AshEse Journal of Business Management
Vol. 1(2), pp. 017-027, July, 2015

http://www.ashese.co.uk/business -management1/blog

Full Length Research

Between the devil and the deep blue sea(m): A case study exploring the borders between work and life domains described by women in the U.S. fashion industry

Laura E. McAndrews[1]* and Jung E. Ha-Brookshire[2]

[1]Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors, University of Georgia, USA.
[2]Department of Textile and Apparel Management, University of Missouri, USA.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: lauraemc@uga.edu

The study explored the border management between work and life domains as described by women working in the U.S. fashion industry. Clark's (2000) work-family border theory lent to the study a framework for how people manage and negotiate their work and family domains and the borders between domains. The interpretation from a qualitative case study approach, which triangulated semi-structured interviews and field observations of five women working in the fashion industry in New York City and Philadelphia revealed two theme categories: (a) grand view triggering events and effects and (b) every day triggering events and effects. Implications derived from the results offer several important opportunities. Corporate human resource departments may want to utilize the study's findings to cultivate a work environment that may be more sustainable in the long term with reasonable work expectations and more supportive role models.

Key words: Work-life balance, fashion industry, gender roles.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast paced society, the demands of life and work are inescapable. As a response, people have become experts at multitasking by talking on the phone and driving, answering work emails while cooking dinner, or taking work calls on a family vacation. Society today seems to be on a never-ending sprint, but to what end point? With the boundaries of work and life blurring together, people seem to have no refuge from the pressures of work or life. Hence, the idea of balancing work and life has been a popular topic of research, corporate culture, and personal ideal. However, for most people, a balance between work and life still seems to be an unachievable state of being (Strazdins and Broom, 2004).

Work-life balance has been described as a circus-juggling act (Fey, 2011). Particularly, women are conflicted with balancing a successful, but demanding career with the attempt of achieving a fulfilling personal life (Fey, 2011). After all, the movie called "Devils wear Prada" is a timely depiction of women struggling to find the right niche in the highly competitive industry. Though men also face these issues, because of social and cultural traditional gender roles and the women-dominant nature of the fashion industry, the issues of work-life balancing is thought to have a greater impact on women than men (Hall & Richter, 1988).

Currently the discussion has centered on women's struggle with work-life balance. However, this study was designed to not just focus on the work and life domains, but to further examine women in today's U.S. fashion industry and the border-crossing phenomena. More specifically, the study explored the events or situations that trigger the women to cross between their work or life environments and understand how border-crossing affects their work and life environments from the lenses of Clark's (2000) work-family border theory.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Work-life balance

Work-life balance has been a topic of research for the past 50 years. At first, research seemed to have focused on looking at men as breadwinners and women as homemakers (Parsons and Bales, 1955). In response to the liberal feminism trend in the 1970s, Hall (1972) frequently researched college educated women. The study investigated how the women experience role conflict and utilize different coping mechanisms between work and life domains. Furthermore, Hall found a relationship between coping mechanisms and satisfaction, which affected a woman's successes and failures throughout her life.

After the feminist focus of research in the 1970s, some researchers in the 1980s and 1990s took a non-gendered approach to investigate how the work and life domains were related. Staines (1980) compared the two opposing theories at the time: spillover theory and compensation theory. The spillover theory explains how the work environment is positively related to the family life environment, and therefore, positive behavior models and activities in the work domain must be developed so they could 'spillover' to the home life.

Conversely, the compensation theory describes how the work environment is negatively related to the non-work environment. The compensation theory contends that where the work environment falls short in fulfilling needs of satisfaction or happiness, the individual will seek that fulfillment and happiness in their home life (Stanies, 1980). Therefore, if a person is unfulfilled in their career, they may seek more achievements in their home life, such as getting married or having children. Additionally, if a person is very satisfied in their career, they may not seek fulfillment in their home life. Both the spillover and compensation theory have led to exploring the idea of balancing the work and life domains.

Work-life border central concepts

In 2000, Clark introduced the work-family border theory that explains how people manage and negotiate their work and family domains, the borders between them, and the people who occupy them in order to attain balance (Clark, 2000). In general terms, work is often defined as paid employment (Guest, 2002), which historically was considered as physical work areas into which people reported. Thus, the work domain was clearly defined by going in and out of one's actual work area. In contrast, today's work environment could essentially be everywhere and anywhere. With the advent of new technologies, such as smart phones, lap tops, and wireless Internet, work is no longer confined to a specific area (physical border) or even a clearly defined times (temporal borders) (Guest, 2002). Thus, beyond the physical work domain, a psychological work domain is possible (Clark, 2000; Guest, 2002). Given this nature of today's work environment, in this study, work is defined as any and all activities associated with paid employment both physically and psychologically, without limitation of physical or temporal boundaries.

The concept of "life" in the work-life border theory has seemed to come from the concept of "family." Originally, the boundary for family time was thought to be the time that is not used for work (Clark, 2000). However, not just family occupies the non-work time in today's society. Therefore, in this study, the term 'family' was replaced with 'life' to include comprehensive nature of our "life" domain that is beyond the family domain. That is, in this study, the term 'life' includes family, leisure, home, personal, and all activities outside of the work domain, in order to understand the relationships between work and life domains and boundaries.

The term, balance, is a complex word with a variety of meanings. In the research phrase 'work-life balance,' the term 'balance' is used more metaphorically, because individually, balance may be achieved in varying manners. In physical and psychological terms, balance is "stability of body or mind" (Guest, 2002, p. 261). Yet, balance can also be defined and measured either subjectively or objectively, "that it will vary according to circumstances and that it will also vary across individuals" (Guest, 2002, p.261). Therefore, balance is distinguished by both the individual's feeling of fulfillment and good functioning in both the work and life domain (Clark, 2000).

Borders refer to defining points at which domain-relevant behavior begins or ends. In Clark's work-family border theory (2000), these borders are thought to have three forms: physical, temporal, and psychological. Physical borders define where domain-relevant behavior takes place, such as specific work locations or walls in a home. Temporal borders, divide when work is done and when personal life activities are carried out, such as set work hours. Psychological borders are "rules created by individuals that dictate when thinking patterns, behavior patterns, and emotions are appropriate for one domain, but not the other" (Clark, 2000, p.756). Psychological borders are mainly self-created. However, the individual could use physical and temporal borders to establish psychological borders (Weick, 1979).

Borders are found to have four characteristics: (a) permeability – the degree to which elements from other domains may enter (Hall & Richter, 1988); (b) flexibility – the extent to which a border may contract or expand, depending on the demands of one domain or the other (Hall & Richter, 1988); (c) blending – occurs when a great deal of permeability and flexibility occurs around the border (Clark, 2000); and (d) border strength – permeability, flexibility, and blending combine to determine the strength of the border (Clark, 2000).

The border-crosser's identification with their domain's values and activities is another key aspect in understanding work-life balance. When a border-crosser strongly connects personal values and activities to a certain domain, then investment in that domain is increased (Clark, 2000). Thus, if the border-crosser identifies more strongly with one domain over another, then imbalance may occur. Past research, such as

Stanies (1980), measured personal identification by the border-crosser's involvement in a certain domain. The findings concluded how close identification with one's domain causes conflict and changes involvement in the other domain.

Hyper competitive nature of the US fashion industry and research questions

The U.S. fashion industry is known for its highly competitive and dynamic nature of the industry, with complex market relationship, volatile environmental changes, and competition over scarce resources (Dyer & Ha-Brookshire, 2008). The unique environment of the U.S. fashion industry makes it difficult for any women professionals to balance career with a personal life. Values and activities women partake in their work domain could be in contrast to values and activities in their life domain. This is different than other female dominated industries, such as teaching or nursing, where similar values and activities exist in both the work domain and life domain, such as helping others (McAndrews & Ha-Brookshire, 2013). The activities and values in the work domains found in the fashion industry may be considered more closely related to male-dominated work domains. Thus, women in the fashion industry may face different challenges when managing and border-crossing between their work-life domains, than women in other female-dominated industries.

Yet, we know little about how women in the U.S. fashion industry deal with the work-life domains from the border-management perspective. Though research has been conducted in other industries, currently there has been little work in exploring work-life balance in the fashion industry. To fill this gap, this exploratory study was designed to help gain an understanding of the border management, border-crossing, and how this affects work-life balance among women in the U.S. fashion industry through the theoretical frameworks of Clark's work-family border theory. The results were expected to shed lights into how these women manage, overcome, or give up on balancing work and life at a deeper and personal level.

METHODOLOGY

Case study approach

Because the aim of this study was exploratory in nature to better understand women working in the fashion industry, the case study approach was deemed the best strategy to elicit rich data. A case study approach is useful to "explore a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Creswell, 2007). With a qualitative case study approach, the goal is not to generalize, but to gain an understanding of unique cases (Creswell, 2007).

Case selection

The method of purposive case selection was utilized to identify cases that would provide specific characteristics of different work-life border management and border crossing strategies (McCraken, 1988). After the approval of the university's Institutional Review Board, a total of five participants were recruited through the professional network of the researchers. All participants were currently working in the fashion industry in New York, NY and Philadelphia, PA during the time of data collection in early 2013. Participants worked at specialty retailers working in the design, product development, or production departments, in addition to owning their own fashion business. Job levels range from assistant designer to owner. The variety of the participants' job and personal life elicited enriching information from different angles, however, their vital connection was the fact they were all working in a hyper-dynamic fashion industry. Table 1 illustrates demographic characteristics of the case study participants.

Data collection

In order to strengthen the design of this study, data triangulation was used to study the phenomena at hand. As "no single method ever adequately solves the problem" (Patton, 1990), the study entailed three steps for data collection: (a) in-depth interviews, (b) field observations, and (c) follow-up interviews. The researcher spent one "day in the life" with each participant where the initial interview took place, along with field observation. A follow-up interview took place three to five days after the initial interview and field observation to elicit further insights from the participant.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilized to allow the participants "the opportunity to tell her own story in her own terms" (Anderson and Jack, 1991). The initial interview for each participant took place during the 12 hours the researcher spent with each participant. Location was chosen by the participant and at her convenience. Three participants chose to be interviewed at home. One participant chose her neighborhood coffee shop as the interview location, since this participant worked from home. One participant chose to be interviewed during her lunch hour at her work cafeteria. This participant was working 12 hour days and this was the only time she had available for the interview. Total interview duration ranged from 80 to 90 minutes. General questions regarding the participants' background and experience in the apparel industry and personal life initiated the interview. Subsequently, questions led into defining the participant's different domains. For example, the research asked to "describe a typical work day." "What is your daily routine, responsibilities, tasks?" "Who are the people you interact with at work and home?" Then, investigating how the participants described their borders, border-crossing, and border nature as outline in the work-family border theory. For example, "Describe a time when a demand at work interrupted your personal life" "Describe your daily commute." The interview concluded with reflective questions on how the participant perceived how they balance their work and life.

Observation is another method to obtain data in the

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

Participant[1]	Age	Years in the Apparel Industry	Current Position	Type of Company	Marital Status	Children	Work – Home Location
Summer	37	13	Senior Manager Women's and Men's Sweaters	Specialty Retailer Brand	Single	0	NYC / Hoboken, NJ
Mary	38	15	Owner, LLC	Apparel Consultant	Married	1	NYC / Broklyn, NY
Courtney	32	10	Women's Knit Designer	Specialty Retailer Brand	Married	Expecting	NYC / Jersey City, NJ
Jane	38	12	Business Owner	Apparel Boutique	Single	0	Philadephia, PA
Tricia	27	6	Production Assistant	Specialty Retailer	Single	0	Philadephia, PA

Note. [1] All participants' names are pseudo names.

participant's natural setting in which the phenomena occurs. In order to describe the participants social world and its people (Emerson, 1995), one researcher spent a 12-hour time period observing the participants activities, responsibilities, and interactions. For example, what was the participant's routine, along with how she spent her time when she woke up, traveled to work, while at work, during breaks, commuted home, after work activities, or duties when she returned home. This entailed the researcher becoming a participating observer. Utilizing participatory observation, the researcher accompanied the women throughout their daily activities and responsibilities. Data were gathered through field notes and recorded in the researcher's field diary for a holistic perspective.

Validation strategies

The validation strategies utilized in this study were (a) triangulation, (b) low inference descriptors, (c) reflexivity, and (d) member check. First, triangulation was implemented in the study through in-depth interviews, field observations, researcher reflections, and follow-up interviews. The goal of using these multiple methods results in different types of data to provide cross-data validity checks (Patton, 1990). Each method of validation was chosen to build over-arching themes that arose from the data. Second, low inference descriptors provided long, full quotes allowing for the participants to describe their work-life balance experiences without paraphrasing, which could result in taking meaning out of context. Along with the quotes, rich, thick descriptions enabled the reader to transfer the information to other settings based on shared characteristics (Creswell, 2007). Third, reflexivity was a continuous strategy throughout the duration of the research and analysis as "the researcher is an active participant in qualitative research" (Anderson and Jack, 1998). Finally, member check helped the researcher do an external check of the validity of the data and interpretations concluded with the participants' involvement. Two of the five participants had the time to review all materials and replied. All of them were in full agreement with the researcher's interpretation, strengthening the validity of the study's theme interpretations and overall conceptual model.

Data analysis

After all participants' data collection was completed, the audio-recorded initial interviews and follow-up interviews were transcribed. All names were changed to pseudo names. After the initial listening and transcription, the audio-recordings were again played and a visual cluster mapping was used to see "what goes with what" (Miles & Heberman, 1994, p. 245). The emergent themes were then used to go back through the transcripts and coded with the aim to uncover how the participants experience work-life balance. Following McCracken (1988), the analysis moved from the particular to the general where the data was broken down and arranged back together in themes that eventually helped to establish patterns

and corresponding categories. This allowed for the researchers to develop similarities and differences among the cases which was then interpreted (Creswell, 2007). The researcher's personal field diary was used to provide full descriptions of the participant's body language or activities beyond what was said in the interviews in order to maintain a holistic perspective.

Interpretation

Border-crossing events and effects

In understanding the border-crossing phenomena of triggering events and effects experienced by women working in the U.S. fashion industry, the results of data analysis revealed two major theme categories: (a) *everyday* border-crossing events and effects and (b) *grand view* border-crossing events and effects. For each theme category, different triggering events were identified that caused the women to border-cross into their work and life domains.

Everyday border-crossing events and effects

Everyday events and situations triggered the women to cross into their work and life domains. These triggering events alluded to the border nature between the domains and the when, where, and the period of time the border-crossing occurred. In identifying the everyday border-crossing events and effects, work-life balance was better understood. In the first theme category, everyday border-crossing events and effects, three themes emerged: (a) work consuming life, leaving the questions "what is my life?"(b) keeping work and life separate, but "not too far separated"; and (c) work and life blending together as "there is not a clean line."

Chaotic stage: Work consuming life, leaving the question "what is my life?"

In the chaotic stage, the work domain dominated over the life domain with two borders. The everyday triggering events helped realize the border management and domains. These triggering events were noticed during times the women were border-crossing (a) the morning commute, (b) during lunch and/or work breaks, and (c) the evening commute.

In the mornings, Summer and Tricia seemed to cross the border from their life domain to work domain during their commute. Both women seemed to "take advantage of [their] mornings" as this seemed to be their last moments in the life domain. Tricia, who drove 40 minutes to work, felt her time in "the car, that's my little freedom" and that she "get(s) to be in control". While enjoying her morning cup of coffee, Summer seemed to protect and relish even this small moment of her life domain before entering her "very consuming" work domain. This suggested the border when border-crossing from their life domain to their work domain would be described as permeable and flexible, as both gradually moved from their life to work domain.

Summer: I love always getting a cup of coffee and having it on the subway before work. It is just 15 minutes being alone with your cup of coffee. (…) I don't know if that was me just getting ready for the day and just zen'ing out and prepping myself. But I have to have!

Because the work domains for Summer and Tricia seemed to be all consuming, most days they ate at their desks, never leaving their physical work domain. At Tricia's workplace, the norm was for employees to eat at their desks, many people plugged in listening to their iPhones, which seemed to make the work setting very quiet and isolating. Tricia described how she really enjoyed taking the time to eat, even if it was at her desk. This suggested a different border from work domain to life domain, which was rigid and Tricia was not able to border-cross from work to life domain during lunch.

Tricia: I am very happy when I am eating, but yeah, I eat at my desk. We usually work while eating lunch. Most people eat at their desks for lunch. I don't know who sits in here [company's cafeteria], but it is always crowded. It must be interns or marketing. People that don't work until 9:00pm.

The evening commute from their work domain to the life domain was very different compared to the morning commute. In the mornings, the women seemed to be in good spirits and ready to start their day, the commute home seemed to be an extension of their work domain. The women appeared to have trouble letting go of their work domain. They described how it was "easier to go to work and start to work, but when you leave work it is harder to leave work at work because you are thinking of all the things you still have to do at work." As Summer explained, even when she was finally in her life domain, her work pressures pushed her back into her work domain, even while she slept. This suggested the border characteristic was impermeable and rigid when crossing the reverse direction from their work domain to their life.

Summer: Oh the end of the day! The light at the end of the tunnel. I love that! I do feel better once I get to Hoboken. I try to think about it (work) on the PATH and try to let it (work) go, but I will dream about it!

Fight stage: keeping work and life separate, but "not too far separated."

In the fight stage, there were everyday triggering events that effected Courtney's work and life domain and border management. Her domains were equal but separated by a clearly defined and rigid border. Much like the chaotic stage, these triggering events were noticed during the border-crossing between the work and life domains (a) the morning commute, (b) during lunch and/or work breaks, and (c) the evening

commute. The commute from Courtney's physical life and work domain was "door to door, 30 minutes." She "like[d] having [her] home life and work life not too far separated." Courtney rode the PATH train from Jersey City, NJ to New York, NY, which was a short six minute train ride. Leaving her home in the mornings, she seemed to casually stroll the ten-minute walk to the PATH station, stopping and sometimes getting a coffee for the train ride. As Courtney described, this part of her commute, she is in "personal mode." However, once she reached NYC and exited the PATH station at World Trade Center, she was in "work mode." This suggested that Courtney had a defined and rigid border between her work and life domains.

Courtney: I am in personal mode, because I am going down (the PATH station). I usually get out my Nook and read. When I get down into the station, I am not really worrying about work too much at that point, trying to at least. Every once in awhile I get off the train and there will be a text like "meeting got moved up to 9:15(am)!"

Different from the chaotic stage, in the fight stage, Courtney would sneak in moments of personal time, crossing momentarily into her life domain, while in her physical work domain. She seemed to really make an effort to get away from her desk during lunch. Courtney happily spoke of looking for "inspiration for the baby during lunch or as a reward after finishing a project." Again, this suggested Courtney's border-crossing into her life domain during lunch or breaks, unlike Summer and Tricia in the chaotic stage.

Courtney: In my spare time, I look for inspiration for the baby (…) It's what's really on my mind half the time at work. When I am really busy of course not, but when there is down time at lunch, I reward myself with that or finish a big project. I'm just looking at some blogs or some ideas for a little while.

At the end of Courtney's work day, she described how "it's fine once I am out of the building," which suggested that once Courtney is out of her work building in the evenings, she had border-crossed into her life domain. She consciously made an effort to "leave [her] work at work." When leaving her work domain, she was "already letting go of what has happened at work and heading home to relax." This suggested how Courtney established a rigid border between her work and life domains. In leaving Courtney's office building, she described how once she is out of her physical work domain, she was focused on her life domain, texting her husband and planning dinner.

Courtney: I just want to get my work done and get out of there!(…) Once I make it out of the building, I am usually texting [my husband], "I am leaving work, when are you leaving? What should we have for dinner?" It is fine once I am out of the building.

Calm Stage: work and life blending together as "there is not a clean line."

In the calm stage, the everyday triggering events seemed subtle. There did not appear to be a definite or clear cross between Mary and Jane's work and life domains, as they seemed to blend together, thus having a flexible, permeable border. Because of their *grand view* triggering events, this effected their every day triggering events and border-crossing. Both Mary and Jane worked for themselves, which seemed to give them more control in their every day triggering events and border-crossing. Every day triggering events were noticed throughout their day, not just during their commutes to and from work, but were observed during (a) the morning transition to work, (b) throughout the day, and (c) the evening transition.

Since Mary consulted from home, her morning transition from her life domain to her work domain seemed to be triggered once her babysitter arrived at 8:30am. Mary and her son seemed to enjoy this special time together in the morning. Once Mary's babysitter arrived, she described how she was able to psychologically border-cross from her life domain to her work domain. Although Mary psychologically border crossed, physically her work and life domain were both in her home. This suggested the border between her work and life domain was permeable and flexible.

Mary: A typical day, because I work from home there is a lot of cross over. There is not a clean line and understanding what my schedule every day is a bit different (…) [When the babysitter arrives] I have a sense of I can elevate my motherly duties and I can focus on my job. So once she is there and her presence is there, I feel less pressure on me to think about two things at the same time.

While Jane worked at her boutique, she also seemed to have control over her daily duties. Jane gushed as she talked about her boutique "I do love it!" Jane happily worked on the sales floor, greeting and interacting with the customers as if they were friends shopping. During a lull at the boutique, Jane "really enjoy(ed)" going outside and tending to her store's front flowers. Though tending to her storefront may be classified as work, Mary seemed to have great joy going outside and interacting with the neighborhood. This suggested how Jane's border between her work and life domain was also flexible and permeable.

Jane: Sometimes I am in the store and I am like what do I do? And I go check the flowers and pick the dead ones off and water them, make them look pretty, so when people walk by they see. When I am outside doing that people walk by and say "your flowers look great." It is people in the neighborhood and they notice.

As the business day came to an end, both Jane and Mary would start to think about their evening plans. Some of Jane's friends would stop in her store and ask her to dinner after the store closed. Mary would start planning what was for dinner. However, both Jane and Mary referred to checking work emails and voicemails throughout the evening. Again, this suggested the flexible and permeable border between their work and life domains.

Mary: Well I have to quit at 5:00 (pm), temporarily, to relieve my babysitter and then get him (my son) in his routine. Then, I usually, if he (my son) is playing, I might sporadically check email. Then, once he (my son) is asleep, I go back to work sometimes.

Grand view of border-crossing events and effects

From the larger perspective, grand-view border-crossing events suggested how these women moved to different phases of their lives and how border management changed over time and with different life events. Thus, balancing work and life was effected by different life events. The five women in this study all seemed to begin their career in the chaotic phase and with certain life and career events moved them to other stages. In the second theme category, grand view of border-crossing events and effects, three themes emerged (a) chaotic stage, (b) fight stage, and (c) calm stage.

Chaotic stage

All the women, at some point of their career and life, described how "work is ninety percent of my life and it should only be fifty percent," suggesting a chaotic stage of their lives. At the time of data collection, two of the women working in the apparel industry fell into the chaotic stage theme. The two women, Summer and Tricia, described their "very consuming" work domain, and "what is my life?" domain. Their duties and responsibilities in their work domain seemed to be overwhelming and they would "try to let it (work) go but (they) would dream about it." Their work domain consumed what little life domain they tried to have. They described not "know(ing) why (they) felt (they) don't need it (a personal life)."

Interestingly, contrast to the review of literature (Clark, 2000), Summer and Tricia seemed to have two characteristically different borders between their work and life domain. The first border was when the women crossed from their life to work domain. Border-crossing in this direction was gradual and easy for Summer and Tricia to enter their work domain. The border in this direction could be described as permeable and flexible. The second border was when the women crossed from work to life domain. Border-crossing in this direction was much more complicated and difficult. Summer and Tricia struggled to both physically and psychologically leave the work domain. The border in this direction could be described as impermeable and rigid.

As a result of Tricia and Summers's consuming work domain and very small life domain, they seemed to feel their work domain dictated their life domain. As Summer admitted, she felt insecure in her work domain which caused her to feel insecure in her life domain. She felt she was only living "one day at a time."

Summer: It would be nice to have that job security and not thinking "oh I am going to get laid off" or "oh are they going to have another re-org (re-organization)." No, I do not feel I have job security. Possibly because I don't have job security, I don't feel secure in my personal life. That is why I'm day to day.

In this chaotic stage, Summer and Tricia seemed to think their work domain was so consuming, they struggled to let go of their work domain during vacation. As Summer described, during her vacation week, she took her work lap top to her beach vacation. Her five employees knew Summer was checking her emails to deal with any "fire drills" and would constantly reach out to her for help. Summer described how she thought she was balancing by taking off and going on vacation, but with her work lap top. The connection to her work domain seemed to almost comfort her and allow her to relax, if she was able to check in with what was going on in her work domain.

Summer: Yeah it should be, I am at work and only thinking of work, and at home only thinking of me. And not taking work home. But I take my computer home once or twice a week and on the weekends, and when I take a vacation, I take my computer to answer emails.

Fight stage

Due to life triggering events, Courtney had moved from the chaotic stage to the fight stage. She described how in the beginning of her career, she was willingly "working late all the time" and "felt good about (her)self based on (her) job." At 30 years old, Courtney married her husband. Two years later, they bought their first home in Jersey City, New Jersey. At 33 years old, at the time of data collection, Courtney and her husband were expecting their first child. Because of these triggering events, getting married, buying a home, and expecting a child, pushed Courtney out of the chaotic stage and moved her into the fight stage.

Courtney: I think work is more work to me. Where in the beginning, work was so exciting and new and I was really excited to be there (…) Where now I want to get work done and get out of there. I think in the beginning, having the job was part of my value of who I was. I felt good about myself based on my job. Where now, I feel I have been in a good place for a while, but the job is not really defining me anymore. I have enough going on in my personal life that means more to me. I like my job, but it does not define me as much as it used

to.

In this fight stage, Courtney seemed to fight to balance her work and life domain by creating a rigid border between her domains. To help fight against her work domain interfering with her life domain, she made it difficult for herself to check emails at home. She did not let her work emails come to her personal phone. She appeared to fight bringing work home. Courtney consciously fought to keep her work and life domain separate and equal.

Courtney: I try to be good at it (balancing). I think that is partially because I am someone who leaves their work at work. But a lot of people I work with will say they will sketch at home, because they get so much more work done from home. I am not one of those people!

Calm stage

Due to career triggering events, Jane and Mary had moved from the chaotic stage to the calm stage. Unlike Courtney, Jane and Mary never found themselves in the fight stage where they kept work and life separate. Rather, they chose to re-define their careers in the U.S. apparel industry, where they felt they could have more control over their work and life domains. This led Jane and Mary to the calm stage. Jane described how she "didn't want that" life anymore, alluding to not wanting that chaotic stage of life anymore. In that chaotic stage, Jane thought about how "it had always been work consumed me" and she was "tired of that lifestyle." In feeling the need of something more in both her work and life domains, Jane moved from New York, New York to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She bought an existing retail boutique in Old City, just three blocks from her apartment. She believed "so many things led me to here and now I feel life the personal stuff will fall into place."

Jane: I didn't want to continue to build a life in New York because I was getting tired of it! (…) I saw the women being the bread winners and then having to get married and have kids and wanting to move out to the suburbs and having the commute. It wasn't going to change and I didn't want that!

Mary had less control in moving from the chaotic stage to the calm stage. After working three years for her previous employer, a popular international apparel brand, Mary was forced to resign her position. Mary recalled how her corporate environment was getting "very tense" and she "didn't enjoy what [she] was doing and where [she] was." The lost of her job forced Mary out of the chaotic stage and into the calm stage, where Mary established herself as an LLC and began consulting for new apparel businesses. She happily worked from home where she can be closer to her 2 ½-year-old son and "feel[s] a lot more in control of my life."

Mary: Before, I really didn't enjoy what I was doing and where I was. It was emotionally really tiring. Towards the end of my corporate position, I started noticing the difference between people without a family and working moms. People without families started isolating the working moms and started saying not so nice things.

Conceptual model

Over time, major theme categories and themes were interpreted in a holistic manner. This was possible through the researcher's professional experience, personal reflection, and close interaction with the participants. As a result, Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the major theme categories and themes. The work and life domains of the three stages, chaotic stage, fight stage, and calm stage are shown. The chaotic stage portrays a "very consuming" work domain, and "what is my life" life domain. The fight stage portrays a "work is just work" domain and a "personal life means more to me" life domain. The calm stage portrays a work and life blending together as "there is not a clean line." Both the grand view triggering events and everyday triggering events are displayed. As a result of these triggering events, the women's border management was revealed and a better understanding of work-life balance was gained.

Researcher's reflexivity

A "critical self-reflection" (Johnson, 1997) was a requisite and obligation for this study. As a validation strategy, understanding my own reflexivity was crucial before the commencement of this study (Johnson, 1997). I, the researcher, have a unique perspective to the struggles of balancing work and life for women working in the apparel industry. For nine years, I worked in the apparel industry in both New York, New York and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in design and product development departments for popular specialty retailers.

Personally, I allowed my career to dominate my life's decisions. I devoted all my time and energy into my work domain and the companies I worked for rewarded me with monetary gains, title promotions, international travel, and other glamorous compensations. As a consequence, I lived a very unbalanced life throughout my 20s. After my realization, an awareness to my friends' and co-workers' work-life balance occurred. Together a type of confessional dialogue began, as we started to talk openly about our fight to develop a personal life with such a demanding career. My participants are former colleagues, who I witnessed struggle daily and yearly to balance their work and life. Throughout the years, I have seen them all evolve in different ways, some sacrificing their career or personal life to sustain different jobs in the apparel industry.

CONCLUSION

To explore how today's women professionals in the U.S.

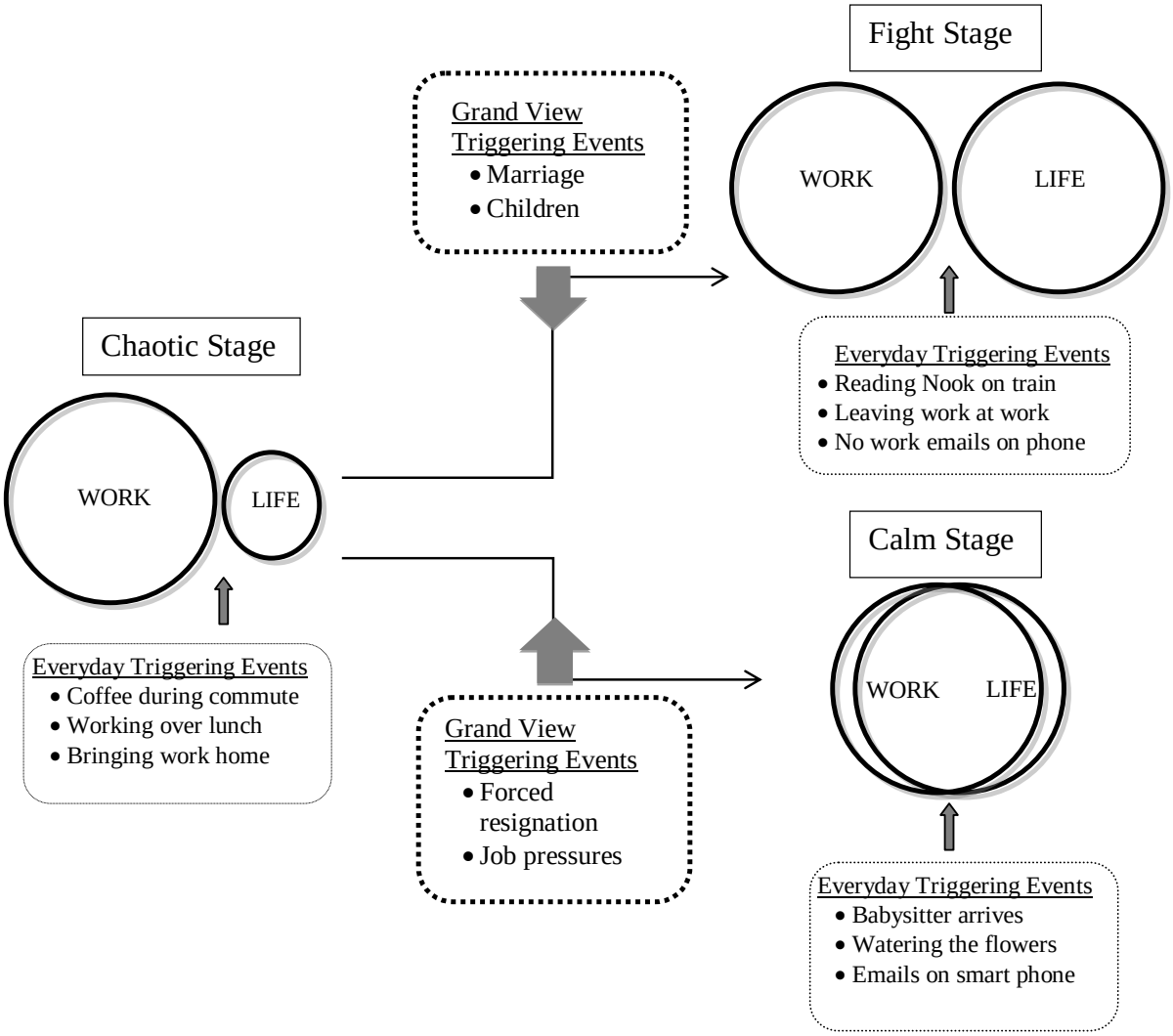

Figure 1. A pictorial representation of work and life domains and border crossing events and effects in the three stages that emerged from data analysis.

fashion industry manage their work-life border and how the border-crossing phenomenon affects their work-life balance, the study took a case study approach by triangulating interview, observation, and researchers' reflexivity data. The data analysis revealed that the participants experienced both grand-view triggering events and everyday triggering events, which effected their work-life border management. These triggering events also seemed to lead to different work-life balancing stages: (a) chaotic stage; (b) fight stage; (c) calm stage.

This study has a few contributions to the literature. First, the study findings support and expand on Clark's (2000) work family-border theory. The importance of understanding the nature of the border between work and life domains can help in discovering how people balance their domains. As in Clark's study, the nature of the border are negotiated and managed by the individual. The study participants in the fight stage and calm stage had characteristically different border natures; however, balance and ease in border-crossing seemed to be achieved in both stages. The findings from the chaotic stage were interesting contributions to the literature, as two characteristically different borders seemed to exist between the work and life domains, causing difficulties in border-crossing and unbalanced life and work borders.

From a methodology perspective, the triangulation of interview, observation, and researcher reflection was very effective in gathering enriched and in-depth data. Two of the participants in this study were observed as having difficulty opening up during the interview method. During the initial interview, participants' discussion was brief and restraint. However, during the follow-up interview, these same reserved

participants opened up and divulged personal feelings and insights regarding their life. In contrast, the other three participants frankly spoke during the initial interview. Thus, during the follow-up interviews, most topics and insights discussed in the initial interview were repeated and validated.

The study findings have implications for society, corporate human resource departments, and academia. First, this research offered opportunities for the participating women to examine their work and life domains and to highlight their struggles with work-life balance. The experience of participating in such a research project was new to the five participating women. Throughout the data collection process, they were compelled to take an introspective look at their lives. Many times during interviews or days of observation, the women would stop and realize something new the research had taught them about their lives. Motivations of how they created work ties and personal friendships, or why they felt certain insecurities were some of the immediate realizations these women experienced during the study's data collection.

Second, the findings on the participating women's struggle between work and lives may help show other working women that they are not alone in their struggle. The study's findings and conceptual model could help working women better manage their work and life. In the fight stage of balancing, the participant clearly defined her border between her work and life domains, by not bringing work home, accessing email from her phone, and focusing on work at work. With these coping mechanisms, she was able to focus and be present in both her work and life domains, assisting her in enjoying her life more than when she was in the chaotic stage. In addition, lessons may be learned from the participants who were in their calm stage. They have found an ease in balancing their work and life domains by strategically blending them together. They find relief in the merging of these domains, as they feel they have more control of their life and career. In the fight and calm stage, lessons can be applied to any working woman struggling with finding balance.

Third, corporate human resource departments may also discover the findings in this study useful. From the business perspective, women are considered a unique organizational resource. Through these resources, organizations gain and sustain competitive advantages. Thus, corporations would benefit from supporting working women to gain success. Working women are struggling to balance work and life as seen from the women in the chaotic stage. In the chaotic stage, work and life demands seem to be unsustainable for women in the apparel industry. This seems to cause many of them to either leave the apparel industry or to give up having a personal life. The study finding could help corporate human resource departments in constructing realistic expectations for women employees, such as flexible work hours and location. Corporations may need to allow for flexibility to accommodate fluctuating professional and personal priorities throughout a woman's life. Additionally, corporations could help to cultivate a work environment that is more sustainable with reasonable work expectations and more supportive role models, especially for working mothers. Human resource departments could develop and structure stronger mentorship or career development programs to ensure employee job satisfaction, which would help recruit and retain talented women employees.

Finally, the study's findings could greatly help academic departments in the fashion-related discipline. In preparing students for a future in the fashion industry, academic departments may find this study's finding useful for guidance and education purposes. Many times, recent college graduates enter the fashion industry unprepared for the overwhelming work-load demands and the effects on their personal life. Other fashion-related disciplines may incorporate the findings into coursework or career development programs to bring awareness to some of the different ways the women in this study balanced work and life.

As in other research, this study had certain limitations and, therefore, there are future research opportunities. First, this study highlighted women working in the fashion industry in New York, NY and Philadelphia, PA. Future research opportunities could validate the themes from this study with a national survey conducted to include a representative sample of women working in the fashion industry or other female dominated industries. Also, though this study purposively focused on women, future research ideas could compare women and men's work-life balance struggle. Additional balancing strategies and coping mechanisms could be learned from comparing genders.

Conflict of interest

Authors have none to declare

REFERENCES

Anderson K, Jack D (1991). Learning to listen. In Gluck, S. & Patai, D (Eds.), Women's Words. New York: Routledge pp. 11-26.

Clark S (2000). Work/Family Border Theory: A New Theory of Work/Family Balance. Human Relations 53:747-770.

Creswell J (2007). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Chosing Among Five Approaches (2nd Edition ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Dyer B, Ha-Brookshire JE (2008). Apparel Import Intermediaries' Secrets to Success: Redefining Success in a Hyper-Dynamic Environment. J. Fashion Market. Manag. 12:51-67.

Fey T (2011). Confessions of a juggler. The New Yorker, 64-67.

Guest DE (2002). Perspectives on the Study of Work-life Balance. Soc. Sci. Inform. 41:255-279.

Hall DT (1972). A Model of Coping with Role Conflict: The Role Behavior of College Educated Women. Admin. Sci. Quart. 17(4): 471-486.

Hall DT, Richter J (1988). Balancing work life and home life: What can organizations do to help? Acad. Manag. Exec. 11:471-486.

Harper D (2002). Talking Pictures: a case for photo elicitation. Visual Studies 17(1):13-26.

Johnson RB (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. Education 118:282-292.

Lobel SA (1991). Allocation of Investment in Work and Family Roles: Alternative Theories and Implications for Research. Acad. Manag. 16:507-521.

McAndrews LE, Ha-Brookshire JE (2013). A (our) nitty, gritty reality: Meanings of success described by textile and apparel women educators. Clothing Text. Res. J. 31:195-209.

McCracken G (1988). The Long Interview, Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Miles M, Huberman M (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis: an expanded sourcebook. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Parsons T, Bales RF (1955). Family, socialization, and interaction process. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Patton M (1990). Designing Qualitative Studies. In *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications. pp. 145-198.

Staines GL (1980). Spillover versus compensation: A review of literature on the relationship between work and non-work. Human Rel. 33:111-129.

Strazkins L, Broom DH (2004). Acts of love (and work): Gender imbalance in emotional work and women's psychological distress. J. Family Issues 25:356-378.

Tajfel H, Turner JC (1985). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W.G. Austin (Eds), Psychology of intergroup relations (2nd ed, pp. 7-24) Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Turner JC (1982). Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group. In H. Tajfel (Eds.), Social identity and intergroup relations Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 15-40.

Weick KE (1979). The social psychology of organizing. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.