.

![Figure 5.1. Perceived Resource Scarcity in Combining Work and Non-work Roles](image)

In perceiving tensions as a ‘tug of war’, Work-oriented participants also experienced an ‘incongruence’ regarding the allocation of scarce resources to multiple work and non-work roles, while at the same time trying to maintain a sense of competence and autonomy at work. Table 5.4 provides example quotes from participants that demonstrate how ‘incongruence’ was experienced through: the frustration and guilt of trying to meet the incompatible expectations of work and the demands of a young child (see quotation 5), attempts to follow competing work and
non-work schedules (see quotation 6), and the process of allocating various personal resources (see quotation 7).

‘Overwhelming’ captures how tensions came to the awareness of Work-oriented participants when their attempts to identify with work and non-work roles simultaneously hampered work performance. ‘Overwhelming’ aggregates two first-order concepts: ‘blurred boundary’ and ‘trickle down’. Quotations 8 to 10 illustrate how a ‘blurred boundary’ resulted from identification with incompatible role-related partners’ expectations of work and non-work roles and values. In quotation 8 (see Table 5.4), for example, participant #19 described the sense of strain experienced through work-related decisions when resources were limited by non-work commitments.

Perceiving tensions as ‘overwhelming’ also reflects the ‘trickle down’ impact of having difficulty maintaining work commitments while simultaneously identifying with multiple work and non-work roles. For example, quotations 11 to 13 in Table 5.4 illustrate how expected role identities from non-work life can be in tension with the self-expectations of work engagement. This incongruity is further aggravated by overlapping tension-triggers such as mismatched work and non-work schedules and resource scarcity, as described by participants #06, 17, and 02. For example, in quotation 13 participant #02 expressed frustration and anger at not being able to resolve a work crisis without losing her weekend, such as “behaved like a cross person” (see Table 5.4).

In summary, Work-oriented participants perceived tensions when non-work demands impeded engagement in the work domain. For this orientation, internal demands for displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities, together with external demands for performing, organizing, and expressing belonging were perceived as better satisfied by prioritizing work engagements. In particular, external and internal triggers for tension were found to coexist. This coexistence was elaborated by three first-order concepts: ‘diminished control’, ‘incongruence’, and ‘blurred boundary’.

Furthermore, internal and external triggers for tensions were also reported to be persistent, a feature elaborated by the first-order concept ‘trickle down’. Together, these persistent and coexisting external and internal triggers lead to tensions being perceived as a ‘tug of war’ and ‘overwhelming’. The next subsection outlines how
those with a Non-work orientation perceived tensions surfacing from enactment of work and non-work roles.

5.3.2 Perceived tensions under a Non-work orientation

For Non-work-oriented participants, tensions become salient when non-work engagement was adversely impacted by demands from the work domain, leading to simultaneous deviations from internal standards (displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities) and competing external demands (displaying performance, organizing and sense of belonging). In total, the Non-work-oriented group reported 31 episodic triggers. The same number of descriptive first-order concepts were identified from which the second order theme ‘encroachment’ emerged, which refers to perceived tensions resulting from work demands infringing on non-work life. Table 5.5 provides representative quotations describing the selected first-order concepts (‘spill over’, ‘entanglement’, and ‘dissatisfaction’) from which ‘encroachment’ was elaborated.

Table 5.5
Non-work-oriented Participant Quotes Representing First-order Concepts from which ‘Encroachment’ was derived

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spill over 1. “If I have a client in the afternoon that troubled me, and this happened before, and I haven’t had the opportunity to debrief it with the colleague before I left, I probably would think about it at home, that would just be on my mind all night, until I got to work, and talk it through the next morning, that is the only time I think it would follow me home, because I was concerned about someone.” #03</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. “…so at 8 pm, an email coming through, I know I would check it, because it would be there, and I can check it and maybe it was really important, maybe I needed to respond to it straight away. So, work physically comes into my house, immediately drawing my attention to it, because work is into my phone.” #03</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. “I feel tired, and the moment I wake up in the morning I start feeling tired again. ‘Oh, no, a big day is waiting for me.’ It’s stressful…I’ve been demotivated sometimes and it’s just too much work, never ending. It’s just going on and on and on.” #03</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. “…my older son was only very young. Just so you know, so that you can understand, my partner had my older son, and I have my younger, so that is how we worked it out. So, I was straight back at work, I was full time working; I wasn’t looking after my son. But he was very young and my grandmother was very old and was very ill. And at that time, I had lots of opportunities open to me and I had lots of good things happening at work, but also had a lot of pressure, you know, that sort of thing. My grandmother, after she died, I found it very hard, um, it was just very hard, you know, that kind of pressure at work, very hard, you know.” #11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-order concept</td>
<td>Sample quotations</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. “I’m working in a role that really I shouldn’t take time to do that. Because it is related but it’s not, it was my PhD data; it is not directly relevant to my role. So, I shouldn’t be doing it work time. So all the hours of my week, 40 hours of my week that I can’t do this, they want me to get it done in five days, it means I will have to go home and do it in my personal time at home when I was either cooking or want to go to the gym or hanging out with my husband or friends or something like that, so it was gonna massively impact my life.” #03</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. “…when I’m at work I’m at work, when I’m at home, I’m at home. I don’t mind there being overlap in terms of my colleagues and we do stuff outside of the work context, like socializing and things like that. But in terms of the head space required to be at work and the pressure, I don’t like that encroach to my life, and I don’t like want to be at work 80 hours a week.” #03</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. “I get carried away with my little projects and I forget about my family. So I know that they are kind and they don’t punish me or they don’t yell at me, but I should not abuse them. I must remember that if I care about me, then my family would be happy. But sometimes I get carried away with so many projects.” #12</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. “…this afternoon I need to leave at two o’clock, because I need to take my older son to the dentist, so while I have a lot of work that needs to be done, I’ve managed to discuss that with my boss and we negotiate the meeting that we would have had or the deadlines that we would have had, and to take time off to take him to the dentist. I need to do that because my partner is having some ‘me time’ for her, she is going to a workshop that she wants to go to tonight. Well, this is normally her day off, she would have normally taken the kids to the dentist. Today I need to do it…. If I’m having a particularly hard week or it has been a particularly hard patch, I see the demands of work and family as meaning I have no time for myself. I see them as difficult.” #11</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. “At the moment, the way I’m living is not a proper work-life balance, because my son is missing out on a lot of stuff. He doesn’t get as much time as I would like him to get…But how I see it and how I move on is that this is only for a couple of years.” #05</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. “…everything impacts on being a parent and being a parent impacts on everything… I don’t think it is a bad thing; it is just the way it is. It is just life when you got kids. But I hate those labels that put on working woman, such as ‘Yummy mummy.’ You already got enough pressure as a mum, you got enough pressure to getting up all night, you are trying to feed a baby, and you are trying to do all these, and you are supposed to look like you are a glamorous super woman while you are doing it. I hate those extra roles and expectations that kind of get thrust upon you by the outside world.” #15</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. “…life is not perfect. It’s never ever going to be balanced. Never. There are times when it’s beyond your control because of ecology, your environment –you just need to accept, and if not, then make the most of it, at least. There’s no such thing as perfect world.” #12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The first facet of ‘encroachment’ reflects work-related demands that ‘spill over’ to non-work life, thus leading to little time (Table 5.5, quotations 1-2) or energy (Table 5.5, quotations 3-4) being available for non-work activities. For
example, participant #11 reflected on a period of work pressures that indirectly spilled over to caring for her infant son and ageing grandmother, resulting in strain and a feelings of guilt. Such unwanted spill-over from work to non-work illustrates dissatisfaction with a lack of autonomy while enacting work and non-work roles.

Secondly, ‘encroachment’ resulted from feelings that non-work life was being pulled and pushed due to the ‘entanglement’ of multiple work and non-work role identities. In the case of participant #03, for instance, the fuzzy boundary between paid work and work related activities meant that events such as socializing were still perceived as infringing upon her non-work time (see Table 5.5, quotations 5-6). Similarly, participant #12 reported that close involvement with work projects could temporarily reduce her focus on the family (see quotation 7). For participant #11, on the other hand, when both family and work duties created additional demands, her “me time” was reduced (see quotation 8).

A third feature of ‘encroachment’ is captured by the concept ‘dissatisfaction’, whereby meeting multiple work and non-work demands violates a personal preference for performing non-work roles, thus creating a sense of dissatisfaction with displaying non-work competence. For example, participant #05 described how the demands of career training had impacted the quality of interactions with her five-year-old son, but persevered because those demands were not seen as long term (see Table 5.5, quotation 9). Participant #15 perceived tensions between the general public’s perception of a working mothers’ ability to cope and her own experiences and expectations of combining work and non-work roles, but rationalized that these were the unavoidable difficulties that faced working mothers (see quotation 10).

In summary, derived from several first-order concepts, ‘encroachment’ encapsulates the sense of infringement experienced when Non-work-oriented participants’ work impacted upon their non-work lives. Professional women with a Non-work orientation were found to perceive tensions when non-work engagement was impeded by external demands for performance, organizing and demonstrating belonging while enacting multiple work and non-work roles. Such instances were simultaneously accompanied by deviations from internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and identification with non-work roles.
5.3.3 Summary of perceived tensions for participants with a Dominant orientation

This section demonstrated that Dominant-focused participants’ orientation towards either work or non-work roles is reflected in how the tensions they perceive differ in response to simultaneous enactment of roles in both domains. Table 5.6 summarizes the tensions perceived by both Work and Non-work-oriented participants.

Table 5.6
Perceived Tensions under a Dominant Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order themes</th>
<th>First-order concepts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Orientation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tug of war: making</td>
<td>Diminished control: dissatisfaction with sense of work competence and autonomy in maintaining work performance while meeting non-work demands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>difficult choices</td>
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<td>between incompatible</td>
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<td>work and non-work</td>
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<td>roles perceived to</td>
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<td>have impeded work</td>
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<tr>
<td>performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diminished control:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dissatisfaction with</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sense of work</td>
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<tr>
<td>competence and autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>in maintaining work</td>
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<td>performance while</td>
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<td>meeting non-work</td>
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<td>demands.</td>
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<td>Incongruence:</td>
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<td>incongruent choices</td>
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<td>made when allocating</td>
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<td>scarce resources to</td>
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<td>multiple work and non-</td>
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<td>work roles, while</td>
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<td>maintaining competence</td>
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<td>and autonomy from work.</td>
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<td>Overwhelming:</td>
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<td>perceiving that</td>
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<td>difficulty in identifying</td>
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<td>with multiple work and non-work roles</td>
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<td>has hampered work performance.</td>
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<td>Blurred boundary:</td>
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<tr>
<td>difficulties associated with identification with incompatible expectations of work and non-work roles and values.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trickle down:</td>
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<tr>
<td>the cascading impact of difficulties associated with keeping work commitments while simultaneously identifying with multiple work and non-work roles.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-work Orientation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Encroachment:</td>
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<tr>
<td>tensions perceived as</td>
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<tr>
<td>a result of work</td>
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<td>demands infringing on</td>
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<tr>
<td>non-work life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spill over:</td>
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<tr>
<td>work related issues (concerns, affects, or expectations) “spill over” to non-work life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entanglement:</td>
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<tr>
<td>the feeling that non-work life is being pulled and pushed due to the entanglement of multiple work and non-work role identities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction:</td>
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<tr>
<td>dissatisfaction with the need to display non-work competence when meeting multiple work and non-work demands violates personal preferences for performing non-work roles.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants considered salient tensions to be internally and externally triggered. External forces resulted from resource scarcity, leading to episodic tensions where work and non-work demands vied for limited personal resources, such as time, energy, and attention. Internal triggers referred to deviations from internal standards about how to simultaneously enact multiple work and non-work roles. Significantly, internal and external triggers were considered to coexist and jointly impact participants’ sense of satisfaction with work and non-work interaction. The perception of tensions resulting from these coexisting forces produced different first-order concepts for Work-oriented (‘blurred boundary’, ‘trickle down’ and ‘incongruence’) and Non-work-oriented (‘entanglement’ ‘dissatisfaction’ and ‘spill over’) participants.

However, Work-oriented participants tended to perceive the source of salient tensions as deriving from the non-work domain. This manifested as both deviations from internal standards and competing external demands being perceived as triggered by the non-work domain. For example, internal and external demands were perceived as incompatible with each other regarding displaying competence and performance (see first-order concept ‘diminished control’), autonomy and organizing (see first-order concept ‘incongruence’), and role identities and belonging (see first-order concept ‘blurred boundary’).

Conversely, Non-work-oriented participants perceived that internal and external demands are better satisfied with a non-work priority. Tensions were rendered salient when this priority was constrained by work domain. This led to simultaneous deviations from internal non-work standards and external demands for displays of: (1) competence and performance (first-order concept ‘dissatisfaction’), (2) autonomy and organizing (first-order concept ‘spill over’); (3) role identities and a sense of belonging (first-order concept ‘entanglement’).

Therefore, professional women perceive salient tensions between work and non-work domains differently depending on their orientation. Work-oriented women tend to perceive tensions between work and non-work roles as a ‘tug-of-war’ and ‘overwhelming’, whereas Non-work-oriented women tend to perceive tensions as ‘encroachment’.
Chapter 5: Perceived Tensions and Coping Strategies under a Dominant-Orientation

This section addresses the second research question regarding how professional women coped with work and non-work tensions. The coping strategies employed by Work-oriented professional women are considered first, followed by their Non-work-oriented counterparts. Exploration of these findings entails a discussion of how these two groups of professional women consciously coped with the coexistence of internal and external triggers for tension. As discussed earlier, Work-oriented women tend to perceive the source of salient tensions as deriving from the non-work domain, thus creating a perceived impediment to work engagement. Conversely, Non-work-oriented women tend to perceive the source of salient tensions as deriving from the work domain, experienced as impediments to non-work engagement. Several first-order concepts of coping are presented for both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants, from which second-order themes for coping are elaborated.

5.4.1 Coping under a Work orientation

Multiple strategies were combined in coping with the coexisting and persisting internal and external triggers for tensions. In total, 87 episodic coping strategies were identified, corresponding with the previously reported 39 episodic triggers. ‘cost-benefit’ was identified as the second-order theme for Work-oriented participants coping with tensions perceived as a ‘tug of war’ or ‘overwhelming’ (see Table 5.7). This second-order theme was elaborated from two selected first-order concepts, ‘reframing’ and ‘juggling’.

More specifically, ‘cost-benefit’ refers to decisions to adjust non-work arrangements to accommodate work demands, which were perceived as providing a better fit between self and others’ expectations of how work and non-work roles should be enacted. Table 5.7 provides representative quotations describing the selected first-order concepts from which ‘cost-benefit’ was derived.
### Table 5.7

**Work-oriented Participant Quotes Representing First-order Concepts from which ‘Cost-Benefit’ was derived as the General Coping Strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reframing           | 1. “So, although you do have a lot of these tensions, you are getting a lot of rewards. I mean if you didn’t have a child, you would just be working, so you would miss out a lot of that. In a way you have to sacrifice, all that conflicts or whatever, so that you can have a child and work… I suppose I just accepted that conflict would be there, to some extent, just think that ‘OK, it was bad today, but it won’t be that bad tomorrow.’ Because all of these things happen today, but usually we can get by, so I suppose that gets you through.” #06

2. “It does give you character, you see what I mean, because you got to focus and work through things on your own, make your own decisions, get from A to B, you build confidence that way, I think.” #06

3. “I knew I was progressing toward another career, so I thought it was not forever, so that is the other thing. If I was still in nursing, I would still be doing that…the two (work and non-work) make sense of each other. I think it forces you out of that world where you do just take everything for granted…” #06

4. “I achieved quite highly, but that meant for 13 years, I travelled to Queensland to visit my family. The sacrifice is that I lived in a different house to my family, my husband and my daughter, especially my daughter, in her teenage years, she was without mum basically, and my husband was a mother and a father. So, those sacrifices were made for me to be able to pursue my academic career. Because if I’d stayed here, I would still be, maybe a half-time senior tutor or half-time level A, you know, maximum, a full time level A, maximum.” #07

5. “As I said, I enjoyed work, I’m happy to have done what I have done. I’m really happy that how I achieved these, but I know there has been sacrifices, I know this does not suit everyone. I know there are a lots women think ‘Oh, my husband would run off with another woman’ and that could easily happen and I would have failed if that has happened. Fortunately, that didn’t happen, fortunately, my husband is a decent man and considered my career is as important as his own. So, those limitations are there for other people. Academic life is exceedingly high pressure, so when women are in academic life, they have to get grants, they have to publish; they have to teach, supervise, lots of demands. So few hours here is not enough, they have to take home work and do it here at night.” #07

6. “And having financial independence is very important. I remembered my mum used to say ‘Make sure you have financial independence; that is so important, doesn’t matter how good your husband is, you have to make sure that you have your own income that allows you do what you like to do.’ …the money I earn allows me the flexibility and the kind of things that I want to be doing… and that freedom I would never want to lose. I’m so glad that I have job that gives me the freedom, the freedom of choice.” #07
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. “There are seven nights in a week, I would work at home about four of those seven nights. I take maybe a specific thing, or three things home to do. But when I get in the door at night, I give as much attention as I can to my partner and our two little dogs. I do my home calls; I get texts during the day. I have nieces and nephews who I helped raise when they were little; they’re all old now, but they communicate with me all the time. If I haven’t responded to their texts or emails, I’ll make sure I do that when I get home. If I haven’t phoned my mum I’ll make sure I’ve done that thing as well. So, I try to have a period when I can connect to my family, even if I still have to tend to one or two more papers on that night.” #02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. “If there is an opportunity to go at 5.30, I always take it. I monitor my emails at home.” #02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. “You can do everything, but you’ll just be exhausted, you have no time to recharge your battery, and that would probably be quite detrimental for you… I have good people giving me professional support in my role, that has been very good, that are conscious of your time.” #02</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. “It is juggling many balls at the same time, but that is still your own decisions…The person who is responsible for what you are doing is yourself, nobody else…Now you made those choices, you live with it or you change what the choices were.” #02</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. “…a juggler is a very skilled person because even though they have the balls in the air, they still keep the balls moving….And to be able to be so focused to know that one ball, it’s coming down, it’s gonna be in their hand at this point but the other hand is also moving the other one up, and there’s multiple balls happening at the same time. They’re doing something fairly systematic. So what you see is this person who is so focused that they can keep this moving on, and it continues on. But what you aren’t seeing is the kind of mental thing that’s happening in that head to keep them going and for others to be entertained. And to me, that is actually what happens for all of us, really. Some people do it in different ways and it possibly sounds that their lives may be quite haphazard and chaotic and really chaotic and it’s been given over to others as a form of control. And so for me, though, I actually have total control of what’s happening. It can look quite chaotic, how I’ve got all my circles, and I’ve got multiple circles but this is how I see my life. It’s a collage, and there’s a lot of thing happening there, and they’re all happening at the same time.” #17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. “My life is a business and you have to have networking in there to keep it surviving. You have to have social interactions. You have to have personal development. You have to have learnings that go on and they are ongoing, and you have to face new challenges every day because you have to learn how to make decisions and you have to learn how to make decisions that are good decisions, and you have to make decisions that will be at sunk cost, as an economic term, “sunk cost”. You make the decision, once you make that decision it means other decisions have to fall aside. And you have to make decisions that are consistent with you as a human being and how you want to operate in the world.” #17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. “You always have something to do. I don't feel like I have to take time away from here to give time there or—I just think that these lists—I just have to keep working through them…Everyone wants a piece of you. Likewise, I take a little piece of everyone as well. See, that’s what some people don’t realise is that you do actually—you do get a lot of support as well.” #19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘Cost-benefit’ is an overarching theme that embodies two different types of coping strategy. First, by consciously ‘reframing’ resource depletions (e.g. depletion of physical presence, time, energy, or attention) as an enriching experience, coping with tensions from work and non-work domains is alleviated. For example, participant #06 reported physical tiredness, isolation due to lack of time for socializing, and financial pressures as coexisting with exciting learning opportunities, professional recognition, autonomy, happiness, and personal fulfilment.

However, participant #06 emphasized the significance of her desire for intellectual advancement in maintaining a quality of life, and how that positively influenced her relationship and interactions with her daughter (see Table 5.7, quotation 1). In addition, coping with multiple work and non-work roles—particularly during an intense period of career transition—imbued participant #06 with a positive sense of self-worth for what she was able to achieve (quotation 2). Therefore, participant #06 considered her need for competence was best served by pursuing a career change, rather than by staying in job that was well-paid and meaningful, but lacking opportunities for intellectual advancement, recognition, and autonomy (quotation 3).

Based on the resources identified in Table 4.1, Figure 5.2 illustrates this interweaving of work and non-work roles, capturing the resource depletion and generation perceived by participant #06 during the work and non-work interface. The blue rectangles represent the work and non-work roles participant #06 plays, red rectangles represent depleted resources, and green rectangles represent resources generated during interactions with various role-related partners. Figure 5.2 not only highlights the costs and benefits of simultaneous enactment of multiple work and non-work roles, but also the meanings participant #06 attached to these roles under a Work orientation.
In another example of ‘reframing’, participant #07 discussed tensions that were externally imposed or the result of incompatible role identities, as well as those related to displays of competence and the perception of autonomy (see Table 5.7, quotations 4-5). By consciously deciding to place more weight on work, participant #07 not only clarified her value, but also enriched her family life. For instance, financial independence and career advancement enabled alignment of her needs to display autonomy and competence with work and non-work role-related partners’ expectations (quotation 6).

Although varied in their constructions of how resource generation contributes to alignment between self-expectation and external demands, Work-oriented participants constantly adjust their sense of satisfaction while enacting work and non-work roles to better accommodate their work focus. Hence, the second type of ‘cost-benefit’ coping strategy involves ‘juggling’ between work and non-work roles, with work as the dominant focus and non-work as the subordinate focus.

To illustrate Work-oriented ‘juggling’, quotations 7-8 (see Table 5.7) indicate that participant #02’s non-work engagement was bound in time and space, never
taking family phone calls or attending to other non-work related matters during work hours. Further, when participant #02 needed to work late, she chose to bring work home to fulfill work duties, thereby still allowing time to interact with family members. Participant #02 also adjusted her work involvement by delegating tasks to subordinates (see quotation 9, Table 5.7).

In addition, quotation 10 suggests that combining work and non-work roles stemmed from participant #02’s own needs, rather than those of role-related partners or others’ expectations. By adjusting her needs for displaying competence and exercising autonomy to better satisfy work pursuits while still accommodating non-work demands, the gains from ‘juggling’ were perceived to outweigh the costs. Apart from adjusting self-expectations of how—and to what extent—work and non-work roles should be performed, ‘juggling’ also reflects how participants actively negotiated with others to cope with persisting and interrelated tensions (see quotations 11-13, Table 5.6).

In summary, Work-oriented participants enacted a ‘cost-benefit’ strategy to cope with external demands for performance, organizing, and belonging, as well as deviations from internal standards regarding displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities. As discussed in Section 5.3, these external and internal triggers for tensions were found to coexist and persist. In response to these coexisting and persistent triggers, the complementary aspect of internal and external demands was fostered through a combination of ongoing ‘juggling’ and ‘reframing’ strategies.

For Work-oriented participants, these strategies required ongoing efforts to build connections between the three aspects of internal and external demands respectively. As illustrated in Figure 5.2, satisfaction with meeting one aspect of the coexisting internal and external demands were found to buffer tensions triggered by other aspects of internal and external demands. In addition, enriching experiences during the enactment of one aspect of internal and external demands were found to facilitate the execution of internally and externally derived expectations. In this way, the complementary interaction between aspects of internal and external demands is enhanced.
5.4.2 Coping under a Non-work orientation

In order to address both immediate concerns and longer term stability for simultaneous work and non-work engagements, Non-work-oriented participants were found to adopt a ‘give and take’ strategy to cope with the perceived ‘encroachment’ of work demands on non-work life. As a second-order theme, ‘encroachment’ was derived from 98 episodic coping strategies. More than one coping strategy was adopted when confronting the 31 episodic triggers. ‘Give and take’ refers to decisions to balance work and non-work engagements by adjusting work arrangements to accommodate non-work demands, thus maintaining non-work as the core. Three first-order concepts in particular captured the ‘give and take’ strategy adopted by Non-work-oriented participants: ‘independence’, ‘internal adjustment’, and ‘evolving role identity’. Table 5.8 provides quotations that represent the specific first-order concepts from which ‘give and take’ emerged.

The first theme, ‘independence’, corresponds with the uncontrollable spill over of work to non-work discussed in Section 5.3.2. Quotations 1-3 (see Table 5.8) indicate how participants #11 and #03 used jogging or exercise as a means of psychologically separating work and non-work life. Despite occasionally working late, these participants never brought work home and made deliberate efforts to physically separate work and non-work life. However, Non-work-oriented participants also demonstrated efforts to maintain their work engagement by allocating more personal resources to work-related matters, so long as this was a conscious choice and not one imposed by others (see quotation 4, Table 5.8). In addition, quotations 5 and 6 in Table 5.8 demonstrate how participants #03 and #11 enacted autonomy by adjusting work arrangements to accommodate non-work activities, thus illustrating one aspect of a ‘give and take’ strategy.

‘Internal adjustment’ captures the second aspect of the ‘give and take’ strategy adopted by Non-work-oriented participants. For example, participant #12 made conscious choices to ensure she could enjoy both work and non-work lives by opting to work part-time in a flexible workplace. While emphasizing that caring for her young daughter was a priority, she devoted significant time and energy to developing projects in the community that drew on her passion as an artist. In contrast to those with a Work orientation, participant #12 preferred analogies such as “buffet”,
“journey”, and “detour” to “juggling” as descriptors of her efforts to confront multiple work and non-work demands (see Table 5.8, quotations 7-8).

Furthermore, quotation 9 in Table 5.7 indicates that better accommodation of work demands requires a deliberate effort to adjust one’s need for displaying non-work competence. In a second illustration, quotation 10 indicates participant #05’s dissatisfaction with the way she interacted with her young son due to the hectic training required to be a clinical psychologist. Although non-work was her priority, she made a conscious decision to temporarily emphasize work, as training only lasted for one year. However, she was realistic about her own capacity in terms of completing her training while raising a child, thus demonstrating how she adjusted her dissatisfaction with displaying non-work competence to match the reality of her circumstances.

Table 5.8
Nonwork-oriented Participant Quotes Representing First-order Concepts from which ‘Give and Take’ was derived as the General Coping Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>1. “Because then I use the gym as clearing my head space or I use exercise to clear my head into basically take work away from me.” #03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “I like to jog home, because it means I stop thinking about work, because it is a physical thing, it is a physical effort, it means as soon as I get out of the door, I started jogging not thinking work anymore. Once I get home, I’m busy with the kids, I don’t think about work anymore, so it is very, I like to keep things very defined.” #11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “I like to keep things very defined, very separate, so they are very separate... so when I’m at work, I give it 110%, really give it my all. Then when I’m walking away from work, I don’t take work home with me, I don’t take work home for the weekend or the evening – that’s a very unusual situation.” #11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. “But to me, it is about balancing the two of them and not having one encroaching too much on the other. A lot of people talk about how it goes from work to life, and how work encroaches to life, but there are a lot of people who aren’t professional, have their life massively encroaches to their work as well, and that reflected in performance in their workplace...So, it does work both ways, I think a lot of people talk about it in terms work encroaches on life, not so much life encroaches on work.” #03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                     | 5. “...this afternoon I need to leave at two o’clock, because I need to take my older son to the dentist, so while I have a lot of work that needs to be done, I’ve managed to discuss that with my boss and we negotiate the meeting that we would have had or the deadlines that we would have had, and to take time off to take him to the dentist... My boss knows that in the previous week I’ve been working long hours,
Chapter 5: Perceived Tensions and Coping Strategies under a Dominant-Orientation

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**First-order concept**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longer than usual, and then next week I work longer hours and get that all pick up.”</td>
<td>#11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“So, even I don’t love working 12 hours a day every now and then, it means I can put the hour together and take off a day during the week to get haircut, go to see the dentist and have a day off. So, it is kind of give and take. Even though that very much infringes on my personal time, that time I have to work late, it has given back to me in another way. So, I don’t know if I caught out in the tug of war or not, because it is give and take in a way. If my job was so ridiculous busy that I wasn’t been able to get that time back, that would be different.”</td>
<td>#03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…you taste it and you say, ‘No, I don’t like that’. So, I would stick to this one but I’m very, very – I like this too. But the rest, you can have a little taste of everything.”</td>
<td>#12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“So, if you juggle, because you know that you’re skilful in juggling, you’re aware of that, but I don’t use that allegory of juggling, never, but I understand what it is. To me it’s a journey. If today is the detour, I can’t force myself to go in my car and bulldoze all the rest of those road marks. I’m gonna be in trouble, isn’t it? So, I have to follow the detour or to go back, if it allows me to go back. Sometimes, yeah, I break rules...And if I caught up with the risk, I was aware of it and I just need to be responsible, because I chose not to care in that little bit because there’s something more important. So, there is a journey. Like you know the ambulance, it breaks the rules all the time because that’s pressing. That’s most important. But life is not like that. Life is not an ambulance all the time. Life is actually just a little detour of here and there. And it’s not really major. So, if we complain, fine. But don’t complain every day because it’s not good for you. You got to care about your family.”</td>
<td>#12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I guess taking on (my) current job role is a conscious decision, and going back to study is a conscious decision...balance of how important is my job, how my job and my family coexist in a way that makes everybody happy.”</td>
<td>#15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“At the moment, the way I’m living is not a proper work-life balance because my son is missing out on a lot of stuff. He doesn’t get as much time as I would like him to get...but how I see it and how I move on is that this is only for a couple of years. It’s not going to stay...I’ve got ideas how it should stabilise and how we should sort of give everything the proper time that it needs.”</td>
<td>#05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think you value those things that you love...there are more love and weights attached to them, I value them most, but I don’t think they define me. That doesn’t mean that is all I have. There are lots of bits that could come, and bits are part of me. I think you can value something without it defining you.”</td>
<td>#15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s not the same size as I grow older. The pie for that particular item can grow bigger sometimes and then it could grow smaller depending on your environment, because our environment we don’t have control. Your environment is your salary, the needs, people getting sick or etc., the things that you want to do, the things—your children are growing or retention, election or anything really. So, just as long as that pie, all that balance, whatever it is both scales, has got you in it and look who’s caring for you and you know what your duties and you know what risks are then you are able to still maintain it because balance is not balance in what we do,”</td>
<td>#15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The third first-order concept ‘evolving role identity’ corresponds to the tensions of ‘entanglement’ of multiple work and non-work role identities discussed in Section 5.3.2. For example, quotations 11 and 12 (see Table 5.8) reflect different aspects of the self that are not unchanging properties of the individual. Indeed, rather than taking historical or traditional role definitions for granted, participants #15 and #12 made deliberate efforts to define what each role meant to them. Furthermore, this evolving role identity also reflects participants’ awareness of coping strategies that
had the unintended consequence of stimulating further tensions. For example, participants #03 and #11 had made very clear career decisions to favour their family after experiencing circumstances in which work occupied most of their energy (see quotations 13-14, Table 5.8). Therefore, indications point to an evolving view of self-capacity in constructing responses to ‘entanglement’. For example, participant #05 developed the ability to accept the consequences of her choices, something that she saw as requiring practice and learning (see quotations 15-17, Table 5.8).

In summary, Non-work-oriented participants perceived tensions as ‘encroachment’ triggered by competing internal and external demands during work and non-work interactions. An overarching ‘give and take’ coping strategy was adopted to foster the complementary interaction between different aspects of internal and external desires during the enactment of work and non-work roles. In particular, ‘independence’, ‘internal adjustment’, and ‘evolving role identity’ strategies were used to enhance connections between the three different aspects of internal and external expectations. In this way, the meeting of one aspect of internal and external demands enabled the transfer of resources and support that in turn complement the execution of other aspects of internal and external demands.

5.4.3 Summary of coping strategies adopted by Dominant-oriented participants

Work-oriented participants tended to use a ‘cost-benefit’ strategy to cope with the ‘tug of war’ and ‘overwhelming’ tensions triggered by internal and external demands. For these participants, maintaining a work priority during work and non-work interactions was perceived as better satisfying their internal and external demands. By prioritising work in this way, a ‘cost-benefit’ strategy entails conscious ‘juggling’ between engagements in both domains, and ‘reframing’ the internal and external triggers that are derived from the non-work domain.

Furthermore, ‘juggling’ between work and non-work roles not only eased dissatisfaction with deviations from one aspect of internal and external demands, but also buffered the other two aspects. Additionally, ‘reframing’ further strengthens the support and resources available by satisfying one aspect of internal and external desires, thus facilitating the fulfilment of other aspects. In this way, Work-oriented participants utilized a ‘cost-benefit’ strategy to increase the complementary interaction between aspects of internal and external demands.
To better illustrate these attempts at restoring a sense of equilibrium, Table 5.9 summarizes the coping strategies of both Work-oriented and Non-Work-oriented participants.

Table 5.9
*Coping Strategies Adopted by Dominant-oriented Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order themes</th>
<th>First-order concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-Oriented</td>
<td><strong>Cost-benefit:</strong> adjusting non-work arrangements to accommodate work demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reframing</strong> to facilitate coping with tensions triggered by the depletion of resources of physical presence, time, energy, and attention when simultaneously enacting work and non-work roles.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Juggling</strong> with work as the dominant focus, and non-work as the subordinate focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-work-Oriented</td>
<td><strong>Give and take:</strong> balancing work and non-work engagements, but with non-work as the core, and adjusting work arrangements to accommodate non-work demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Independence:</strong> maintaining role multiplicity while protecting non-work from the uncontrollable spill over from work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Internal adjustment:</strong> to address dissatisfaction with displaying non-work competence due to demands from multiple work and non-work roles violating a preference for non-work roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Evolving role identity:</strong> corresponding to the tensions of entangled multiple work and non-work roles identities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-work-oriented participants tended to adopt a ‘give and take’ strategy to cope with the ‘encroachment’ of work demands on non-work life. For these participants, maintaining a non-work priority during work and non-work interactions was perceived as better satisfying internal and external demands. Via a combination of ‘independence’, ‘internal adjustment’, and ‘evolving role identity’, those with the Non-work orientation fostered the complementary interaction of aspects of internal and external demands.

However, efforts to cope with internal and external triggers for tensions are not experienced as singular episodes. Rather, external demands are constantly changing during work and non-work interactions, and internal desires are evolving. To illustrate, although a ‘give and take’ strategy was used by Non-work oriented
participants to cope with tensions that were both internally and externally triggered, this approach also stimulated new tensions such as ‘dissatisfaction’ and ‘entanglement’ (see Section 5.3.2).

Therefore, coexisting internal and external triggers imply that in reality tensions are cascading and persistent in nature. In other words, reciprocal impacts between the perception of tensions and their coping strategies are implied. However, for the purposes of clarity, this chapter has presented internal and external triggers for tension and their coping strategies as individual events. The theoretical implications of tensions in a work and non-work context are explored in-depth in the next section.

5.5 THEORETICAL EXPLANATION RELATING TO THE TWO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following theoretical clarification of perceived tensions and coping strategies begins with how Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented professional women interpret the coexistence of internal and external triggers for tension. Thereafter, discussion centres on how the ongoing interactions of internal and external triggers for tension were approached differently by Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants. As this study adopted a tension lens to explore the challenge of work and non-work interactions, findings are discussed in the light of the tension literature, thus contributing a deeper understanding of tensions in the context of the work and non-work nexus.

5.5.1 The competing and complementary interaction of triggers for tension

Smith and Lewis (2011) earlier proposed a dynamic equilibrium model to specify the characteristics—and management—of paradoxical tensions, in which persisting paradoxical tensions can remain latent and embedded during social interactions. The authors suggested that latent tensions were rendered salient due to environmental and individual factors. The external factors identified in the current study were found to be compatible with the environmental factors suggested by Smith and Lewis (2011), namely: plurality (stakeholders have different interests, which create competing goals); change (incompatible emotions or identities resulting from organizational change); and scarcity (competing for limited finance, temporal, or human resources).
The individual factors, and in particular the ability to recognize and respond to contradictory demands—or what Smith and Lewis (2011) termed *paradoxical cognition*—were evidenced in both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants’ construction of the ongoing competing and complementary interactions between internal and external demands. The competing interaction is the result of resource scarcity and multiple role expectations from work and non-work role-related partners, together with deviations from internal standards, which jointly contribute to the discrepancy between ideal and actual functioning of both domains.

For example, first-order concepts such as ‘incongruence’ (Work-oriented), ‘blurred boundary’ (Work-oriented), and ‘dissatisfaction’ (Non-work-oriented) suggest that tensions were triggered by discrepancies between desires for certain resources and the actual availability of those resources to both Work-oriented and Non-Work-oriented participants. As illustrated in Figure 5.3, the white side of the Yin-Yang circle denotes salient tensions that result from competing interactions, which require immediate responses.

The complementary interaction is the result of ongoing efforts to build connections between the three aspects of internal and external demands respectively. As analysed in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, satisfaction at meeting single aspects of internal standards and the corresponding external demands were found to buffer other aspects of competing external demands, as well as deviations from internal standards. Furthermore, both work and non-work oriented participants reported that the process of coping with the interaction of internal and external triggers also stimulated enriching experiences. As illustrated in Figure 5.3, the black side of the Yin-Yang symbol denotes latent tensions that result from complementary interactions, which create a buffer that mitigates the need for an immediate response.

However, tensions are not eliminated in this way. Rather, by seeking alignment between internal standards and external demands, the latency of certain tensions is maintained. This persistent nature of tensions is represented in Figure 5.3, by the white and black dots within the Yin-Yang circle, indicating that various tension episodes were not experienced as discrete incidents during the enactment of work and non-work roles. For example, coping with external demands activated dissatisfaction with respect to autonomy and competence, thereby stimulating incompatible role identities: ‘dissatisfaction’ and ‘entanglement’ for Non-work-
oriented participants; and ‘trickle down’ and ‘blurred boundary’ for Work-oriented participants.

Crucially, analysis in Sections 5.3 and 5.4 concluded that competing and complementary interactions were constructed by participants as being persistent in nature. For example, first-order concepts such as ‘blurred boundary’ (Work-oriented), ‘trickle down’ (Work-oriented), ‘entanglement’ (Non-work-oriented) and ‘evolving role identity’ (Non-work-oriented) demonstrate not only the interplay between external demands and self-expectations on a short term basis (illustrated as the green interlocking gear for short-term responses in Figure 5.3), but also for prolonged periods of time (illustrated as the blue interlocking gear for long-term coping strategies). The coexisting competing and complementary interaction between internal and external demands is represented by two interlocking gears in Figure 5.3,

Figure 5.3. Perceiving and Coping with Tensions under Work and Non-work Orientations
thus creating “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3).

This subsection has discussed how tensions are rendered salient due to the competing interaction between internal and external demands. Although the *complementary* interaction between internal and external demands temporarily eases tensions, it does not *eliminate* them. Perceived tensions and coping strategies adopted by Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants reveal that both internal and external triggers for tension have short-term, as well as the long-term impacts, requiring ongoing efforts to work through. The next subsection discusses two distinct (Work and Non-work) orientations to these persistent tensions.

5.5.2 Two distinct orientations to persistent tensions

Apart from the salient and latent tensions proposed by Smith and Lewis (2011), their dynamic equilibrium model suggests that coping with salient tensions requires iterating between *acceptance* and *paradoxical resolution*. *Acceptance* refers to the ability to recognize the interrelatedness of paradoxical tensions (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Under this proposal, rather than attempting to eliminate tensions, coping requires ongoing efforts to capitalize on the connection between contradictory elements by consciously employing *paradoxical resolution*. As an example of *paradoxical resolution*, individuals may constantly shift attention between multiple, even competing coping strategies, such as fluctuating between the integration and differentiation of competing strategic commitments (see Smith, 2014).

Although the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011) specified the environmental and individual factors that determine whether tensions become salient or latent, as well as their corresponding coping strategies, these theoretical insights are extended in this study by: (1) elaborating the iteration between salient and latent tensions; (2) specifying two different ways of perceiving salient tensions by Work-orientated and Non-work-oriented participants; and (3) illuminating two different ways of employing iteration between acceptance and paradoxical resolutions depending on an individuals’ orientation to work or non-work.

According to the tension literature, iteration between *acceptance* and *paradoxical resolution* contributes to short-term performance as well as long-term sustainability (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Smith, 2014). Consistent with this
view, both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants were able to live with coexisting competing and complementary interaction between internally and externally triggered tensions by consciously adjusting their self-expectations to various work and non-work roles. As both work and non-work involvements were perceived as meaningful and important to all participants in this study, the presence of persistent and coexisting tensions required the constructing of responses that not only addressed immediate concerns in responding to salient tensions, but also offered longer term sustainability for simultaneous work and non-work involvements.

Correspondingly, professional women were found to deploy various strategies simultaneously. In the short term, both groups of dominant-orientated professional women were found to (1) simultaneously negotiate with Work and Non-work role-related partners; and (2) adjust self-expectations through differentially allocating personal resources to both work and non-work domains. By constantly iterating the priority between work and non-work activities, both Work-orientated and Non-work-oriented professional women reported that most identifiable tensions could be effectively resolved. Such short term approaches to coping are consistent with the paradoxical resolution suggested by previous research as a strategy for confronting salient tensions (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

However, in contrast to the existing literature, this study specifies short-term and long-term distinctions when acceptance and paradoxical resolution (Smith & Lewis, 2011) are employed as coping strategies. This distinction is illustrated in Figure 5.3, where the green interlocking gear denotes short-term responses, and the blue interlocking gear represents long-term coping strategies. While achieving short term performance in confronting salient tensions requires paradoxical resolution, in the long term, acceptance was found to be achieved in two distinct ways depending on participants’ orientation.

Work-oriented participants accepted persistent tensions via ‘reframing’, achieved by adjusting internal drives for displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities through a work focus. On the other hand, Non-work-oriented participants accepted persistent tensions via ‘evolving role identities’, achieved by adjusting internal drives for displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities through a non-work focus. In other words, for Work-oriented participants, the primary focus of ‘juggling’ is in work engagement, and non-work activities were adjusted to
accommodate this core. For Non-work-oriented participants, the core consisted of non-work activities, which were protected by a clear yet flexible boundary when enacting multiple work and non-work roles.

Therefore, for both groups of participants, having either a Work or Non-work orientation not only influenced their efforts to regain or maintain the status quo, but also the way they perceived tensions within their overarching work and non-work lives. For Work-oriented participants, tensions were perceived as salient when non-work demands impeded maintenance of their work priority, which resulted in simultaneous deviations from internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and identities with work roles. For Non-work-oriented participants, tensions were perceived as salient when work demands impeded maintenance of their non-work priority, creating simultaneous deviations in internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and identities with non-work roles.

In summary, the way persistent tensions are perceived and managed by professional women with a dominant orientation has implications for understanding how latent tensions can become salient, and how salient tensions are managed and transformed into latent. Due to the variations in perceiving of, and coping with tensions observed between orientations, the individual complexity of experiencing “ubiquitous and persistent forces” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3) in a work and non-work context can be further illuminated.

By specifying two different orientations to perceiving and coping with work and non-work tensions, this study elaborates the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011) in three ways. First, in constructing tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions, salient tensions can be internally and externally triggered. How salient tensions are experienced is contingent on an individuals’ orientation to either the work or non-work domain.

Furthermore, professional women in this study revealed that external demands or internal desires were constantly changing due to their ongoing competing and complementary interactions. Therefore, coping with persistent and coexisting tensions cannot be reduced to a pre-defined algorithm. However, various tension episodes were not experienced as discrete incidents insofar as the way in which tensions are managed gradually influences how latent tensions become salient. The cascading and persistent nature of tensions therefore imply, that in reality reciprocal
impacts between the perception of tensions and their coping strategies were experienced by both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented participants. Secondly, latent and salient tensions iterate between each other.

Third, in confronting salient tensions, although professional women with a dominant-orientation may iterate between acceptance and paradoxical strategies in resolving tension episodes (Smith & Lewis, 2011); they differ in their long-term behavioural choices and approach to competing demands, depending on their work and non-work orientation.

5.6 SUMMARY

This chapter established three key findings. First, persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands. The analysis shows that, regardless of orientation, tensions between work and non-work domains are considered to be both internally and externally triggered. Internal triggers of tension refer to deviations from internal standards about how to enact work and non-work roles. External triggers of tension refer to the competing demands from work and non-work role-related partners. More specifically, this study specifies three aspects of internal and external demands that render tensions salient.

The second key finding is that there are two distinct approaches—Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented—to the management of persistent tensions where one domain is dominant. Each of these approaches is characterized by the different ways of combining coping strategies in response to perceived tensions contingent upon orientation. Work-oriented professional women perceive tensions as ‘tug of war’ and ‘overwhelming’, requiring ‘cost-benefit’ strategies to cope with episodic tensions in the short term, but with a long-term focus on their work domains. On the other hand, Non-work-oriented professional women perceive tensions as ‘encroachment’, requiring ‘give and take’ strategies to cope with episodic tensions in the short term, but with a long-term focus on their non-work domains.

Thirdly, it was found that perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally affect each other due to ongoing interaction between internal and external demands. The process of working through the ever-present and ever-changing interaction of internal and external triggers for tensions leads to an ongoing competing and
complementary relationship between the various aspects of internal and external demands.

Key to unearthing these three findings was evidence of ongoing competing and complementary interactions between internal and external triggers for tensions. In the next chapter, how two groups of Dual-oriented participants perceived tensions—and their corresponding coping strategies—is explored and explained. As with their single-oriented counterparts in this chapter, the discussion of the findings in Chapter 6 focuses on how those with a Dual orientation approached the ongoing competing and complementary interaction of internal and external triggers for tensions.
Chapter 6: Perceived Tensions and Coping Strategies under a Dual Orientation

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, it was argued that Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented professional women value both their work and non-work lives, and when tensions between domains are rendered salient, they prioritize the domain they perceive to better satisfy internal and external demands. The purpose of Chapter 6 is to analyse and elucidate the perceived tensions and coping strategies of two subgroups of Dual-oriented participants.

For professional women with a Dual orientation, work and non-work domains are considered closely intertwined, where involvement in different life roles provides them with opportunities to display competence, autonomy, and role identity. At the same time, they are expected to fulfil corresponding external demands from role-related partners regarding performance, organizing and belonging. Tensions are perceived as salient when they confront deviations from the coexistence of these internal and external demands. However, within a dual orientation, professional women differ in how they evaluate whether internal and external demands are satisfied. Two subgroups emanate from this difference: Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women.

This chapter is divided into six sections, in which the perceived tensions and coping strategies that distinguish these two orientations are explored. Following the introduction (Section 6.1), the background details for both Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants are presented in Section 6.2, thus providing a context for the findings relating to how Dual-oriented participants perceived (Section 6.3) and coped with (Section 6.4) tensions. Thereafter, in Section 6.5 theoretical explanations for the perceived tensions and coping strategies analysed in Sections 6.3 and 6.4 are provided, including a comparison of Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual orientations in
terms of their interpretation of standards for meeting internal and external demands. Finally, a chapter summary is provided in Section 6.6.

6.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR DUAL-ORIENTED PARTICIPANTS

6.2.1 Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants

Participants with a Pragmatic Dual orientation (#04, 09, 10, 13, and 16) were professional women who valued both work and non-work involvement. However, when encountering competing demands from both work and non-work domains, they do not prioritize one domain over the other. For these professional women, internal demands for displaying competence, autonomy, and role identity could only be actualized by engagement in both domains, and were also perceived as better satisfying external competing demands for displaying performance, organizing, and belonging during work and non-work interactions. For example:

I don’t think I would be me without all of these bits, all these roles. I don’t think I’d be as fulfilled or happy. I might be slightly less sleep deprived. #13
(IT consultant with 2 dependent children, age 35)

However, this group of participants emphasized the evolving nature of internal and external demands during work and non-work interactions. In particular, they considered certain roles to be more important at different stages of their lives. The importance attached to roles depended on the changing levels of satisfaction derived from those roles. For example:

Knowing where we are in life and have reasonable expectations, and work out what is gonna make you happy. For some people, yes, you might have children, but the work role might still be the most important. But that is fine, as long as it is giving you the satisfaction that you want. #09 (clinical psychologist with 2 dependent children, age 51)

To provide more context for the analysis of perceived tensions and coping strategies, Table 6.1 summarizes the background details of participants with a Pragmatic Dual orientation.
### Table 6.1
*Background Details for Participants with a Pragmatic Dual Orientation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (highest degree)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#04 (M)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A computer programmer, who works part-time and is the main care provider for two young children while her husband works full-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#09 (PhD)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A clinical psychologist, both she and her partner have worked part-time in the last 20 years. Despite only working part-time since migrating to Australia from South Africa 20 years ago, she has always been employed, no matter how heavy or light her non-work demands have been.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 (M)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A business consultant. While she and her husband share parenting duty for their three dependent children, she was the main financial provider when her husband was pursuing his PhD. She is currently undertaking a Masters degree by research and works part-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 (M)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Recently divorced, she is the main care provider for two young children. Apart from the mother, employee, breadwinner, and house maker roles, participant #13 is also writing a book and heavily involved in community service and various recreational activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#16 (PhD)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Career counsellor. She is single and child free. The various work roles and student roles participant #16 has taken on stem from her passion for learning, and she had completed two Masters degrees and a PhD in different subjects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PhD - Doctor of Philosophy; M - Master’s Degree**

### 6.2.2 Paralysed Dual-oriented participants

Similar to Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants, those with a Paralysed Dual orientation (#01, 08, 14, and 18) were professional women who considered that internal and external demands could only be actualized through both work and non-work involvement. As such, when competing external demands coexisted with deviations from internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identity, they did not prioritize either work or non-work domains.

However, unlike their pragmatic counterparts, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants were inhibited by their intention to align self and others’ expectations whenever discrepancies occurred. This paralysis not only reflects their construction of tensions, but also their own evaluation of coping with these tensions. For example:
Failure is not something I am prepared to allow. It’s not something I was brought up to think was okay. And if I’m not the one that suffers, then maybe it will be my kids or my husband. And in the past, I haven’t been prepared for them to make those sacrifices. It’s been me…I think that my career has suffered because of my personal life, because of the choices I’ve made in my personal life. #14 (full time researcher with 2 dependent children, age 38)

I probably didn’t do anything well…I managed those financial tensions by taking up this role and earning more money. I don’t think in terms of home, how I handled these stresses, I don’t think I’ve got anything that I can say I was proud of, because I could have done a lot better, I think. I just became a slave to work and that wasn’t the right thing to do. #01 (recently resigned as a director of finance department, with 3 dependent children)

To provide further context for the analysis of perceived tensions and coping strategies, Table 6.2 summarizes the background details of participants with a Paralysed Dual orientation.

Table 6.2
Background Details for Participants with a Paralysed Dual Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (highest degree)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#01 (PGD)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The main financial provider at home, with a partner who works part-time. She recently resigned from a well-paid job and became a librarian. She demonstrated ambivalent responses to this decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#08 (PGD)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mother of two children, married. She had been a marketing manager until giving birth to her first child. Since then she has been a stay-at-home mother looking after two young children. Her younger child has Asperger’s syndrome, requiring special care. She also worked part-time as a librarian and a researcher in information science.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14 (PhD)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Married mother of two young children. Apart from being the homemaker and the main care provider of two young children, #14 is also a full-time researcher in information technology, and actively engaged in various community services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#18 (PGD)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Senior internal auditor. She perceived a constant tension between her need to spend more time with her family and doing a good job at work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PGD - Postgraduate Diploma; PhD - Doctor of Philosophy
Information in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show that the average age of participants with a Pragmatic Dual orientation was 50, and the average age of Paralysed Dual-oriented participants is 44. In addition, like those oriented to either work or non-work domain (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2), two subgroups of Dual-oriented participants experienced heavy responsibilities from demanding work and non-work roles respectively.

Specifically, Non-work-oriented and the two subgroups of Dual-oriented participants share demanding domestic duties. However, while those with a Dual orientation described external demands comparable to both Work-oriented and Non-Work-oriented groups, Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants differed in their standards for satisfying internal demands. In the next section, how Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants perceived tensions arising from these differences is analysed.

6.3 FINDINGS: PERCEIVED TENSIONS

This section addresses how Pragmatic and Paralysed subgroups of Dual-oriented participants perceived tensions between their work and non-work lives. Findings are explored through a discussion of how the two groups made sense of tensions triggered by the coexistence of internal and external demands. Several first-order concepts for perceived tensions were identified, which collectively elaborated subsequent second-order themes for each subgroup. These themes are introduced and discussed below.

6.3.1 Perceived tensions under a Pragmatic Dual orientation

For Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants, tensions became salient when engagements in both work and non-work roles were adversely impeded by incompatible demands from work and non-work domains for performance, organizing and belonging. At such times, deviations from internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy and role identity occurred. Initially, 35 descriptive first-order concepts of perceived tensions were identified, which were reduced to 17 during the focused coding. From these revised first-order concepts, the second order theme ‘Everlasting ebb and flow’ emerged, which refers to the perceiving of tensions
between work and non-work lives as a cycle. In essence, ‘Everlasting ebb and flow’ captures how deviations from internal standards and incompatible external demands were perceived as both uncontrollable and evolving over time. For example:

I kind of feel like they (all the work and non-work roles she played) could kind of roll around in there like they’re not set, if that makes sense. They can move around. These things are obviously related, but they can move around as to how important they are and they might change size a little bit depending on what’s going on. I don’t feel like they’re set and that –I suppose that’s why I say that I try and juggle and it morphs a little bit. 

Table 6.3 provides representative quotations describing the selected first-order concepts (‘the nature of the beast’, ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’ and ‘we are our own worst enemy’) from which ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ was elaborated. These three concepts are described in more detail below.

The first-order concept ‘the nature of the beast’ describes how aspects of internal and external triggers for tensions coexist and aggravate each other. For example, participant #13 described an instance where her identification with being a mother competed with her ex-partner’s expectation of what she should do in relation to her roles as a housekeeper and a mother (see quotation 1, Table 6.3). The competing interaction between internal and external triggers were also found in participants #16 (see quotation 2, Table 6.3) and #04 (see quotation 3, Table 6.3), where demands to perform and organize from employers or family members coexisted with the dissatisfaction resulting from self-constructed standards about displaying competence and autonomy while performing work and non-work roles.

A second facet of ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ is ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’, which reflects the dissatisfaction associated with a lack of control or sense of competence concerning the performance of various work and non-work roles. In relation to the perceived tensions from which ‘the nature of the beast’ was derived, ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’ highlights the persisting and coexisting nature of those tensions perceived by Pragmatic Dual-oriented women. More importantly, the Pragmatic group tended to perceive these tensions as inescapable and unable to be eliminated (see quotations 4, Table 6.3). However, such competing interaction of internal and external demands was perceived as the essential character of enacting work and non-work roles simultaneously (see quotations 5, Table 6.3).
Table 6.3
Quotations Representing the First-order Concepts from which ‘Everlasting Ebb and Flow’ was derived as a Second-order Theme Perceived by Pragmatic Dual-oriented Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The nature of the beast          | 1. [My ex-partner] she would ask “Why do you have to do that? Why is that so important? You’re supposed to look after the kids.” So, that’s just about her not being a very nice person, but it’s where the conflict is about her expectations of what my roles should be and my expectations of what my roles should be. It’s when I hit against other people’s expectation.” #13  
2. “When I was working in a university, yes, that was incompatible with a family life and a home life. It was very stressful, in hindsight, the academic life. I couldn’t do everything. I couldn’t teach research and supervise PhD and travel overseas every six weeks… I thought that it is what you have to do to be an academic - you have to do all these things to survive in academia; you still do.” #16  
3. “I always have a view that I was going to get an education and do something with it…there was a source of constant conflict to my mother, who never has the view that women could do anything, other than be life servers, and the whole up-bringing. She wasn’t happy for me to go back to work, but she understood why I did after I had kids.” #04 |
| Rob Peter to pay Paul            | 4. “Just like the gold fish going round and round my bowl. it is hard, I put that on myself, because there are so many things that I want to get out of life. I choose this, doesn’t always work brilliantly…One of those is that I extend my day at both ends. So I tend to get up earlier and go to bed later. And you can only do that for a period of time. Otherwise, you’re doing longer days but your productivity has really reduced. You know, it’s that expression ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’” #10  
5. “I don’t think I could be who I want to be and have the life I want to live without there being some pressure.” #13  
6. “I mean, it's more the tension of 'I'm dedicating some time and effort here, but with no definite role.' So, it's not substantial yet, it's still developing and so--yeah. But it has to go through that stage…But looking for a job and networking and doing a bit of this work and a bit of that work wasn't really satisfying until I was in the job, but that's what I had to do in order to get it. Mostly I'm satisfied with it and I'm not sure whether that moment of dissatisfaction isn't just part of development. I don't see it as sacrifice. I see it as choice.” #09 |
| We are our own worst enemy        | 7. “If I didn’t have to work, there would be less tensions. I work because I wanted to…I felt like I was lost underneath the idea of being a mum full time; there wasn’t me anymore, it is just all mum… Here I am, I work my butt off and I’m crying to leave my children behind because they are growing up without me. And all my money was going to have somebody else look after them.” #04  
8. “I’ve chosen those. I can drop them. I can’t drop being a mum, but I could drop just about any of the rest of them…If I wanted a cosy life and just to be a good mum and earn enough money to pay the bills and that’s it, then there’ll be less roles and I’d be a simpler person and I wouldn’t want to change the world” #13  
9. “Even the bad bits have meaning and purpose, increase acceptance of life. Bad things happen to everybody, you can’t go through your life without experiencing bad things. But the cause of our struggles are ourselves.” #16 |
Quotation 6 in Table 6.3 provides an example of ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’, whereby participant #09 reflected on a period when her two children were young, expressing dissatisfaction with having to invest time and energy in job seeking. Additionally, in saying “I think you should only put energy and time into things that are gonna give you satisfaction. If it's not something you enjoy doing, don't do it.”, participant #09 perceived tension between her work and non-work lives as having derived from developing a professional role after leaving the field for some time to raise children.

Thirdly, ‘we are our own worst enemy’ reflects perceived incompatible role identities and values resulting from one’s own choices. Quotations 7-9 (see Table 6.3) suggest that the source of salient tensions is a misalignment between demands from both work and non-work role-related partners, and self-expectations for how—and to what extent—work and non-work roles should be enacted. Importantly, quotations 8 and 9 in Table 6.3 indicate that although misalignments between self and others’ expectations were considered ongoing, they did not cause resentment.

For Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants, competing external demands were found to coexist with dissatisfaction regarding deviations from internal standards. This coexistence of internal and external triggers for tension was elaborated through the first-order concepts ‘the nature of the beast’ and ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’, and still further, by expressions of ownership of their persisting tensions via the first-order concept ‘we are our own worst enemy’. Together, these persistent and coexisting tensions lead to the perception of an ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ of tensions. This stands in contrast to the perceived tensions of Paralysed Dual-oriented participants, which are now considered.

6.3.2 Perceived tensions under a Paralysed Dual orientation

For Paralysed Dual-oriented participants, 28 descriptive first-order concepts of perceived tensions were initially identified, which were reduced to 14 during the focused coding procedure. From these, the second order theme ‘submersion’ emerged, which captures how deviations in self-constructed standards and incompatible demands from work and non-work role-related partners were perceived. Women with a Paralysed Dual orientation tended to perceive tensions between work and non-work life as a feeling of being trapped: ‘submersion’—the
more they struggled to meet self and others’ expectations, the more trapped they became. For example:

It is a cycle in a circle of roles that you just keep on repeating, and that then lends itself to a type of tension where you are thinking that you are never going to get out, you know that expression: groundhog day?...I’m trapped in this circle #01

Table 6.4 provides representative quotations describing the selected first-order concepts (‘Catch 22’ and ‘immobilization’) from which ‘submersion’ was illustrated.

The first-order concept ‘Catch 22’ refers to the perception of a mismatch between self and others’ expectations regarding how (autonomy vs organizing)—and to what standard (competence vs performance)—work and non-work roles should be enacted. For example, quotations 1 and 2 in Table 6.4 illustrate how perceiving a ‘Catch 22’ was elicited by the coexistence of deviations in self-constructed standards and external work and non-work demands. Similarly, quotation 3 (see Table 6.4) indicates a mismatch between self-constructed standards of how work and non-work roles should be performed and expectations from her three sons, partner, and managers or customers.

More importantly, perhaps, the quotes in Table 6.4 show that ‘Catch 22’ signifies a negative evaluation of coping efforts. Participant #08, for example, faced a ‘Catch 22’ situation triggered by the demands of caring for her son, which led her to withdraw from a unit at a university. While acknowledging that this decision was necessary, participant #08 expressed frustration at what she felt was a missed opportunity (see quotation 4, Table 6.4).

Apart from perceiving tensions during work and non-work interaction as ‘Catch 22’, ‘submersion’ also reflects the perception of being paralysed by being unable to simultaneously satisfy both internal and external demands. When internal and external demands compete, this paralysis is captured by the first-order concept ‘immobilization’. As an illustration, participant #01 used the phrase “slide door moments” to convey the paralysis she perceived as a result of having difficulty accepting the misalignment between one’s own attempts to embrace multiple role identities and values and others’ expectations (see quotation 5, Table 6.4).
Table 6.4
Quotations Representing the First-order Concept from which ‘Submersion’ was derived as a Second-order Theme Perceived by Paralysed Dual-oriented Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Catch 22            | 1. “I think they’re all roles that have different, varying degrees of importance to me…When I’m working, I worry that I’m not being a good enough parent, spouse. And when I’m being in my role as a parent and spouse and those other things, I worry that I’m not being a good enough PhD student. Again, maybe that will become easier. I suspect it’s in my nature that it won’t. I tend to worry about things” #14  
2. “Like a lot of women, I’m in that Catch-22 situation where if you wanna do stuff, you’ve got to earn money to do that, but then you don’t have the time to do those things, you know?” #14  
3. “I feel like I’m always catching up, I feel like I’m only at work, mentally maybe 90% of me at work, because I’ve lost 10% getting up in the morning, getting everybody ready. It is like you have this other layer of things going on in your head that you are thinking about all the time. You are sort of suppressive when you get to work but it is still there, so it is hard to give 100% of your brain power, of your thought processes. It feels like there is an unknown sort of stretching of the brain being stretched, and it is not going to go back very well. That is the sort of tension that you are aware of that you are not fully—I’m not fully engaged as I should be, because I’ve left a little bit of my brain with the children or with the stress of organizing myself.” #01  
4. “Because it’s something I feel like I should be doing and have done in the past. And that’s important to me, but I just don’t have the time for it. Although I would have the time for it if I didn’t spend so much time worrying… It all comes down to me again not wanting to miss out on an opportunity.” #08 |
| Immobilization      | 5. “We all have those slide door moments, you know that expression where you make a decision and you could go that way, you could go that way…I probably lost sight of what is important to me, is it my career, is it my children; obviously I drew a much smaller circle for career. So, I feel personal tension within myself that I should be more interested in my career than I am, but maybe I’m interested in my career, I just don’t show it as much as other people do, perhaps.” #01  
6. “I had to face the reality that I couldn’t be the perfect mother, the perfect housekeeper, the perfect cook, the perfect anything, but if I wanted to do that many things, I wasn’t gonna able to do any of them well. And it’s something that still doesn’t sit well with me that I needed help which I’m not good at asking for, and that I needed to compromise and that other people needed to compromise. So, I would—I take it very personally if someone doesn’t think I’m doing a good enough job at something. So if my parents, perhaps, comment on my house-keeping or something, I would get very upset about that.” #14  
7. “Reluctance would be the wrong word, but I always hope that I don’t have to miss out on my work due to any family problems or illness with myself obviously. Work, I don’t like to be someone who takes a lot of days off work. So, that always makes it even harder with family. Some people do it a lot easier, I think. The generation—the younger generation today have a better mindset. I think, they don’t worry too much if they have days off work or—so I would—it would add to my stress. Yes. I’m doing extra hours to get the job done.” #18 |
In addition, quotations 6 and 7 (see Table 6.4) indicate how Paralysed Dual-oriented participants tended to invest heavily in self-worth when trying to meet others’ expectations. However, when misalignment between the internal and external demands occurred, they expressed reluctance to adjust internal standards that relied heavily on others’ evaluation. Further, difficulty distinguishing self-limits from mismatches between self and others’ demands was found to further intensify the competing interaction of internal and external demands. For example, ‘Catch 22’ and ‘immobilization’ entail perceived tensions deriving from previously unsuccessful coping efforts, thus leading to a vicious cycle. The following summary clarifies the similarities and differences between Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants with respect to perceived tensions.

6.3.3 Summary of tensions perceived by Dual-oriented participants

Section 6.3 demonstrated that two different approaches to the dual orientation towards work and non-work roles were reflected in how participants perceived tensions differed in response to similar internal and external demands. Similar to Dominant-orientated participants, the two Dual-oriented subgroups also experienced tensions triggered by three aspects of incompatible external demands regarding performance, organizing, and belonging. Correspondingly, two subgroups also perceived deviations from internal standards about displays of competence, autonomy, and role identity. The perceived tensions of the two Dual-orientated subgroups are summarized in Table 6.5.

As with Work and Non-Work orientations, Dual-oriented participants reported that tensions were coexisting and persistent. Indeed, both subgroups under a Dual orientation explicitly emphasized the ongoing competing interaction of internal and external triggers for tensions in their constructions. This competition surfaced where external demands aggravated deviations from internal standards, and where the resultant dissatisfaction intensified the pressure to meet incompatible work and non-work demands. In this way, the ongoing process of working through tensions leads to reciprocal impacts between how tensions are perceived and their subsequent coping strategies.
Table 6.5  
Perceived Tensions under a Dual Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order theme</th>
<th>First-order concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatic Dual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everlasting ebb and flow: perceiving tensions between work and non-work lives as a cycle, uncontrollable and evolving over time.</td>
<td><strong>The nature of the beast:</strong> perceived tensions deriving from internal and external triggers aggravating each other are perceived as the essential character of enacting work and non-work roles simultaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Rob Peter to pay Paul:</strong> dissatisfaction associated with the lack of control or sense of accomplishment regarding how to perform various work and non-work roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>We are our own worst enemy:</strong> perceived incompatible role identities and values resulting from own choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paralysed Dual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submersion: feeling trapped; the more they struggle in meeting self and others’ expectations of enacting work and non-work roles, the faster they sink.</td>
<td><strong>Catch 22:</strong> perceiving mismatch between self and others’ expectation regarding how and to what standard work and non-work roles should be enacted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Imobilization:</strong> perception of being paralysed by their own attempt to embrace multiple role identities and values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More importantly, distinctions were found regarding how persistent tensions were perceived by Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants. Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants expressed no resentment, even though misalignments between self and others’ expectations were recognized as ongoing. On the other hand, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants expressed difficulties accepting the inability to control these competing pressures from self and others. When such competing pressures were perceived, they evaluated themselves as being trapped in a vicious cycle, where previous unsuccessful coping efforts reciprocally affected their perception of tensions.

Therefore, within a Dual orientation, professional women perceive salient tensions between work and non-work domains differently. Pragmatic Dual-oriented women tend to perceive tensions between work and non-work roles as an ‘everlasting ebb and flow’, whereas Paralysed Dual-oriented women tend to perceive
tensions as ‘submersion’. Although both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present perceived tensions and coping strategies separately, participants in this study reported that tensions were not experienced as singular events. The next section further elaborates the persistent nature of tensions, and the coping strategies employed while simultaneously enacting work and non-work roles.

6.4 FINDINGS: COPING STRATEGIES

This section addresses the coping strategies adopted by professional women with a Dual orientation to their work and non-work lives. The strategies employed by Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women are first considered, followed by those with a Paralysed Dual orientation. Exploration of these findings is centred on a discussion of how the two groups of professional women consciously coped with coexisting internal and external triggers for tensions.

As discussed earlier, Pragmatic Dual-oriented women tend to perceive misaligned internal and external triggers as inevitable, while their Paralysed counterparts tend to internalize the misalignment between self and others’ expectations, expressing negative emotional reactions as a result. In particular, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants’ self-constructed standards about dual engagements were found to be contingent on external expectations. To elaborate on the second-order themes for both Pragmatic and Paralysed groups with respect to coping, their corresponding first-order concepts are presented and analysed.

6.4.1 Coping under a Pragmatic Dual orientation

In total, 129 episodic coping strategies were identified. ‘Elasticity’ emerged as a second-order theme for Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants coping with the ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ of tensions. ‘Elasticity’ refers to a conscious self-adjustment regarding one’s sense of competence, autonomy, and role identity when enacting work and non-work roles. As different strategies were combined in coping with each episodic tension, two first-order concepts (‘go with the flow’ and ‘reflective pendulum’) were selected to elaborate ‘elasticity’. Table 6.6 provides representative quotations describing the first-order concepts from which ‘elasticity’ was derived.
Table 6.6

**Pragmatic Dual-oriented Participant Quotes Representing the First-order Concepts from which ‘Elasticity’ Emerged as the General Coping Strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Go with the flow</strong></td>
<td>1. “I think we are our own worst enemies...Some people would say maybe lowering your expectations. I don't see that. I see it as having reasonable expectations. Who decides when it’s good enough? You decide at the end of the day. Being happy, that’s successful and going in and doing as good a job as you can on that day. That would have to be what success is. I think I’ve had it quite a long time. I mean maybe when I first started, maybe the first few years of my career, I maybe thought being a manager was successful that very early on, but I think that’s also about how you can accept it. I mean if I didn’t have that as my definition of success, I would be unhappy.” #09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “Definitely, and the decision to slow it down a bit is just come from experience. When I was younger, I was more like a marathon runner and it is the belief that you have to be a super woman and do it all. Everything is urgent, everything is important to...yes, something is important and something is urgent. If you can decide which things are urgent and to deal with them and then spend more time on things that are important.” #04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “… [my roles as] parent and office worker do compete, because I’m the one who’s taking kids to places, so my time, I mean, in this office is much less than someone who might not have those demands...Definitely the way it is working is enmeshed and just for the job I do and the way I do it, it can’t separate, because the boundary is blurred and will always be until I change job maybe. You know, until life changes, you know, next stage. I have my next role when my kids grow up, I would look for a job that has more responsibility.” #04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. “As long as it's a conscious decision—like my children went to afterschool care on a couple of days a week. So, I wasn't there 100% for my children, but I also wasn't there 100% for work...But it's more about—that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to just spend time with my children. It wasn't about—...‘Oh. This is better than that.’ So, I never had a sense of ‘Oh, I'm better than doing that.’ It's just about...—More about my needs. I want that, I want these things” #09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. “I always just say I’m happy enough, enough. And then at one point, I just went, I’m happy, I found that centre, I didn’t have to have enough. I was just happy, full stop...Because life always brings you challenges, every single person found somebody who doesn’t have a challenge, will challenge you. So, you can’t always be happy. But you can appreciate the times when happiness comes. And you can appreciate acceptance when happiness isn’t in your life. It is just part of life, acceptance. Just need to be realized that I’m lucky...Happiness is a dragger out there, is actually an illusion. Because the nature of humanity is not to be happy all the time, because how can you know, it is not the nature of the beast.” #16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective pendulum</strong></td>
<td>6. “I think the difference between being self-determined and choosing, and having something imposed to and having to, is a world of difference in terms of handling that, where the tension feels...yes, there is a tension here, but it is actually quite exciting as oppose to draining and negative. Because there is a tension to my life. But it is all self-imposed. It is all about how well I want to do, who I don’t want to let down. That’s all optional. Any goal setting is you put self under pressure, because you want to. Therefore, living with that tension, the strategy is you can laugh, or enjoy sitting with somebody else or I’m avoiding it.” #10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-order concept</td>
<td>Sample quotations</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>“But for me, it’s because I prioritize them all, but I also know that you can’t have them all at ten out of ten. I’m not going to be a super parent. There are some meetings at school that I may not be able to get to, but I’ll try and get to most of them. So I have to make reasonable expectations and this level of what I’m doing as acceptable as success because that then makes me happy. Otherwise I’m continuously striving for something that’s unattainable. I can’t be the vice-chancellor. Well, I could be, but not if I’ve got those things in my mind and I’d rather have those things than be the vice-chancellor… I do believe that if you have children, you can’t have it all. Otherwise there will be tension. It’s a matter of prioritizing. And if I’ve got all these things that I wanna be of equal importance, then I’ve got to break it down.” #09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>“Yes, I still have to earn some money. But if I can survive on three days a week, then I’ll do that and I’ll do some writing or do the grocery shopping without them, so we can play soccer or whatever on those other two days.” #13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>“When we don’t have [time] we learn the tricks to make time more valuable. We break up tasks and all those strategies. You are using one thing to pull you along to the next thing.” #10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>“It was a stirring effort, but I would never do it again [laugh]. It was a good try. And I did some very good work, but it is too hard. It expands your consciousness, you expand your understanding, and you can be creative to your thought in your life.” #16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>“Changing what you view success as, changes the choices you make and whether you feel like things are a compromise…that’s about seeing that success is not just about my career. Success is about being happy and having a good family.” #13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In coping with persistent and inevitable tensions, Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants were likely to adopt a ‘go with the flow’ strategy. This strategy fosters an evolving understanding of self and others’ expectations, thus facilitating acceptance of personal limits when encountering competing demands from both work and non-work domains. For example, participants with a Pragmatic Dual orientation tended to take a long-term view of dual work and non-work engagements, thus helping to make sense of perceived deviations in internal standards about displaying competence (see quotations 1 and 2, Table 6.6).

In other words, these participants tended to build connections between different aspects of self and others’ expectations by perceiving work and non-work engagement as “enmeshed” or in terms of a “blurred” boundary (see quotation 3, Table 6.6). At the same time, this strategy avoided internalizing uncontrollable misalignments between external demands and self-constructed standards, thus preventing the negative reactions reported by their Paralysed Dual-oriented counterparts.
Furthermore, ‘go with the flow’ reflects the ability to differentiate between the pressures of competing external demands and dissatisfactions resulting from deviations in internal standards. For example, quotations 4 and 5 (see Table 6.6) suggest that internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities for those with a Pragmatic Dual orientation are not contingent on others’ expectations. Rather, being able to pragmatically adjust internal standards enables the ‘elasticity’ to cope flexibly with the ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ of tensions.

Another aspect of ‘elasticity’ coping is represented by the first-order concept ‘reflective pendulum’, which refers to consciously swinging between work and non-work roles in order to satisfy self-expectations and others’ demands. The Pragmatic group in particular were found to differentially cope with coexisting external and internal demands. Quotations 6-11 (see Table 6.6) suggest that decisions to channel personal resources to work and non-work domains are internally driven.

Although both work and non-work commitments were important to participants with a Pragmatic Dual orientation, they did not seek to eliminate discrepancies between internal and external expectations by attempting to align demands from the two (see quotations 7-9, Table 6.6). Rather, the self-esteem of Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants was perceived as not being contingent on others’ judgment (see quotations 6, 10, and 11, Table 6.6).

In addition, quotations 6 and 8 suggest that ‘pendulum’ coping is reflective rather than a simple reaction to—or compliance with—others’ demands. In other words, although invested heavily in both domains, participants with a Pragmatic Dual orientation did not downplay their sense of self-worth when deviations from self-constructed standards occurred.

For example, participant #16 demonstrated in Quotation 10 (see Table 6.6) how as a professional women with a Pragmatic Dual orientation, she did not interpret competing demands between displays of belonging and her identification with roles as a mother, entrepreneur, and wife as unbearable. Rather, she constructed these tensions as opportunity to stimulate her need for competence (“It expands your consciousness; you expand your understanding”) and autonomy (“…you can be creative to your thought in your life”). In this way, the complementary interaction between aspects of internal and external demands was enabled.
Therefore, ‘go with the flow’ reflects Pragmatic Dual-orientated participants’ relaxed attitude to competing work and non-work demands, and ‘reflective pendulum’ encapsulates the emotional calmness of their conscious decisions to lay emphasis on internal standards of how both work and non-work roles are enacted. Together, these two first-order concepts indicate an ‘elasticity’ approach to tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions.

In summary, quotations 1-11 in Table 6.6 entail a process of conscious reframing of competing demands and internal dissatisfaction as enriching experiences. Rather than aiming to resolve misalignment between internal and external demands, Dual-orientated participants with a pragmatic approach expressed their awareness of a gradual process through which they enhanced their self-capacity to adjust self-standards, and negotiate with work and non-work related partners. By fostering complementary interactions between aspects of internal and external demands, Pragmatic Dual-orientated professional women translated external competing demands into opportunities to actualize self-potential in displaying personal competence, autonomy, and role identities.

6.4.2 Coping under a Paralysed Dual orientation

In total, 89 episodic coping strategies adopted by Paralysed Dual-orientated participants were identified. How participants with Paralysed Dual orientation combined these episodic coping strategies is captured by the second-order theme ‘grass is greener on the other side’, which refers to perpetual discontent with efforts to cope with tensions between work and non-work domains. Those with a Paralysed Dual orientation, therefore, tended to approach the perception of ‘submersion’ by adopting the perspective that the ‘grass is greener on the other side’.

Quotations describing the two representative first-order concepts from which ‘grass is greener on the other side’ emerged are provided in Table 6.7. The first, ‘passive aggressive’, captures the emotional anxiety and defensiveness provoked by the misalignment between internal and external demands when enacting work and non-work roles. For example, quotations 1-4 describe instances where participants aggressively responded to incompatible demands regarding how work and non-work domains should be performed and organized.
Table 6.7
Paralysed Dual-oriented Participant Quotes Representing the First-order Concepts from which ‘Grass is Greener on the other Side’ Emerged as the General Coping Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order concept</th>
<th>Sample quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive aggressive</td>
<td>1. “I don’t feel that I can ever feel satisfied with my achievement. You’re always driven to have to do this, have to meet the demands. It doesn’t feel like there’ll ever be any conclusion to it apart from death. While you’re working and while you’ve got family matters, it’s hard to sit back and feel satisfied that everything’s under control. That rarely happens.”#18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “I don’t want the emotion (relevant to family) creeping into the workplace or my study. I would like to be present in the moment…spending it productively with my kids or spending it productively with my work and study, but I just spend a lot of time worrying about the time I should be spending doing those things…I talk about all my regrets. I would change everything.” #08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “So, I’ve just accepted that this is it. This is what I have to deal with. It’s not gonna change. I’ve been doing it long enough, trying to change my husband’s perspective on some of these things to know it’s not going to. So, I just have to make the best of it.”#14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. “We all have those slide door moments; you know that expression where you make a decision and you could go that way, you could go that way…Sometimes you can’t choose your manager; you don’t know what they’re really like until I work for them. I probably know this person will be, this person in these other jobs would be difficult to work for, but I was kind of coasting along, it was expecting of me to do it, I didn’t have anywhere else to go, I haven’t done it before. I kind of fell into it…Essentially, I still need to try and be the financial provider because I’m a mother, it is not just about food and housing, it’s the extra things that they want to do as children and that all cost money, music and camps, sport, things like that.” #01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive juggling</td>
<td>5. “(taking on the role as a director) there was an impact on both of those roles (partner, mother) absolutely. I was physically tired, I was then cranky, short tempered, or just too tired to interact in a meaningful way. And everything was a rush. I just didn’t manage it at all. I was like a robot, get up and go to work, managing all these things, problems and dramas and then go home and do the same thing the next day” #01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. “When my son being bullied, I was feeling quite stressed already…and I had to drop out of a subject because I thought, ‘I just don’t have the mental energy to do the two subjects.’ So that, for me, was very disappointing, in myself…But I was very lucky to have a very understanding supervisor, and she’s given me that time that I need to just sort out what I need to at home and take a bit of a break, and then get back to it.”#08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. “I’m happy, but I’m feeling guilty as well because I’m not using that time towards other things. The happiness that I find in the cake decorating, I don’t think that means that I should give everything up and be a full-time cake decorator. I don’t think that would make me happy. I’m sure I’d find something to be stressed about.”#14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These competing demands can be self-constructed as well as externally derived. Quotations 1 and 2 indicate concerns about performing and organizing when responding to work and non-work role-related partners’ expectations. Such concerns directly arouse Paralysed Dual-oriented participants’ dissatisfaction with displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities, such as “I don’t feel that I can ever feel satisfied with my achievement” (#18, see quotation 1, Table 6.7), and “I talk about all my regrets. I would change everything” (#08, see quotation 2, Table 6.7).

Recognizing the significance of engagement in both work and non-work domains, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants also expressed awareness that both internal and external demands are closely intertwined, for example: “We all have those slide door moments; you know that expression where you make a decision and you could go that way, you could go the other way.” (see quotation 4, Table 6.7).

However, being unable to accept personal limits that prevent alignment of internal and external demands leads to Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women’s perpetual dissatisfaction with their own approaches to ongoing tensions. This is illustrated by responses to uncontrollable misalignments between self and others’ expectations. Women in the Paralysed group tended to passively evaluate their own coping efforts in response to the coexistence of competing external demands and dissatisfaction with deviations from self-constructed standards.

‘Reflexive juggling’ is a second representative first-order concept reflecting a facet of ‘grass is greener on the other side’ as a coping strategy. Examples are provided by quotations 5-7 (see Table 6.7), which indicate a wide range of strategies adopted by Paralysed Dual-oriented participants, including: multi-tasking to accommodate both work and non-work demands (quotation 5, Table 6.7); rescheduling work arrangements to accommodate non-work demands (quotation 6, Table 6.7); and engaging in recreation activities to relax (quotation 7, Table 6.7).

However, unlike their Pragmatic Dual-oriented counterparts who reflectively enacted both work and non-work domains, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants attempted to internalize dissatisfactions aroused by deviations from self-imposed standards regarding displays of competence, autonomy, and multiple role identities. This is illustrated in the negative emotions expressed by participants #01 and #08 when they perceived misalignment between self-constructed standards and external demands (see quotations 5 and 6, Table 6.7).
Thus, the Paralysed group expressed difficulty in differentiating between internal standards and external demands, tending to internalize persistent, competing pressures that were both internally and externally derived from work and non-work roles. Rather than seeing the same opportunity to develop self-potential that Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants did, those with a Paralysed Dual-orientation found it difficult to capitalize on the complementary interaction of internal and external demands, instead perceiving persistent tensions as a process of battling with self-deficiency.

6.4.3 Comparison of coping strategies adopted by Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants

Both subgroups of professional women with a Dual orientation experienced the competing aspects of interacting internal and external demands. As analysed in section 6.3, all Dual-oriented professional women perceived the persisting nature of tensions triggered by these internal and external demands. In this subsection, the different responses of Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants to the coexistence of internal and external triggers for tensions are compared. Table 6.8 summarizes the coping strategies of both Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants to better illustrate attempts by those with a Dual orientation to the competing work and non-work demands.

Table 6.8
Coping Strategies Adopted by Dual-oriented Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order theme</th>
<th>First-order concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elasticity: self as elastic capable of being pulled and pushed, which creates a non-contingent sense of accomplishment.</td>
<td>Go with the flow: accepting the evolving nature of self and others’ expectations; adjusting internal standards that contingent on external demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective pendulum: differentially dealing with coexisting external demands and deviations from self-constructed standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass is greener on the other side: reflects as perpetual discontent with how tensions have been managed.</td>
<td>Passive aggressive: defensive responses to the coexisting external demands and deviations from self-constructed standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive juggling: reacts to incompatible work and non-work demands; internalizes the persistent competing pressures from work and non-work.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants, complementary interaction between internal and external demands was fostered by adjusting external demands to align with self-constructed standards. This strategy entails ‘go with the flow’ to accept the cascading impact of different episodic coping strategies, and a ‘reflective pendulum’ between work and non-work demands consistent with internal values, while at the same time accommodating both work and non-work demands. Thus, Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants tended to adopt an ‘elasticity’ strategy to cope with the ‘everlasting ebb and flow’ of tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles (see Table 6.8).

For Paralysed Dual-oriented participants, complementary interaction between internal and external demands was perceived as depending on external evaluation. In turn, this orientation entailed ‘reflexive juggling’ to cater for external work and non-work demands (see Table 6.8). When the competing interaction between internal and external demands was perceived as uncontrollable, this group of participants were found to passively accept and react to others’ demands, reflecting as ‘passive aggressive’ (see Table 6.8). Therefore, rather than being content with their coping efforts, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants adopted a ‘grass is greener on the other side’ strategy to cope with the ‘submersion’ of the tensions they perceived between work and non-work roles.

Although there are no objective indicators to measure the effectiveness of the Pragmatic and Paralysed participants’ respective coping strategies, their subjective appraisals suggest that a process of understanding tensions, together with self-capacity in coping, tend to contribute to a productive enactment of both work and non-work roles. For example, the Pragmatic group were found to be content with their coping and expressed a higher level of satisfaction with their work and non-work involvements than the Paralysed group, whereas the latter tended to internalize misaligned internal and external expectations. Table 6.9 summarizes Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants’ different emotional reactions to perceived tensions.
### Table 6.9

*Emotional Responses to Perceived Tensions by Participants with Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual Orientations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Emotional reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Pragmatic Dual-oriented** | 1. “I always try to maximize what I get out of the day. I operate at the level that is right for me. I see myself fill my world up…the wheels get loose, but they don’t necessarily fall off. Everything gets reframed.” #10  
2. “There are always difficult times in life, more stressful time than others. Ebbs and flows. I think we are all born with special gifts, to be able to find the meaning of those gifts for ourselves, and then to able to share them is the process of creating your own world.” #16  
3. “There is no conflict, because I work part-time, it is very comfortable. I don’t feel like work impacts on parent, because I feel comfortable with the time allocation…I've been content in my role.” #09  
4. “So, it’s just about making the experience of juggling those roles less about conflict and more about being okay. And you need to be on top of your game to manage that.” #13  |
| **Paralysed dual-oriented** | 5. “I just, I can't handle the anxiety. I don’t feel I’m getting enough support, and it’s been quite an emotional roller coaster.” #14  
6. “I probably didn’t do anything well. It is exhausting, and I feel like I was caught in these three large circles (referring to being a financial provider, partner, and mother). So in terms of feeling, I would say stress…er…tension, not stress, but tension, tension that I’m probably expected to be thinking and acting in one way but in actual fact, I’m functioning in another way. Maybe is just in my head, I just think that I’m not, and there is always tension to go somewhere else, to fulfil these roles.” #01  
7. “I think that insomnia is a big one. But I think a really big thing that happened in my life recently, is that I had been putting tremendous pressure on myself to get high marks and take advantage of all these opportunities, and I just reached an impasse. I kind of had a mental-block and I just couldn’t do anything anymore. I just felt very unmotivated and I kind of had a little breakdown…I’m good at saying no, but then I’m bad at letting go of that decision. It all comes back to the regret and the worry, I think, but I know I just couldn’t have done it.” #08  |

**6.5 THEORETICAL EXPLANATION RELATING TO THE TWO RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following theoretical clarification of perceived tensions and coping strategies begins with how the tension literature can be used to explain the persistent tensions constructed by Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women. Thereafter, discussion centres on how the ongoing interaction
between internal and external triggers for tension was approached differently by the two subgroups of Dual-oriented participants. The positive and negative reciprocal impacts between perceiving and coping with tensions derived from these two orientations are also discussed.

6.5.1 The Dual orientation to persistent tensions

As discussed in Chapter 2, the underlying assumption of the tension perspective is that tensions or opposing demands are considered “ubiquitous and persistent forces that challenge and fuel long-term success” (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p.3). This theoretical assumption of the persistent nature of tensions is consistent with the coexistence of internal and external triggers for tension constructed by professional women with a Dual orientation. In common with both Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented professional women, the coexistent internal and external triggers for tension were also evident in those with a Dual orientation. External triggers for tension were the competing external demands from work and non-work role-related partners regarding performance, organizing, and belonging. Internal triggers for tension were deviations from self-constructed standards of competence, autonomy, and displays of role identity.

Of relevance here are the four categories of paradoxical tensions at the organizational level identified by the tension literature: tensions of performing, organizing, belonging, and learning (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Performing tensions refers to the coexistence of plurality, and change and scarcity create competing goals and strategies for organizational members (Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Organizing tensions refers to confusion over how the processes of performing competing goals are experienced by organizational members (Lewis, 2000). Confronting organizing and performing tensions infuse competing role expectations from multiple stakeholders stimulate belonging tensions (Lewis, 2000; Luscher & Lewis, 2008).

Professional women in this study not only experienced tensions of performance consistent with the tension literature (see Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011), but also tensions of belonging and organizing. Interestingly, the first three of these tensions could be viewed as compatible with the deviation from the internal standard regarding displays of competence, autonomy, and role identities respectively: whereas organizational paradoxes of belonging,
organizing, and performing illuminate how macro issues are experienced by individuals, the coexistence of internal and external demands point to tensions surfacing from ideal and actual functioning of work and non-work roles at the micro level.

Significantly, in a context of work and non-work interaction, internal and external demands are both coexisting and interdependent, a state that is represented by the rotation of the circle in Figure 6.1. In other words, the perception of tensions is ongoing and corresponds with the interaction between self-constructed standards and expectations from work and non-work role-related partners. As illuminated in Figure 6.1, the white side of the Yin-Yang circle denotes external demands regarding pressure for organizing, performing, and belonging. Coexisting simultaneously with these external demands is the self-constructed internal demands of displaying autonomy, competence, and role identity, represented in Figure 6.1 by the black side of the Yin-Yang circle.

*Figure 6.1. The Dual Orientation to the Ongoing Interaction between Different Aspects of Internal and External Triggers*
The interplay between internal and external demands is represented in Figure 6.1 by the interlocking gears that are embedded in the black and white parts of the Yin-Yang symbol. In Chinese philosophy, the black and white parts of the Yin-Yang symbol denote complementary (rather than opposing) forces that interact to form a dynamic system (see Lewis, 2000). Consistent with such a complementary system, analysis in Section 6.3 and Section 6.4 indicates that aspects of internal and external demands are adjustable and interactive. Of relevance here is the ability to recognize that ongoing competing and complementary interactions between internal and external demands offer support for environmental and personal conditions, as suggested by Smith and Lewis (2011).

The dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011) specified the environmental and individual factors that render paradoxical tensions salient. Due to multiple, competing, performance-related expectations, the environmental factors create the paradoxical tensions of performance, organizing, learning, and belonging (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). The second, personal factors such as cognitive complexity, enable individuals to acknowledge that competing demands are interrelated, and to embrace these contradictory yet interrelated elements as coexisting and persistent (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

The individual and environmental factors suggested by Smith and Lewis (2011) as influencing the transition from latent to salient tensions are supported in the context of work and non-work interactions. In particular, for professional women with a dual-orientation, tensions derive from an ongoing process of satisfying self-constructed standards, as well as expectations from work and non-work role-related partners. The competing interaction between internal and external triggers occurs when dissatisfaction is perceived as internally derived, which coexists with incompatible expectations from work and non-work role-related partners. It is under these circumstances that salient tensions are perceived by professional women with a dual-orientation.

The complementary interaction between internal and external triggers, on the other hand, reflects opportunities for personal growth that enrich work and non-work life. Crucially, the enriching experience is also perceived to stimulate awareness of more external and internal demands. In other words, the ongoing interactions of
internal and external triggers create double-edged impacts during work and non-work interaction.

However, the possibilities and constraints professional women confront when meeting internal and external demands are integrated into an evolving process of interpenetration of work and non-work domains. More specifically, for professional women with a Dual orientation, the desire to satisfy internal and external demands is not perceived as better achieved by either the work or non-work domain. Rather, ongoing interplays between domains contribute to the substance of professional women’s changing internal desires and external demands. In other words, while enacting work and non-work domains, the opportunities and meanings presented by the external world are selectively used and internalized by professional women.

As represented by the light yellow and gold colours in the encompassing square in Figure 6.1, the ongoing interaction of internal and external triggers is perceived as existing in a wider context, where work (light yellow colour in Figure 6.1) and non-work (gold colour in Figure 6.1) domains are separated by a fluid boundary that forms their life space. Therefore, the coexisting competing and complementary interactions between internal and external demands as constructed by Dual-oriented participants serves to illustrate the Yin-Yang dynamic (see Lewis, 2000) in a work and non-work context.

As Dual-oriented professional women do not prioritize either work or non-work domains, they differ from Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented professional women in the way in which they deal with the double-edged impact of ongoing interactions between internal and external demands. Significantly, within a dual orientation, Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women differ in how they approach double-edged impacts. In the next subsection, attention turns to how theories in the tension literature help to explain two subgroups of Dual-oriented professional women’s perceptions and how they cope with tensions surfacing during work and non-work interactions.

6.5.2 Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual orientations to perceiving tensions and coping

Although the tension literature has found that the capacity to manage organizational paradox is associated with a higher level of effectiveness at individual, group, and organizational levels (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher &
Lewis, 2008), those with a Paralysed Dual orientation lend support to Westenholz’s (1993) concern that paradoxical thinking is rare due to cognitive limitations. The ability to effectively apply diverse strategies appropriately according to the demands of a particular situation, or what Smith and Lewis (2011) identified as cognitive and behavioural complexity, entails a long learning process, something that is consistently reflected in the coping strategies within the Pragmatic dual orientation.

Analysis presented in Section 6.4 suggests that both groups of Dual-oriented participants adopt multiple strategies when negotiating with work and non-work role-related partners. This is consistent with the behavioural complexity (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995) described by Smith and Lewis (2011) as a means of coping with paradoxical tensions. More specifically, both Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual orientations employ combinations of multiple strategies consistent with displaying a behavioural repertoire—the range of behaviours that people are capable of performing or enacting (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009). According to Lawrence, Lenk and Quinn (2009), behaviour repertoire is the first dimension of behavioural complexity, which is one of the individual factors that spur virtuous cycles to productively cope with paradoxical tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2014).

Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women demonstrated the second dimension of behavioural complexity—behaviour differentiation—through their ability to apply coping strategies flexibly according to the demands of a particular situation (Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009). When constructing tensions, those with a Pragmatic Dual orientation emphasized the evolving nature of self and others’ expectations: they accepted their own limits with respect to changing external demands, and differentially adjusted their expectations accordingly.

Apart from behavioural complexity, Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants also exhibited the emotional equanimity and cognitive complexity described by Smith and Lewis (2014). These individual attributes help to sustain a dynamic equilibrium between both work and non-work engagement. For example, ‘go with the flow’ illustrates this group’s ability to recognize and accept the cascading impact of different episodic coping strategies on subsequent coping efforts. Further, Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants indicated contentment with their coping, thus demonstrating their emotional equanimity in accepting the interrelated nature of internally and externally triggered tensions.
In addition, ‘reflective pendulum’ entails recognition of the interrelated relationship between internal and external triggers. ‘Pendulum’ suggests ongoing efforts to accommodate self and others’ expectations, and ‘reflective’ involves a process of transcending inevitable and coexisting tensions. This transcending process incorporates two aspects of coping. First, transcendence requires the ability to differentiate the failure to simultaneously meet both work and non-work demands from the dissatisfactions aroused due to deviations from internal standards. Second, transcendence requires a conscious reframing of each aspect of internal and external demands as sources of support that not only buffer other aspects, but also create opportunities for personal growth.

On the other hand, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants, while able to demonstrate a wide variety of coping strategies, held strong negative emotions (see Table 6.9) aroused by persistent tensions and a lack of satisfaction at their own coping. This suggests they had difficulty accepting the uncontrollable, persistent nature of tensions, and tended to internalize deviations from self-constructed standards as self-inability. In addition, the coping strategy ‘grass is greener on the other side’ was found to promote defensive reactions that were self-perpetuating, whereby participants were more likely to feel trapped in a ‘Catch-22’ situation, or in the vicious cycles described in the tension literature (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Lewis, 2000).

The above discussion reflects the positive and negative self-evaluations of approaches to persistent tensions as constructed by Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented participants. These different constructions can be explained by the vicious and virtuous cycles of confronting persistent tensions posited in the existing tension literature (Lewis, 2000; Lusure & Lewis, 2008).

The virtuous cycle refers to a productive reaction to tensions in the short term, but also sustainable functioning in the long term. The virtuous cycle denotes a positive reciprocal impact between perceiving and coping, whereby the principle of coping is not simply about finding a solution or fit. Rather, it “shifts the notion of managing from modern definitions based on planning and control to coping” (Lewis, 2000, p.764). This is evidenced by the “elasticity” strategy adopted by Pragmatic Dual-oriented participants, underscored by their recognition of tensions as “everlasting ebb and flow”.

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On the other hand, vicious cycles refer to a sense of being paralysed by persisting tensions and exhibiting defensive behaviours, where defensive behaviours are defined as “supressing the relatedness of contradictions and maintaining the false appearance of order… [that] may temporarily reduce anxiety” (Lewis, 2000, p.763). Lewis (2000) also noted that efforts to suppress one side of a polarity increase the pressure applied from the other. For example, Paralysed Dual-oriented participants felt trapped by the reciprocal impact between perceiving tensions as “submersion” and coping with the principle of “grass is greener on the other side”.

In summary, the significance of identifying two forms of dual orientation is that it distinguishes positive coping (Pragmatic Dual-oriented) from reactive coping (Paralysed Dual-oriented). More specifically, professional women with a Pragmatic Dual orientation were found to effectively and appropriately apply diverse strategies according to the demands of a particular situation, which supports the suggestion that cognitive complexity and behavioural complexity are crucial attributes in managing paradoxical tensions (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

6.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, how professional women with a Dual orientation perceive and cope with work and non-work tensions was explored. Professional women adopting either a Pragmatic or Paralysed approach to their Dual orientation consider work and non-work domains to be closely intertwined, where involvement in different life roles provides them with opportunities to display competence, autonomy, and role identity. At the same time, they are expected to fulfil corresponding external demands from role-related partners.

The ongoing competing and complementary interactions of internal and external triggers as constructed by Pragmatic and Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women explicitly highlight the persistent nature of the tensions perceived. However, within a Dual orientation, professional women with Pragmatic and Paralysed outlooks were found to perceive and cope with these persisting tensions differently. Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women capitalized the connection between competing and complementary interaction, and adjusted self-constructed standards, as well as involvement in meeting external demands. Conversely, Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women over emphasize the
competing interaction of internal and external demands, and tended to adjust self-constructed standards to align with external demands.

Therefore, two different approaches—Pragmatic and Paralysed were established in this chapter to perceive and cope with tensions under a dual orientation. Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women perceive tensions as ‘everlasting ebb and flow’, requiring ‘elasticity’ strategies to cope with the coexistence of internal and external demands; whereas Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women perceive tensions as ‘submersion’, and react to persistent tensions by adopting a ‘grass is greener on the other side’ coping strategy.

The next chapter provides the theoretical implications for identifying four distinct orientations (Work-oriented, Non-work-oriented, Pragmatic Dual-oriented, and Paralysed Dual-oriented) to perceive and cope with tensions. Hence, as the final part of this thesis, Chapter 7 addresses the research questions by elaborating the theoretical and practical significance of the reported findings.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 INTRODUCTION

7.1.1 Restatement of the aim and overview of this study

Previous research has shown that simultaneously enacting multiple work and non-work roles is an enduring challenge (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009). However, much less is known about the cognitive dynamics underpinning these ongoing efforts. The research context for this study was the construction of persistent competing work and non-work demands by professional women. This demographic was advantageous in providing participants who had significant exposure to multiple and competing demands during social interactions. Thus, a research opportunity was created to better understand the complexity beneath professional women’s approaches to work and non-work interactions. The aim of this study, therefore, was to uncover professional women’s reasoning of working through the enduring challenge of enacting multiple work and non-work roles.

Specific studies in the work and non-work literature were reviewed, revealing the limitations of using three traditional perspectives (conflict-depletion, enrichment-enhancement, and boundary theory) to explain the individual dynamic of constructing the interaction between work and non-work life. The literature review of traditional perspectives (see Section 2.3) identified three omissions in existing research: first, a narrow focus on interactions between work and family, where the broader scope of non-work would be more appropriate and inclusive; second, an overemphasis on the gender impact for professional women facing competing work and non-work demands; and third, insufficient attention given to the potential interactive effects of coexisting resource depletion and generation during work and non-work interactions.

In framing the complexity underneath reasoning of the persisting competing work and non-work demands, a tension lens (Lewis & Smith, 2014) was chosen as an alternative to the three traditional approaches due to its emphasis on the persisting nature of contradictory elements. To explore the cognitive dynamic in constructing tensions, this study turned to professional women’s reflections and evaluations of
their own approaches to competing work and non-work demands. In-depth interviews were conducted, with the abductive logic of discovery applied as the analytical tool to uncover professional women’s emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses to tensions (see Chapter 3).

Following the logic of abduction, data analysis was first undertaken via constant comparison of professional women’s accounts. Thereafter, comparison was undertaken between relevant theories and emergent themes. According to Barney (2005), “prior literature is both a guide and a blinder” (p.296). In order to balance the risk of being blinded by theories and over-interpreting professional women’s accounts, both tension and work and non-work literature were drawn upon to explain emerging themes during data analysis. This constant comparison between participants’ accounts and two strands of research facilitated an expanded discussion of the complexity underlying professional women’s perception of tensions and their coping strategies.

Due to the emergent research strategy adopted in this study, key findings were reported in Chapter 4 to orient readers to four different approaches to the cycle of perceiving and coping with tensions. Specifically, the process by which three aspects of internal and external triggers for tensions emerge—and the subsequent identification of four orientations to the interaction between these internal and external triggers—were presented in Chapter 4. A detailed analysis and discussion of orientations with a dominant focus (Work-oriented and Non-work-oriented) was provided in Chapter 5. Similarly, Chapter 6 provided a discussion of the two categories of dual orientation to work and non-work tensions (Pragmatic Dual-oriented and Paralysed Dual-oriented).

### 7.1.2 Structure of Chapter 7

As the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 7 provides a synthesized discussion of the findings and analysis presented in Chapters 4-6. To this end, contributions to work and non-work literature are made explicit by applying a meta-theoretical tension lens to the four identified ways in which professional women orient themselves to the perception of, and coping with, persistent competing work and non-work demands.
This chapter is organized into four sections. Following the introduction, Section 7.2 brings together the key findings and discusses the implications of what was revealed by investigating the following research questions:

RQ1. How do professional women perceive tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

RQ2. How do professional women cope with tensions surfacing from the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles?

Section 7.3 presents the theoretical and practical contributions of this study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of this study’s limitations, together with recommendations for how future research might address the nuances of coping with tensions arising from competing work and non-work roles (Section 7.4).

7.2 SYNTHESIZED DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on analysis and discussion in Chapters 5 and 6, this section provides a brief elaboration of this study’s findings as they relate to the two research questions. The presentation of each of the three findings is followed by a discussion of its implications for work and non-work literature. These three findings are: (1) that persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands; (2) there are four different orientations to these persistent tensions, with different ways of combining coping strategies in response contingent upon orientation; (3) perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally impact each other due to the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands.

7.2.1 Elaboration of Finding 1 and its implications

The first finding of this study is that persistent tensions surfacing from work and non-work interactions are triggered by the ongoing interaction between internal and external demands. The nature of this persistent interaction is illustrated in Figure 7.1, visualized as the iteration between latent and salient tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). In order to elaborate upon this process it is necessary to consider how salient tensions emanate from competing interactions between these internal and external triggers, and how the simultaneous complementary interactions between internal and external triggers contribute to the embeddedness of latent tensions.
Analysis of both Dominant-oriented (Chapter 5) and Dual-oriented (Chapter 6) professional women reveals a similar interpretation of the circumstances that render tensions salient. In both cases, perceived tensions were triggered by the coexistence of incompatible external demands and deviations from internal standards about meeting contradictory work and non-work demands. While participants adjusted internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identity, they simultaneously negotiated with work and non-work role-related partners to meet their expectations for performance, organizing, and belonging. The interplay between internal and external demands leads to discrepancies between desire and actual enactment of work and non-work roles, due to either deviations from internal standards or competing external demands, or both.

Crucially, internal and external triggers for tensions interact in a competing way, whereby external demands and internal demands stimulate each other, reflected in the depleted resources perceived by professional women (e.g., energy, time, physical availability). For example, incompatible expectations from others can
activate deviations from internal standards and vice versa, thus resulting in the competing interaction between internal and external demands.

It was further revealed in Chapters 5 and 6 that internal and external triggers for tensions interact in a complementary way, whereby meeting each aspect of internal and external demands can be a source of support that buffers other aspects. The complementary interactions are reflected in the perceived generated resources that buffer other aspects of competing internal and external demands (e.g., perspectives, social support, skills), under which circumstances tensions remain latent. Indeed, not all tensions require immediate attention to resolve. It is only when incompatible external demands and deviations from internal standards intensify that responses are triggered (see Chapters 5 and 6 for a discussion).

Significantly, not all tension episodes were perceived as discrete, isolated incidents. Indeed, most of the triggers for tensions were not exclusive to any single aspects of internal or external demands, which are represented by the interlocking gears on either side of Figure 7.1. These internal and external demands are not separate entities: they jointly contribute to professional women’s development of certain aspects in both work and non-work domains, as illustrated in Figure 7.1 by their complementary interaction. However, their ongoing connectivity can also hinder the development of other aspects, which is the result of their competing interaction.

In this way, the competing interaction between internal and external demands renders tensions salient, while the complementary interaction provides some degree of buffering. Although buffering cannot eliminate tensions, it provides leverage for professional women when confronting competing demands. For example, when triggers activate latent tensions, buffering enables professional women to prioritize multiple competing demands, rather than passively responding to all of them. Thus, buffering is consistent with the persistent nature of tensions, as visualized in Figure 7.1 as the iteration between latent and salient tensions.

Just as conflict researchers have jointly considered multiple external demands for scarce resources and the salience of social identity (Lobel, 1991), the authors of boundary studies embrace the theoretical assumptions of person-environment (P-E) fit theory, which encompasses both environmental factors and personal factors (see Kreiner et al., 2009). In the context of this study’s findings, the environmental factors
identified in the literature are consistent with the three aspects of external triggers for tensions; and the three aspects of internal triggers are the personal factors that concern not only identity in relation to others, but also internally driven self-identification.

In addition, within a work and non-work context, this study’s findings suggest that internal triggers for tensions are related to displays of competence, autonomy, and role identities, while external triggers for tensions relate to performance, organizing, and belonging. Thus, the tension lens adopted in this study not only shares similarities with the external impacts identified by both boundary (Nippert-Eng, 1996) and conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) perspectives, but also emphasizes professional women’s internalization of external impacts when forming their perception of tensions.

Furthermore, rather than being restricted to a single coping strategy, professional women deploy a variety of strategies in coping with perceived tensions. Crucially, many of these strategies have been previously identified in boundary theory studies (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2009), conflict management research (e.g., Lobel, 1991), or as coping tactics within tension literature (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Smith, 2014). In addition, professional women’s use of a range of strategies to cope with persistent tensions is consistent with the dynamic equilibrium model’s (Smith & Lewis, 2011) support for a behavioural repertoire (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009). The implication here is that the various strategies identified by tension and work and non-work literature complement each other in the management of work and non-work tensions.

Although the combining of multiple coping strategies has been considered a necessity for coping with paradoxical tensions (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), the evidence from this study suggests that professional women combine strategies optionally. In other words, while some professional women have the internal capacity to deploy a multi-faceted strategic solution, this is only the case where a single strategy will not suffice. Further, a flexible approach to coping with work and non-work tensions is more likely to facilitate enriching experiences.

Therefore, whenever tensions arise, rather than adopting a mechanistic, equal investment in resources between domains, professional women adjust self-expectations to facilitate their ability to better cultivate personal resources as an
enriching experience. Moreover, the process of simultaneously engaging in both work and non-work domains creates enriching experiences for professional women that *buffer* or *compensate* temporal conflicts or boundary violations (Kreiner et al., 2009; Maertz & Boyar, 2011). As discussed below, enrichment can occur internally or externally.

External enrichment, for example, occurs when the support of others eases external competing demands (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This study finds that enrichment can also occur internally, as when professional women adjust their standards by consciously reframing perceived tensions, thereby generating positive emotions, constructive thoughts, and feelings of self-worth. By so doing, professional women are more able to seek internally driven goals that stretch them, or create psychological buffers to resolve episodic boundary violations or conflict. Hence, the process of working through tensions between ideal and actual enactment of work and non-work roles helps to operationalize the synthesising (e.g., Lewis, 2000) and transcending (e.g., Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004) of tensions at the micro level. This supports the more nuanced view of enrichment proposed by Powell and Greenhaus (2010), in which enrichment entails a more complicated process of transferring resources.

In this subsection, the finding that ongoing competing and complementary interactions between internal and external demands act as triggers for persistent work and non-work tensions was elaborated. In the following elaboration of this study’s second finding, attention turns to how professional women orient themselves to these perceived tensions, as well as the implications for work and non-work literature.

### 7.2.2 Elaboration of Finding 2 and its implications

The second finding of this study is that professional women orient themselves in four different ways to the perceived tensions triggered by internal and external demands. As this study focused on the subjective experience of tensions between work and non-work domains, the two research questions explored professional women’s perception of tensions and coping strategies. Findings related to the perception of and coping with tensions across each of the four identified orientations are illustrated in Figures 7.2-7.5, in which the white side of the Yin-Yang symbol denotes perception of tensions, and the black side denotes coping strategies.
It is important to note that professional women’s orientation is not simply a product of the way they perceive and cope with tensions between their work and non-work roles. Rather, their orientations are themselves a coping strategy, and one that further investigation may reveal to be the driver of the coping themes identified in Figures 7.2-7.5, even if these orientations are not equally functional as evaluated by professional women.

In other words, persistent work and non-work tensions are managed in four different ways, depending on how interactions between internal and external triggers are perceived during the enactment of work and non-work roles. Figures 7.2-7.5 indicate the three aspects of both internal (displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities) and external demands (performance, organizing, and belonging), which are presented on the left and right sides of each figure respectively.

Significantly, perceived tensions across the four orientations were found to correspond with distinct combinations of diverse coping strategies. In each of the four figures (Figures 7.2-7.5) presented below, arrows are used to indicate the distinct approach to coexisting internal and external triggers for each category of orientation to competing work and non-work demands. The blue arrows signpost each orientation’s coping priority, and the green arrows signify the direction of orientation. Despite differing priorities to work and non-work domains, Work, Non-work and Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women have satisfying internal standards in common as the core motivation for coping with work and non-work tensions, as indicated by the direction of the blue arrows in Figures 7.2 to 7.4.
Work-oriented professional women perceive that non-work demands render tensions salient, as indicated in the green arrow of Figure 7.2. Favouring work over non-work not only influences how they perceive tensions between domains, but also their coping strategies. These women adjust involvement in their non-work domains to accommodate a work priority, which they perceive as a better fit with their internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities. Work-oriented professional women, therefore, prioritize engagement with work to better satisfy their internal standards, illustrated by the direction of the blue arrow in Figure 7.2.
Professional women with a Non-work orientation, on the other hand, perceive that demands from the work domain render tensions salient, as indicated by the direction of the green arrow in Figure 7.3. These women adjust work involvements to accommodate a non-work priority, which is perceived as a better fit with their internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities in the non-work domain (see blue arrow, Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3. Findings of Perception and Coping under a Non-work Orientation
Findings related to the perception of tensions and coping under a Pragmatic Dual orientation are illustrated in Figure 7.4. This group of professional women balance others’ and self-expectations by constant negotiation with both work and non-work role-related partners, as indicated by the two-way green arrow at the bottom of Figure 7.4. More importantly, they perceive themselves as being able to differentiate uncontrollable external demands from their sense of self-worth when deviations from self-constructed standards occur. Hence, Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women consider mutual engagement in both work and non-work domains as a better fit with internal standards about displaying competence, autonomy, and role identities, as illustrated in the blue arrow of Figure 7.4.

![Figure 7.4. Findings of Perception and Coping under a Pragmatic-Dual Orientation](image-url)
Findings related to the perception of tensions and coping under a Paralysed Dual orientation are illustrated in Figure 7.5. In common with their Pragmatic-Dual-oriented counterparts, these women also consider mutual engagement in both domains as a better fit with internal standards, as indicated by the two-way green arrow in Figure 7.5. However, Paralysed Dual-oriented professional women are more conscious of the impact of their decisions on other people, and hence differ from their internally driven Pragmatic counterparts. As a consequence, their sense of internal standards is contingent upon how they perceive others’ evaluations, as illustrated by the direction of the blue arrow in Figure 7.5.

![Figure 7.5. Findings of Perception and Coping under a Paralysed Dual Orientation](image-url)
Within a dominant focus, Work-oriented professional women perceive the source of salient tensions as deriving from the non-work domain, while their Non-work-oriented counterparts perceive the work domain to be the source of tensions. Furthermore, analysis and discussion in Chapter 5 suggests that professional women with a dominant orientation are able to distinguish short-term from long-term impacts relating to the ongoing competing and complementary interaction between internal and external demands. On the other hand, Dual-oriented professional women (analysed and discussed in Chapter 6), make no such distinction between the short-term and long-term impacts of simultaneously enacted work and non-work roles.

The work and non-work literature specifies competing demands from both work and non-work domains with short-term and long-term impacts. For example, Maertz and Boyar (2011) proposed that different types of conflict, such as time-based, behaviour-based, strain-based, and energy-based conflict (see Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), should be categorized as episodic, or conflict in a more general sense. Similarly, boundary literature identifies both episodic boundary incongruence (e.g., Clark, 2002; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006; Hall & Richter, 1988), as well as incongruence in a more general sense (e.g., Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Annink & den Dulk, 2012; Cederholm, 2014), whereby individuals perceive that their boundary preferences for either integration or segmentation have been violated during interactions with work and non-work role-related partners (see Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

Correspondingly, researchers have also specified the short-term and long-term attempts to cope with the tensions arising from conflict. For example, Lobel (1991) proposed a combination of utilitarian and identity salience approaches. The former refers to investing personal resources in roles that yield more rewards than costs when immediate responses are required; while the latter adopts from social identity theory (Thoits, 1991), assuming that in the long term people exhibit a general tendency to allocate available resources based on roles they strongly identify with.

In light of the theories outlined above, but not notwithstanding the assumption of bi-directional conflict between work and non-work domains previously established (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005), the four orientations identified in this study reveal nuances that run deeper than a two-way interference between domains. As discussed in Chapter 2, research
has typically attributed causality to either work or non-work domains when considering the perception of conflict and enrichment (Carlson et al., 2000; Shockley & Singla, 2011).

Although the professional women in this study all perceived that their desires for displaying competence, autonomy, and role identity were better satisfied by enacting both work and non-work domains, they were found to differ in their attribution of causality for perceived conflict and enrichment to either one domain or the other. In the long term, Work and Non-work-oriented professional women share the bi-directional view of conflict and enrichment to work and non-work domains (Carlson et al., 2000; Grzywacz & Demerouti, 2013).

However, professional women in this study did not attribute causality of conflict to either work or non-work in dealing with episodic tensions, which contradicts the bi-directionality of conflict proposed by the literature (see Carlson et al., 2000; Grzywacz & Demerouti, 2013). Rather, professional women made situational attributions of directional impact, as suggested by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). For example, when confronting resource scarcity, Work-oriented professional women consciously adjusted their work engagement while ‘juggling’ demands from the non-work domain, thereby finding alignment between internal and external demands. Similarly, Non-work-oriented professional women compartmentalized or temporarily separated work and non-work domains in order to meet situational demands from the work domain.

To summarize, the four different work and non-work orientations presented in this study signify four different ways of combining multiple strategies to cope with the interactive impacts of internal and external triggers for tensions. How these different orientations further accentuate the persistent nature of tensions during work and non-work interactions is discussed in the next subsection.

7.2.3 Elaboration of Finding 3 and its implications

The third finding of this study is that perceived tensions and coping strategies reciprocally impact each other due to ongoing interactions between internal and external demands. The process of working through the ever-present and ever-changing interaction between internal and external triggers for tensions is visualized as the reciprocal impact between perception and coping with tensions within the Yin-
Yang symbol in Figures 7.2-7.5. For example, the perceived tensions ‘trickle down’ (see Figure 7.2), ‘entanglement’ (see Figure 7.3), ‘the nature of the beast’ (see Figure 7.4), and ‘Catch 22’ (see Figure 7.5) elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6 are examples of the failure of previous coping efforts to eliminate tensions, thus accentuating the ubiquitous and persistent nature of tensions. Hence, various tension episodes were cascading, as their management gradually influenced how latent tensions became salient.

The reciprocal impact between perception and coping with tensions implies that the four orientations do not represent responses to single tension episodes. Rather, they represent overarching—yet fluid—approaches to work and non-work engagements. While conflict and boundary violations can be resolved, the persistent nature of tensions is explicitly recognized by professional women, and managed by embracing an evolving approach to coexistent internal and external demands. This evolution of internal and external demands is evidenced by coping strategies like ‘reframing’ (Figure 7.2), ‘evolving role identity’ (Figure 7.3), ‘reflective pendulum’ (Figure 7.4), and ‘reflexive juggling’ (Figure 7.5). These coping strategies revealed the process through which professional women attached meanings to various roles.

Importantly, two forms of reciprocal impact between perception of tensions and coping were found. The positive reciprocal impact between perception and coping was observed in Work-oriented, Non-work-oriented, and Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women. Individuals with these orientations were able to perceive reciprocal impacts as an opportunity for personal development and enrichment in their lives. Significantly, participants with these specific orientations demonstrated an ability to:

(1) Distinguish differences in self and others’ expectations for the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work domains. For example, while professional women with these three orientations expressed the importance of engagement in both domains, their senses of satisfaction during work and non-work interactions was not contingent on others’ judgement. Several first-order concepts for coping strategies across these three groups capture their efforts to maintain an internal core, such as ‘reflective pendulum’ (Pragmatic Dual orientation, see Figure 7.4), ‘juggling’ (Work orientation, see Figure 7.2), and ‘independence’ (Non-work orientation, see Figure 7.3).
(2) Acknowledge the complementary interactive impact between internal and external demands by emphasizing the interrelatedness of internal and external triggers. In particular, professional women with these orientations were able to acknowledge the evolving nature of internal and external demands, and benefit from the ongoing competing and complementary interaction between them. These abilities are captured by the coping strategies 'give and take' (Non-work orientation, see Figure 7.3), ‘cost-benefit’ (Work orientation, see Figure 7.2) and ‘elasticity’ (Pragmatic Dual orientation, see Figure 7.4).

On the other hand, a negative reciprocal impact between perception and coping with tensions was observed in professional women with a Paralysed Dual-orientation. These women found it difficult to reconcile their sense of self-worth with their personal limits for meeting inherent competing external demands, and reported a sense of being trapped within paradoxical tensions.

In other words, there are intrapersonal differences in the capacity to adjust senses of competence, autonomy, and role identity. Some individuals are more sensitive to the evolving and persistent nature of tensions. For Work-oriented, Non-work-oriented, and Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women, the process of coping with ongoing internal and external demands enabled a gradual refinement of self-identification with roles from among socially and historically available alternatives.

The reciprocal relationship between the perceiving of and coping with tensions indicates that while the four identified orientations are relatively stable, they are not fixed over time. Even within the same orientation, some aspects of self-constructed standards are found to be more important than others for some professional women, dependent upon personal circumstances and environmental contingencies. Relatedly, several of the professional women who participated in this study also expressed that the salience of specific internal standards changes during their life course.

Such evolving identifications with various work and non-work roles challenge the stable role identity assumption held by current work and non-work boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009). With respect to the creation and maintenance of work and non-work boundaries, embracing a stable role identity reflects mutually exclusive attempts to integrate and segment role boundaries, where integration and segmentation exist at either ends of a continuum (see Figure 2.2).
Indeed, Nippert-Eng (1996) proposed that individuals develop preferences for role boundaries that exist on a continuum from segmentation, where work and non-work roles have high separation, to integration, where work and non-work roles are often combined. Segmented boundaries are more inflexible and roles are rigidly conducted at specific places and times. In contrast, integrated boundaries have a high degree of overlap and are flexible with cross-role interactions (Ashforth et al., 2000; Winkel & Clayton, 2010).

While boundary theory addresses the coexistence of conflict and enrichment by proposing an ongoing mix of integration and segmentation (Kreiner et al., 2009), the interactive impacts of internal and external demands suggest a more complicated balancing act during simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles. In physics, balance is enabled by two forces that are equal in size and opposite in direction, so that they effectively cancel each other out (Christiansen & Matuska, 2006).

However, in the context of work and non-work interactions, the possibilities and constraints professional women confront when meeting internal and external demands are integrated into an evolving process of interpenetration of work and non-work domains. In other words, tensions surfacing from the interaction between work and non-work domains are perceived by professional women as the evolving interplay between internal and external demands.

Significantly, the strategy of maintaining a fluid boundary between domains adopted by professional women in this study implies that there is no clear choice between integration and segmentation. This suggests that working adults may use both integration and segmentation in practice, or experience what Cohen, Duberley and Mussion (2009) described as ‘seeping’, whereby “control is diminished but not entirely absent” (p.235). In this way, the diverse coping strategies exhibited by the professional women in this study further specify how boundary management strategies interplay with environmental impacts to achieve synergy, thus building on and extending the boundary management tactics identified in Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep’s (2009) study.

The evolving nature of self and others’ expectations during ongoing work and non-work interactions also implies that individuals might embrace several orientations during the various stages of their adult lives. Thus, while Kreiner et al.
(2009) called for further research to specify under what circumstances working adults differentially integrate and segment their work and non-work boundaries, findings here imply that such circumstances are not static.

Therefore, the evolving nature of coping with and perception of tensions revealed in this study, as well as their reciprocal impacts, indicate that boundary preferences for integration and segmentation change over time, and so too does the capacity to differentially integrate and segment work and non-work boundaries. In this way, professional women’s perception of—and their responses to—work and non-work tensions offers a more nuanced, less rigid view of segmentation and integration.

By combining various strategies, Work-oriented, Non-work-oriented, and Pragmatic Dual-oriented professional women gradually learn to be more relaxed about their defensive actions and anxieties, and perceive themselves as becoming more proactive over time. Therefore, it could be argued that in facing persistent work and non-work tensions, individuals are able to maintain functionality without thinking paradoxically, so long as they acknowledge the interrelatedness of internal and external triggers for tensions, and adopt strategies that address the persistent and coexisting nature of those tensions.

To summarize, this section has elaborated upon this study’s findings and considered their implications with respect to the literature. From this, a discussion emerged regarding how four identified orientations to perceived tensions illuminate an evolving, more nuanced process of working through the persistent tensions that surface during work and non-work interactions. How this study’s findings contribute to work and non-work literature, as well as their practical implications, is discussed in the next section.

7.3 CONTRIBUTION

This study identifies tensions emerging through the enactment of multiple work and non-work roles as a useful medium through which the complexity of work and non-work interactions can be explored. At the same time, a tension perspective reveals a more dynamic process of perceiving and coping with competing work and non-work demands. The contribution made by this study, derived from empirical evidence of how professional women perceive and cope with tensions between work
and non-work domains, is now discussed. Theoretical contributions are outlined first (Section 7.3.1), followed by a discussion of the practical contributions (Section 7.3.2).

7.3.1 Theoretical contribution

The three key findings elaborated upon in Section 7.2 contribute to the literature by extending existing theoretical insights in five ways. First, by specifying four different orientations to perceiving and coping with work and non-work tensions, this study elaborates upon the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011) by (1) identifying four different ways of perceiving salient tensions, and (2) by illuminating how the virtuous and vicious cycles of working through tensions manifest themselves in a work and non-work context.

Specifically, the virtuous cycle (see Smith & Lewis, 2011) was elucidated via Work-oriented, Non-work-oriented, and Pragmatic Dual-oriented groups of professional women, each of which is associated with a different manner of iteration between acceptance and paradoxical resolutions to tensions. The vicious cycle is reflected in the responses of professional women with a Paralysed Dual orientation, who found themselves unable to resolve tensions by iterating between strategies.

Further, the coping efforts associated with each of the four identified orientations build on the diverse coping strategies described by existing tension and work and non-work research. While previous research investigating multiple coping strategies indicates why work and non-work domains can influence each other, the four different orientations to work and non-work roles identified in this study describe how rich coping repertoires are differentially deployed.

In addition, the identification of four different ways of meeting the external and internal demands that render tensions salient implies that the idea of balance between work and non-work domains is contingent upon an individual’s orientation. In this way, this study contributes new insight into the way individual differences impact the management of persistent tensions.

The second theoretical contribution is that the ongoing efforts required to work through persistent tensions indicate that the experience of enrichment during work and non-work interactions requires a process of consciously reframing perceived tensions. This is due to the interactive impacts of internal and external demands not
only buffering, but also aggravating, time, strain, and behaviour-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985); or violating preferred integrated or segmented boundaries between work and non-work roles (Kreiner et al., 2009).

This more nuanced view of enrichment helps to explain the coexistence of multiple conceptualizations of the work and non-work challenges identified in the work and non-work literature. Such insight provides empirical support for Powell and Greenhaus’ (2006) proposal, whereby different types of tension episode (e.g., conflicts, boundary incongruence) coexist with enrichment. In addition, the nature of perceiving and coping with tensions among professional women in this study is consistent with Powell and Greenhaus’ (2010) proposal that enrichment entails a more complicated process of resources utilization than a direct transference of skills, or spill over of positive emotions. Further, the interplay between internal and external demands underscores the value of adopting a tension lens for exploring how individual and environmental influences jointly impact the subjective experience of work and non-work tensions.

A third theoretical contribution relates to the established assumption of bi-directional conflict between work and non-work domains (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Indeed, in the long term, Non-work-oriented and Work-oriented professional women were found to share the bi-directional view of conflict and enrichment in their work and non-work lives. However, the four orientations identified in this study reveal nuances that run deeper than a two-way interference between domains.

With respect to perceived conflict and enrichment, the professional women in this study differed in their attribution of causality to either work or non-work domains. In dealing with episodic tensions though, professional women did not attribute a causality of conflict to either work or non-work. This observation contributes to a more accurate incorporation of current theoretical and empirical insights in the work and non-work literature. Hence, the identification of four orientations contributes a fine-grained understanding of how tensions are managed at the micro level, thereby illuminating the complexity of individual’s subjective experience of tensions emerging from micro issues. As such, the four orientations highlight the value of a tension lens for illuminating professional women’s
construction of the coexisting and persistent interplay between internal and external demands.

Therefore, the fourth theoretical contribution is that, by addressing the two research questions from a tension viewpoint, this study has uncovered the broad relevance of tension literature for gaining insight into professional women’s construction of competing work and non-work demands. For example, tension literature suggests that some individuals may initially perceive tensions as either dilemma or dialectics, and over time develop the capacity to adopt a paradoxical view by reflecting on the persistent nature of these tensions (see Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Indeed, this was found to be true of professional women with a Pragmatic Dual orientation. On the other hand, some individuals may never perceive that tensions can be viewed as paradoxical, but still maintain function when confronting competing demands by adopting a pluralistic approach (Westenholz, 1993). This way of perceiving work and non-work tensions accurately reflects the approach of professional women with either a Work or Non-work orientation.

A tension perspective should be used with caution, however, as awareness of paradoxical tensions denotes exposure to further tensions, which may trigger procrastination and paralysis (Westenholz, 1993), as experienced by professional women with a Paralysed Dual orientation. Thus, although previous research points to the utility of adopting a tension lens to view competing work and non-work demands, it is important to recognize that such an approach requires a full appreciation of the nonlinear nature of tensions (Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2013). Therefore, paradoxical thinking is not just a sudden shift of mindset or frame-breaking, it is an ongoing commitment to the recognition and interpretation of contradictory elements.

Notwithstanding this caveat, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how diverse coping strategies have been differentially deployed and improvised by working adults by delineating the persistent—and potentially developing—nature of tensions. This was achieved by synthesizing both tension and work and non-work research, and by subsequently exploring the utility of a tension lens to understand different approaches to the challenge of simultaneously enacted work and non-work roles. Therefore, the final theoretical contribution is the
integration of two interrelated, but not yet synthesized, streams of literature to explore the perception and management of persistent work and non-work tensions.

In summary, this study’s exploration of professional women’s perception and coping with work and non-work tensions makes five theoretical contributions to the literature. The first contribution is the elaboration of the dynamic equilibrium model (Smith & Lewis, 2011), and the illumination of how virtuous and vicious cycles manifest themselves in the different responses of professional women to perceived tensions. The second contribution comes via the ongoing efforts required of professional women to work through persistent tensions, which indicate that the experience of enrichment necessitates a process of consciously reframing perceived tensions.

A third contribution offers a deeper understanding of established assumptions about bi-directional conflict between individuals’ work and non-work lives (Carlson, Kaemar, & Williams, 2000; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). With respect to perceived conflict and enrichment, the identification of four orientations among professional women exposed differences in the attribution of causality to either work or non-work. Thus, a more nuanced view than a two-way interference between domains was revealed. The final two contributions are the novel integration of two research streams—tension and work and non-work literature—and the adoption of a tension lens, which together offer future studies additional scope in their efforts to elucidate how individuals manage the work and non-work relationship.

7.3.2 Practical contribution

Finding that diverse strategies are often required to manage multiple work and non-work roles, together with the evolving nature of individuals’ perception of tensions, has practical implications for organizations in terms of narrowing the implementation gap between provision and take-up of flexible workplace policy. This is a potentially important contribution in the context of the autonomy-control paradox, whereby the more autonomy workers are granted, the greater their level of commitment in terms of hours worked, thus relinquishing more control to their employers (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2013). The individual differences in orientation to work and non-work tensions revealed in this study, and the adjustments professional women make in response, suggest that an individual’s orientation would be a mutually beneficial starting point in discussions
between supervisors and employees regarding work expectations (e.g., work hours, deadlines).

Thus, the subtleties of perceiving and managing tensions found in this study not only indicate a need for greater supervisory discretion in responding to staff arrangements, they can also facilitate a genuine and transparent execution of flexible workplace policy. To this end, knowledge of employees’ orientations and favoured coping strategies would allow managers to be more proactive in the deciding and implementing policies that promote employee well-being and efficiency. In return, adopting such policies could help organizations to develop a supportive and productive workplace culture.

Furthermore, the identification of evolving self-constructed standards for enacting work and non-work roles as the internal triggers for tensions facilitates the understanding of individuals’ diverse responses in different situations and different personal circumstances. In addition, the interaction between internal standards and external demands observed in this study suggest that coping with work and non-work tensions cannot be reduced to a pre-defined algorithm. Rather, coping relies on the ability to adapt creatively to changing circumstances, implying the necessity for personal development and critical reflection.

Although there is no step-by-step guide for managing work and non-work tensions, this study has illuminated the dynamic process of how diverse strategies are deployed. More importantly, rather than consider acceptance and transcendence (Lewis, 2000; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004) to be the unquestionable principles for managing tensions, this study finds such principles to be entwined with alternative strategies like compartmentalizing, prioritizing, and setting temporal or spatial boundaries between various roles. Interestingly, these latter strategies have been defined by tension literature as ‘suppressing’ responses, through which individuals are more likely to be trapped in the vicious cycle of managing tensions (Lewis, 2000).

However, this study has empirically demonstrated that, in practice, some professional women are able to escape such vicious cycles through acceptance and transcendence. Paradoxically, the capacity to accept and transcend only emerges from the multiple deployment of those strategies that the literature considers ‘suppressing’. In other words, rather than avoiding vicious cycles, a more practical
and realistic approach to inevitable and persistent tensions is to progressively embrace them and accept that being defensive and anxious is normal, which ironically, can reduce anxiety and defensiveness.

Thus, working adults are more likely to become proactive in managing tensions gradually, thereby inducing less stressful cycles over time. Hence, this study’s findings support a dynamic balancing approach to recursive and co-evolving tensions (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Therefore, the potential practical contribution is reduction of workforce anxiety through the incorporation of acceptance of both temporal defensive reactions and emotional confusion into workplace mentoring and training programs.

In summary, drawing on professional women’s reflections of working through the competing and complementary interaction of different aspects of internal and external demands, this study offers working adults—and their employers—a solid foundation upon which to base their conscious choices about arrangements in both work and non-work domains. Indeed, the practical contributions outlined above reflect this study’s insights into perceiving and coping with inevitable and persistent work and non-work tensions. These insights motivate an honest discussion between working adults and their relevant role-related partners in terms of establishing realistic expectations. Rather than being anxious about not finding a balance or fit between multiple roles, conversations that embrace the practical realities revealed in this study can serve to enhance working adults’ physical and psychological well-being.

7.4 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION OF FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contains a number of limitations in its scope, as well as in its methodological and analytical approaches. Acknowledging these can inform future research in the fields of work and non-work interaction and organizational tension. In particular, five limitations and related suggestions for future research should be recognized.

The first limitation to consider is that of sample size. As each participant’s reflections required intensive scrutiny, the total number had to be limited. A commonly identified limitation of qualitative research in general, and of constructivist inquiry in particular, is the threat to findings that are generated from a
small sample size (Sandelowski, 1998). In this study, the latitude enjoyed by the 19 research participants in their non-work lives (education and opportunity afforded by living in a developed country), and how this influenced their work and life choices in general (e.g., whether to have children, or how many), may have impacted their reasoning of, and coping with competing work and non-work demands.

Therefore, although the demanding nature of the 19 participants’ work and non-work life, as well as their capacity to critically reflect and articulate their reasoning, provided rich insights into the dynamics of constructing persistent work and non-work demands, the generalisability of these 19 professional women’s perceptions to other populations is untested. Although sufficient numbers were interviewed to identify different types of response to—and coping with—tensions among professional women, the findings made and the implications drawn are indicative rather than conclusive. Hence, more research is required if widely relevant theories are to be generated.

Second, this study was restricted to the perspective of professional women. Although gendered choices were found in their approach to tension management, heavy investment in education and professional development set them apart from other working females with less exposure to such experiences. Similarly, male working adults with the same heavy involvement in both work and non-work activities may perceive and cope with tensions differently. The exclusion of male participants may limit the full portrait of how various cognitive, emotional, and behavioural coping strategies are deployed in practice.

Future studies could explore how both women and men of different educational and cultural backgrounds respond to work and non-work tensions. More specifically, as some responsibilities during women’s life cycles differ from men for historical and biological reasons, future research should explore the process of adjusting internal standards about the simultaneous enactment of work and non-work roles from a male perspective.

Third, due to time constraints, discussion about the reciprocal impact of perceiving and managing tensions was limited to retrospective data, and participants’ subjective experiences were captured via in-depth interview. Although this study adopted a process view to understand how perceptions and coping strategies co-evolve, the impact of past experiences on participants’ current choices could have
been explored in more depth via observation or longitudinal data, such as diary access.

Furthermore, the evolving nature of internal and external demands, and the persistent tensions perceived by professional women of any orientation, leave open the possibility that professional women’s perceived tensions are shaped by—and shape—their coping strategies. Therefore, explorations of working adults’ perception and actual coping require an investigation of the relationship between the two. For example, given this study’s identification of four orientations, future research could adopt an experience-based sampling technique to follow up working adults’ current interpretations of tensions to predict their turnover intention or job-performance. Relatedly, workplace surveys might assess the relationship between employees’ self-rating of tension management capacity and their take-up of workplace flexibility options.

A fourth limitation is the threat to the analysis of over-reliance on the researcher. Although personal experience strengthens the rapport developed between the researcher and participants, it also potentially affects the participants’ responses. The ideal would have been combining multiple data collection methods such as observation, focus groups, and diary access to triangulate different responses of working through persistent work and non-work demands. However, working within the financial and time constraints that many doctoral candidates face, such undertakings were not possible in this study. In order to mitigate the dangers of over-reliance, the researcher kept a research diary and regularly consulted her supervisory team to help prevent jumping to unwarranted conclusions.

Finally, while abduction is suitable for conceiving and initiating a theory (Blaikie, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007), findings generated through abductive strategies must be tested and refined in other contexts to more fully establish their generalisability and scope. Hence, the abductive strategy adopted here takes a first step towards tapping the tension literature for greater understanding of how individuals construct competing work and non-work demands. The theoretical distance between organisational tension and work and non-work interactions, however, implies that the theoretical contribution of applying a tension lens in this context cannot be directly generalised to different situations. Specifically, the theoretical relevance of macro and micro phenomena has to be established before the
strategies of working through tensions can be implemented (Langley et al., 2013). This was achieved in the present study by refining the sampling strategy and data collection technique, which helped to strengthen the theoretical generalisability.

In terms of suggestions for future research, additional questions are raised by this study’s insights into professional women’s perception and coping with work and non-work tensions. For example, why are triggers for tensions that are initially embedded in the process of work and non-work interactions not perceived as salient by all professional women? Although such latent tensions are not the focus here, this study provides support for the implicit understanding that cognitive and behavioural complexity are crucial attributes in constructing paradoxical tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, to provide a finer-grained understanding of how tensions come into individuals’ awareness, and how they unfold over time in the context of individuals’ work and non-work lives, further investigation is required to better understand the relationship between latent and salient tensions.

Moreover, the potential reciprocal impacts between perceived tensions and coping strategies highlighted in this study motivate future research to investigate the relationship between cognitive complexity and people’s ability to adjust their perception of tensions. For example, how does cognitive complexity influence the awareness of tensions embedded in the mutual enactment of work and non-work domains? Likewise, how does behavioural complexity affect the ability to cope with tensions? And what impact does behavioural complexity have on individuals’ perception of persistent tensions? Further research is therefore required to illuminate the relationship between cognitive complexity and behavioural complexity in the context of tensions between work and non-work roles.

In conclusion, there is considerable scope for extending this research in a more culturally specific direction. The findings of this study are not readily generalizable to populations beyond the cultural and demographic confines in which it was conducted. However, this does not mean that the methodological principles employed here could not—or should not—be usefully applied to investigate the same research questions elsewhere. Intuitively, such research would yield very different—yet no less important—findings in relation to the perception of and coping with work and non-work tensions. Indeed, answering such questions in the culturally distinct developing economies of Asia is of particular importance as these countries embrace
their own versions of modernity and become more prosperous. Within this dynamic, the growing acceptance of non-traditional roles for women will inevitably bring competing work and non-work issues into sharp focus for millions of people. How this new wave of professional women orient themselves in perceiving and coping with tensions in a work and non-work context is worthy of investigation.


Sandberg, J. (2005). How Do We Justify Knowledge Produced Within Interpretive Approaches? *Organizational Research Methods, 8*(1), 41-68.


Appendices

**Appendix A**: Example of participants’ drawing exercise

If the circle in the middle represents you, please:

- Draw circles within it and label them with different roles you fulfil from both your work and personal life (e.g., a parent, spouse, daughter…)
- The larger the circle, the more meaningful
- You can draw circles that overlap, or that are separate from each other, depending on how you consider the relationship between these roles.
Participant’s demographic data

Age

Religion

Highest degree of education earned

Occupation

Marital status

Age of children (If applicable)

Work hours by contract per week

Actual work hours per week

Your contribution to this research is greatly appreciated.
Thank you.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

Professional women’s construction of competing work and non-work demands: a tension perspective

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1300000147

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher: Carlin Guo – PhD student – Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
Associate Researchers: Dr Robert Thompson and Prof Caroline Hatcher – School of Management – QUT Business School

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of the researcher’s PhD program.

The purpose of this project is to gain a clearer understanding of the interrelationships between work and non-work by investigating how career women recognize and respond to tensions between work and non-work domains.

You are invited to participate in this project because you have expressed your interest and have given prior permission to be contacted for research. Also, the researcher has entered your workplace in person, or contact via telephone to assess your suitability for this study. This follow up contact has identified that you have:

(1) A significant level of resource demands from both personal and professional life, which have greater likelihood of occasional mutual exclusivity (struggle to meet both demands simultaneously), and are thus more likely to experience work-life conflict.
(2) More flexibility and control over work arrangements than other job holders, thus are likely to have a greater opportunity to develop skills that might be used to enrich both personal and professional life.
(3) The motivation to utilize strategies to create a meaningful life in both domains, and are not only willing to share your experience of work and non-work interactions, but are also able to articulate these experiences.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation will involve an audio recorded interview at an agreed location that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Questions will include: What are the tensions you experience while enacting various work and non-work roles? When you think about (particular tension) what issues, thoughts, feelings come to mind? How would you describe your efforts to manage the competing demands between your personal and professional life? What does having a good work-life relationship mean to you?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. If you withdraw, on request, any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT. You can choose not to answer any questions with which you feel uncomfortable answering.
EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will not benefit you directly. However, it may assist policy makers, the welfare sector, employers and the research community to appreciate the complexity involved for career women when managing work-life tensions.

RISKS

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless otherwise required by law. The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses. Only the researcher, supervisors and transcriber will have access to the data. The audio recording will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed. It is not possible to participate in this research without being recorded. Data collected for this project may be used for comparative research in future, but the data will be de-identified.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We would like to ask you to sign the written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

If have any questions or require further information please contact one of the research team members below.

Carlin Guo  Robert Thompson  Caroline Hatcher

3138  3138  3138 7734
6621  carlin.guo@student.qut.edu.au  5082  r.thompson@qut.edu.au  c.hatcher@qut.edu.au

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.
CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT
– Interview –

Professional women’s construction of competing work and non-work demands: a tension perspective

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RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

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STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the project will include an audio recording.
- Understand that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Please tick the relevant box below:

☐ I would like a copy of the report of the findings to be emailed to me after completion of the research.

My email address is

______________________________________________________________

Name

______________________________________________________________

Signature

______________________________________________________________

Date

______________________________________________________________

Please return this sheet to the investigator.
### Appendix C: Examples of triggers for tensions/ perceived tensions/coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triggers</th>
<th>Perceived tensions</th>
<th>Coping strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had arguments with daughter or husband; or had a highly stressful day at work</td>
<td>“Blurred boundaries” (#07)</td>
<td>Exercising, walking to create a period of transition between work and non-work; Set rigid boundary to allow “switching off”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues’ unfriendly reaction to her achievement</td>
<td>“A square peg in a round hole” (#07)</td>
<td>Acknowledge “tall poppy syndrome” and avoid discussion of her awards and drive to be an achiever; Acknowledging backgrounds in Iran clash with being a scientist in a male dominated field in Australia; Accept the mismatch between her cultural background and the work cultural; avoid acting like a “tall poppy” while interact with husband and colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling bitter and twisted as a stay-at-home mum, and guilty for leaving family behind for an academic position in another country</td>
<td>Tug of war (#07)</td>
<td>Admit that non-work relationship and work competence/autonomy is always a tough choice; Maintain distance relationship with husband and daughter for five years and have a 4 day weekend every month to be with family; Compromise both sides but satisfied with her work and non-work arrangements; satisfied with the way she advanced her career; take ownership with self-choice, even not perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less opportunity for exciting learning, as the nature of work becomes problem solving</td>
<td>Diminish control (#02)</td>
<td>“Can’t fit in everything”, feeling “time poor”; Accept time poor and work embeddedness are the nature of her work—perceived her life embedded in work and accept “time poor” for non-work life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending the whole weekend to deal with work accident</td>
<td>Overwhelming (#02)</td>
<td>Behave like a cross person when interacting with her partner and receive partner’s support –expressed to her partner the frustration and anger that result from her unable to follow her Non-work arrangement – release emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A phone call from her partner at 9pm</td>
<td>Conflict (#02)</td>
<td>Apologize to partner and bring work home, temporally engage with non-work live—express sorry to her partner about her neglecting of family time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex gossip around her being a young school principle</td>
<td>Mismatch (#02)</td>
<td>Sensitive to older male colleagues’ discomfort of her as a female senior administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to leave office at 5:30 was cancelled due to work emergency</td>
<td>“over-committed” (#02)</td>
<td>becoming more “mindful” and proactive in organizing work schedule and delegating tasks to subordinates; frustrated at lack of control on work schedule; adjust sense of mastery from work by delegating more tasks and responsibility to subordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegate tasks to colleagues free her up to engage in non-work; but uncomfortable to let go work responsibility</td>
<td>“Tug of war” (#02)</td>
<td>Be selective in meeting work demands and consult personal assistant to make selective decision; Considered the right to make own decisions is not a given, compare to women in many developing countries. Becoming more proactive in making “hard decisions” between self and others’ expectations regarding what to achieve and how to achieve goals during social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When child is sick, as a single mother, she can’t perform well as a nurse in intensive care</td>
<td>“All consuming” (#06)</td>
<td>feeling guilty on both sides: choose to work, feeling guilty for her daughter; choose to work, feeling guilty for work; Combine taking sick leave to care for sick daughter and asking friends for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back injury aggravate her dissatisfactions with the lack of intellectual advance and autonomy in nursing, while at the same time she needed income as the sole breadwinner</td>
<td>Trickle down (#06)</td>
<td>Balancing the hours in study, nursing, childcare and other part-time work Work part-time in nursing and training to be a librarian, study full-time to pursuit her interest in art and humanity; sending daughter to childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>younger daughter was ill after childbirth, now job was too stressful</td>
<td>“Out of control” (#18)</td>
<td>Put plan for study on hold, which creates frustration; Exercising to reduce stress and spending time with her husband helped to reduce stress;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shift work during weekends when two daughters were teenagers</th>
<th>Reluctant to miss out work due to non-work issues, proud of work performance record; regret missing out chance to care for teenage daughters; proud of achievement at work, which also provides her independence and final support for her daughters;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regret using work domain to distract family tragedy</td>
<td>Regret leaving a professional role for a front line job, but perceiving this move is out of her control, as the new job did distract her from the tragedy for a while; Feeling out of control and dissatisfy with how she has met multiple role demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix D:** List of descriptive first-order codes for perceived tensions and coping strategies for Work-oriented participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triggers</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>Coping strategies</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Resigned from last job due to husband’s work relocation</td>
<td>Interruption (#07)</td>
<td>Start with voluntary work then gradually lead to part time job, to eventually work fulltime, while gradually reduce involvement NW activities</td>
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<td>Had arguments with daughter or husband; or had a highly stressful day a work</td>
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<td>Exercising to create a period of transition between W-NW Set rigid boundary to allow “switching off”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling bitter and twisted as a stay-at-home mum, and guilty for leaving family behind for an academic position in another country</td>
<td>Tug of war (#07)</td>
<td>“never 100% comfortable and contained with where you are” Maintain distance relationship with husband and daughter for five years and have a 4 day weekend every month to be with family</td>
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<td>As a distinguish profession, want to push daughter to be an achiever</td>
<td>Blurred boundaries (#07)</td>
<td>Balancing act between providing freedom and push daughter</td>
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<td>Acknowledging lack of socializing and sometimes feeling exhausted as work has taken up head space most of the time</td>
<td>Leaking (#07)</td>
<td>Learn to reduce sleep time but still function well; perceived her job is not physically exhausting, is mentally exhilarated</td>
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<td>Less opportunity for exciting learning, as the nature of work becomes problem solving</td>
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<td>Invitation from colleagues and communities took over time for recreation and family</td>
<td>Defeated (#02)</td>
<td>Accept and understand others’ disappointment for her decision of not responding to certain demands</td>
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<td>Sensitive to people’s reaction of a female senior administrator</td>
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<td>Plan to leave office at 5:30 was cancelled due to work emergency</td>
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<td>Car breaks down, or delay in travelling create extra strain on busy schedule</td>
<td>Cascading (#06)</td>
<td>Perceived difficulties as temporal, and encouraged by her progress to another career; Reschedule nursing hours to better perform other roles, multi-tasking and no recreation time;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter grows up, feeling bored in Non-work life</td>
<td>Intrusion (#06)</td>
<td>Checking work email after work hours, and pay more attention to self-care</td>
</tr>
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<td>younger daughter was ill after childbirth, now job was too stressful</td>
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<td>weekends when two daughters were teenagers</td>
<td>work issues, proud of work performance record; regret missing out chance to care for teenage daughters</td>
<td>(#18)</td>
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<td>Entering twilight years in work life</td>
<td>Fearing empty and work as a big part is her life is disappear…Planning to study for pleasure</td>
<td>Scare (#18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older daughter die from self-harm</td>
<td>“Overwork” to distract herself from family tragedy</td>
<td>Breached (#18)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Regret using work distract daughter’s suicide</td>
<td>Regreted leaving a professional role for a front line job, but perceiving this move is out of her control, as the new job did distract her from the tragedy for a while; Fearing out of control and dissatisfy with how she has met multiple role demands</td>
<td>Trapped (#18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breastfeed newborn daughter, and to take some time off to recover from a back injury sustained during childbirth</td>
<td>Work part-time in a less demanding but intellectually stimulating job; Considered child-caring limit mental and physical capacity to develop self professionally, and work is “me time” and relaxing compare to child-caring</td>
<td>Interruption (#19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of her friend is very close to “be brilliant at work and also brilliant at home”</td>
<td>Negotiate with her husband regarding increasing her work hours, but be rejected for financial reason; angry with her husband favor his professional development over hers</td>
<td>Pressure (#19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t want to send children to full-time child care but doesn’t want to take on stressful job</td>
<td>Actively seek social support from friends, family and pay for day care3 days a week considered daily life as a “constant to do list” rather than juggling</td>
<td>Tug of war (#19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived childfree or single friends don’t have issue of work-life balance</td>
<td>finding an interesting and less stressful job to start with is “the most important thing rather than trying to kind of make a crappy job work for you with your life”—considered competing interests between work and non-work life is inevitable, and having a difficult job would destroy happiness in life</td>
<td>Diminished control (#19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband’s boss expect her as the home maker</td>
<td>perceived lack of support from most employers and government for working</td>
<td>Conflict (#19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and main carers for the children mothers; choosing industry to accommodate child-caring need

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<tr>
<th>Competing demands from both domains create pressure to live up the “superwomen” image</th>
<th>Insecurity (#19)</th>
<th>Plan to seek help from professional career counsellor and retrain herself for a new job</th>
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<td>Insecurity (#19)</td>
<td>Conflict (#19)</td>
<td>Considered work life has its own balance, so does Non-work. Balance means having “harmony in both aspects of your life. A family and children is a job in itself.”</td>
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Considered work life has its own balance, so does Non-work. Balance means having “harmony in both aspects of your life. A family and children is a job in itself.”