

Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict: A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative  
Studies among Academics

**Abstract**

Quantitative research has reported variable and inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between flexible work arrangements (FWA) and work-family conflict (WFC). In this paper, we address this inconsistency through the lens of qualitative research. We synthesise the findings of 45 qualitative studies from a variety of disciplines that have explored work-family interface (WFI) among academics whose profession offers high levels of FWA by nature. Analyzing the findings of these qualitative studies, we developed six themes, of which five could be translated to moderators of the relationship between FWA and WFC. These moderator variables are boundary management preferences, time management skills and approach, career/family stage, nature of an academic job, and workplace culture. Our findings have theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for work-family and HRD scholars and practitioners motivated to improve the quality of employees’ work-life through initiation of FWA interventions.

**Keywords**

Work-family; Flexible work arrangements; Flextime; Flexplace; Academics

# Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict: A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Studies among Academics

## Introduction

“It’s a real privilege that higher education has for all of us, in general. No matter what you choose to do with your time as parents, you can work at night after the children go to bed, at the computer, or like I do on the weekends. It’s a privilege..... [But] it’s not a privilege to work the long hours that we do and to have the stress that we do, so it’s push-pull.” (Quoted in Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004: 244)

Flexible work arrangements (FWA) have gained prominence as interventions, preferred or prescribed, to alleviate work-family conflict (WFC) of employees (e.g., Kelly & Moen, 2007; Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008; Madsen, 2003; Secret & Swanberg, 2008). More and more companies are moving towards adopting one or multiple forms of FWA. The World at Work (2015) reported that almost 80% of organizations internationally offer some kind of FWA with the most prevalent programs being telework, flextime, and part-time schedules. However, the question of how FWA might reduce employees’ WFC remains unanswered (e.g., Kelly et al., 2008), which might affect employers’ decisions on continuing to provide such interventions.

We begin by defining the concept of WFC and flexible work arrangements. WFC, defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77), relies on the theoretical assumption that multiple roles generate strain and incompatibility (Goode, 1960; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). WFC can occur in two directions often referred to as work-to-family interference and family-to-work conflict interference (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Initially, the concept of FWA was used without a unified definition; overlapping terms referred to different forms of FWA such as flexible work hours and teleworking (Hill et al., 2008). More recently, FWA is used as an overarching term to encompass ‘work options that permit flexibility in terms of “where” work is

completed (often referred to as telecommuting or flexplace) and/or “when” work is completed (often referred to as flextime or scheduling flexibility)’ (Allen et al., 2013, p. 345).

Empirical research has reported variable and inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between FWA and WFC (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Five meta-analyses have reported varied magnitudes of effects ranging from medium to non-significant (Allen et al., 2013; Byron, 2005; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). Variability in the degree of connections was fueled by differences in how FWA was conceptualized (Allen & Shockly, 2009) and unexplored moderators of the relationship between reports of FWA and WFC (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006).

The meta-analyses that have examined the relationships of FWA and WFC offer limited insight into moderators of the relationship between FWA and WFC. The moderators tested in quantitative reviews primarily comprised demographic variables (i.e., gender, parental status, and marital status) (Allen et al., 2013; Byron, 2005; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Michel et al., 2011). As information about other potential moderators is often not included in the sample or FWA description of the reviewed quantitative studies, authors were limited to testing few moderation mechanisms (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2006) invited future studies to investigate other moderators of the relationship between perceptions of an FWA and reports of WFC to provide a clearer picture of the true potential of these FWA programs to assist workers who are struggling with balancing work and family lives.

In this paper, we address the inconsistent findings of meta-analyses on FWA and WFC and the call for exploring variables that moderate the relationship between FWA and WFC through the lens of qualitative research. Therefore, we generate qualitative findings comparable with the results of meta-analyses that examined the relationship between FWA

and WFC. To that aim, we adopt qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, which has been developed to equate to meta-analyses for qualitative research (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Qualitative research is common among HRD researchers; however, HRD's neighboring scholarly fields such as management and organization studies have recently started to realize the distinctive contribution that reviews of qualitative studies can make to our understanding of certain topics (see Bryman, 2004; Liao, Wayne, & Rousseau 2016). Qualitative meta-synthesis method emerged in response to an increasing use of meta-analyses and exclusion of qualitative findings from major quantitative reviews (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Zimmer, 2006). This method has been widely used and advanced by health and medical disciplines (see Walsh & Downe, 2005 for a review), but HRD scholars have yet to put the potential of this approach into practice.

We argue that findings of qualitative studies can contribute to the debate on the relationship between FWA and WFC. In line with this argument, Kossek and Lautsch (2017) identified exclusion of 'non-quantitative studies' as a major shortcoming of prior reviews concerning effects of FWA. Qualitative researchers strive to understand how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The emphasis on meaning of a phenomenon enables qualitative studies to "provide insights that are difficult to produce with quantitative research" (Gephart, 2004: 455). In addition to generating theory, producing new constructs, and inducing researchable propositions from data (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999), qualitative research can elaborate on or test relationships that have been subject to prior theorizing (Lee et al., 1999). A study of trends of theoretical contribution in management field revealed that qualitative research has contributed to theory building in part by introducing new mediators or moderators of existing relationships or processes (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007), which is aligned with what we present in the current study.

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To match the inclusion criteria of the meta-analysis studies that reported on connections between FWA and WFC, we focus on a group of qualitative studies that describe WFC among employees of one profession who could be considered as a representative example of the FWA experience, namely faculty members. Therefore, our review synthesises findings of qualitative studies that have explored WFC among academics whose work offers a high level of FWA in terms of where and when to complete work.

Despite the differences between academic job descriptions in different institutions in various countries, they include the common responsibilities of teaching, research, and service (Austin, 2003; Finkelstein, 1984). Different higher education institutions might put various levels of emphasis on each of these responsibilities, but in almost all cases, the job descriptions allow for multiple levels of FWA, especially in terms of ‘where’ and ‘when’ work is completed. Academics can fulfill part of their professional responsibilities at home or anywhere off campus (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir, 2010). For example, academics have discretion in deciding when (and where) to conduct their research, prepare for their classes, mark student assignments, and meet their students. Due to this flexibility, scholars across multiple disciplines have shown interest in how academic staff combine their personal and professional lives (e.g., academic medicine (Brown, Fluit, Lent, & Herbert, 2011); family studies (Baker, 2010); higher education (Bentley & Kyvik, 2012); and management (Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008)).

We seek to answer the following questions in this review: (i) What do we know about the WFC experiences of academics, whose profession offers a high level of FWA by nature?; and (ii) What are the theoretical implications of the reviewed studies for the association between FWA and WFC and for the HRD field? Our review uncovers five moderator variables that are specifically important in our understanding of the relationship between FWA and WFC (see Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). We rationalize our focus on a single

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3 occupation by following the argument that occupational characteristics play an important role  
4 in how workers benefit from FWA (e.g., Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999;  
5 Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2009; Kossek & Lautsch, 2017). Also, it seems that work-family  
6 scholars in different disciplines, due to their common access to academics for data collection,  
7 have generated an adequate number of articles on this population to enable a qualitative meta-  
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16 Conducting this review is significant for HRD research and scholarship because one of  
17 the main purposes of the field has been to identify factors that help develop and unleash  
18 human expertise for improved performance of employees and organizations (Morris, 2012;  
19 Swanson & Holton, 2001). Although more and more individuals and organizations grapple  
20 with issues of WFC, it appears that HRD's involvement in WFC reduction and the provision  
21 of FWA has remained modest (Kahnweiler, 2008). Initiation of flexible work options and  
22 reduction of work-family conflict can be two possible venues to achieve such goals (Madsen,  
23 2003; Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz-Costa, & MacDermid, 2007; Rogier, & Padgett, 2004). We hope  
24 that by examining the link between WFC and FWAs, this review paves the way for future  
25 HRD scholars and practitioners who want to contribute to reducing employees' WFC and  
26 improve the effectiveness of FWA.  
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### 39 **Method**

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42 We adopted a qualitative meta-synthesis approach to conduct our review (Sandelowski  
43 & Barroso, 2007). Qualitative meta-synthesis begins with "a systematic and comprehensive retrieval  
44 of all of the relevant reports of completed qualitative studies in a target domain of empirical inquiry"  
45 (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p22). This step is similar to the search process of a systematic  
46 literature review (e.g. Higgins & Green, 2008) and integrative literature review (Callahan, 2010 and  
47 2014), but solely focuses on short-listing and including qualitative studies (see Sandelowski &  
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Barroso, 2007 for the full comparison with different types of reviews). The second step in conducting a qualitative meta-synthesis involves a process of comparing and contrasting findings across qualitative studies and generating a new integrative interpretation of the phenomenon (Saini and Shlonsky. 2012).

We started with conducting a broad multidisciplinary search in the fields of education (including human resource development (HRD)), psychology, sociology, and management. The databases we used included ERIC (via EBSCO), PsychInfo, Academic Search Premier (via EBSCO), Sociological Abstracts (via CSA), and Business Search Complete (via EBSCO). The following keywords were used independently and combined to generate as many publications as possible: work-family/life combined with conflict, interface, balance, integration, enrichment, spillover, boundary, stress, relationship, and responsibility combined with faculty, professor, university teacher, academician, academia, and academic. Despite our focus on WFC, we decided to include several work-family conceptualizations, mainly due to the qualitative nature of the studies we included in the review. In other words, qualitative scholars explored the interface of work and family from multiple perspectives and did not feel a need to confine themselves to using the term WFC. The search, which was completed in April 2017, generated 375 publications. After screening the search results to make sure they report a qualitative study, include discussion of WFC, work-family imbalance or issues, and have participants selected from four-year university faculty members (not college or highschool), a total of 45 publications met all the criteria to be included in the review.

To compare and contrast findings across studies and to generate a new integrative interpretation of the phenomenon (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012), we read all the short-listed 45 papers and extracted the findings that focused on academics' WFC with regard to FWA (flexibility in terms of where and when to complete work). Then, we used thematic analysis to synthesize the qualitative findings; this method enables finding emergent themes and

categories across studies (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012). We read findings of each article line by line and coded concepts; afterwards we compared, contrasted, and translated concepts into themes across studies. Themes include common elements and content in the findings across studies. Our analysis progressed until the point of redundancy in emerging themes has been reached. A sample of the 45 papers was cross-checked for consistency of interpretation by at least two researchers. This process led to the identification of six themes, described below.

### **Synthesis of Qualitative Findings**

Our review comprises accounts of academics from a wide range of disciplines—including HRD and higher education, management, medicine, family studies, and engineering—published in 33 journals, encompassing 13 different countries. The first 11 studies in our dataset of 45 publications were published from 1991 to 2008, and had solely female research participants. It might be that the issues female academics struggled with during the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century outnumbered those of their male counterparts. However, six of the more recent studies in the dataset—published from 2012 to 2014—had male-only participants, which might demonstrate that currently both genders have issues balancing work and family. The qualitative studies were conducted in the United states (31 studies), Canada (10 studies), Australia and New Zealand (3 studies), and Finland (1 study).

Below, we present our findings associated with FWA with regards to academics' WFC. Five of the six themes we present can be translated to moderators that might affect how FWA is associated with WFC (see Figure 1).

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Insert Figure 1  
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As illustrated in the six themes discussed below, the first theme is concerned with our general focus regarding FWA and WFC. The next three themes are mainly relevant to



individual differences and how FWA and WFC might be different based on individual-level differences. The two final themes were associated with the nature of the job and organizational culture, which were typically beyond individual differences.

*Valuing FWA while Experiencing WFC.*

Regardless of their field of study, academics found it challenging to make decisions about the interface of professional and personal lives and found this process to be cyclical and dynamic (Brown et al., 2011). It seems as if the greedy nature of work and family (Takahashi et al., 2014) and the unique characteristics of the academic profession lead to this ongoing challenge. Therefore, academics needed to make trade-offs to managed the interface of the two domains; some perceived “balacne” to be a “myth” and suggested sustainability to be a more accurate term (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012).

Almost all academics valued the flexible nature of their jobs (e.g., Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wilton & Ross, 2017; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015) and were not willing to give up the autonomy and flexibility provided by the academic environment to switch to nine-to-five work hours (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010). Many respondents mentioned that they entered academia due to its flexible nature (e.g., Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Penney et al., 2015; Sallee & Pascale, 2012; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012).

Academics also believed that flexibility played a positive role in how they managed their WFC (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013; Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008; Wilton & Ross, 2017). Many studies showed that the flexible nature of the academic job was advantageous to family life and to parenting (e.g., Nikunen, 2012; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). This flexibility allowed academics to spend time with their children (e.g., Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Sallee & Pascale, 2012), to take their children to school and support their activities (e.g., Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Raiden & Räisänen, 2013), and

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3 to attend to their sick children (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013;  
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5 Sallee & Pascale, 2012; Weigt & Solomon, 2008).

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7 Despite all the above-mentioned benefits of flexible work hours, there were also  
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9 disadvantages. These included an overlap of work and hobbies (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir,  
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11 2010), feelings of working all the time (e.g., O'Meara & Campbell, 2011), and difficulty in  
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13 distinguishing between work life and family life (Penney et al., 2015; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra,  
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15 2013). In addition, although studies showed that academics put a high value on flexibility and  
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17 believed that it had helped them manage their WFC, almost all studies included in this study  
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19 confirmed that participants experienced high levels of WFC (e.g., Cherkowski & Bosetti,  
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21 2014; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005; Reddick, Rochlen,  
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23 Grasso, Reilly, & Spikes, 2012; Skachkova, 2007; Thanacoody, Bartram, Barker, & Jacobs,  
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25 2006). The conflict was reported by both genders, but it was more evident in women's and  
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27 mothers' accounts (e.g., Baker, 2010; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Santos & Cabral-Cardoso,  
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29 2008).

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32 Among the manifestations of the academics' WFC were: unusually long and late-  
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34 night work hours—including weekends and holidays (e.g., Hall, Anderson, & Willingham,  
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36 2004; Raiden & Räisänen, 2013; Solomon, 2011; Takahashi, Lourenço, Sander, & Souza,  
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38 2014); a lack of sleep (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006); the inability to disengage from work  
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40 when they wished to do so (e.g., Santos, 2014); feeling guilty about failing to fulfill both  
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42 personal and professional responsibilities (e.g., Sallee, Ward, & Wolf-Wendel, 2016); and  
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44 mental absence when at home (e.g., Reddick et al., 2012; Takahashi et al., 2014). Such  
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46 conflict could be partially attributed to the demanding nature of the academic job that will be  
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48 discussed later in the findings. In other words, academics argued that flexibility by itself did  
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50 not address all their WFC issues and they needed other types of support to help them  
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52 maintain a sustainable WFC (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010).  
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*Moderator One: Boundary Management Preferences*

Academics had different preferences for managing boundaries between their work and family, and that affected how they perceived their WFC. One group preferred to draw a sharp line between their work and family and avoided working at home or leaving work to take care of family responsibilities (e.g., Hall et al., 2004; Poronsky, Doering, Mkandawire-Valhmu, & Rice, 2012); this group is referred to as separators (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). The other group preferred permeable work-family boundaries, brought work home and tried to fit work and family together (e.g., Sallee & Hart, 2015), which has been conceptualized as integrators (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). The degree to which one prefers to separate or integrate work and family roles represents their boundary management preferences (Allen, 2012). The two work-family boundary management preferences among academics are evident in the following quotations:

“I try to avoid everything work-related when I’m at home. I try to work as efficiently as I can while I’m at work. But I have to protect that time.” (Brown et al., 2011, p. 1290)

“I like waking up early on Saturdays and Sundays, then the kids want to watch TV. So maybe I will just take my computer and sit with them for 2 or 3 hours. I get a lot of work done and they are just ... watching television.” (Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013, p. 290)

Individuals who adopted each of the two strategies had justifications that made sense with regard to their preferences or work/family stage. In some cases, findings suggested that men preferred, and successfully managed, to separate work and family lives (e.g., Damaske, Ecklund, Lincoln, & White, 2014; Reddick et al., 2012), while women, specifically those who had young children, preferred or had to cross work-family boundaries (Heijstra &

Rafnsdóttir, 2010). However, this was not true in all studies (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012), and both men and women reported adopting both strategies (e.g., Hall et al., 2004; Solomon, 2011; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013).

It is noteworthy that some individuals switched from having no boundaries to having a clear boundary or vice versa depending on their career or family stage (Brown et al., 2011). Some participants believed that the only way they could handle work and family responsibilities, especially after their children were born, was by spending fewer hours at work and working at home instead, including late-night or weekend work (O'Meara & Campbell, 2011). Others believed that working at home reduces quality time with their family and children, so they made the most of their time at work (Solomon, 2011).

Based on the narratives shared by academics, we speculate that boundary management preferences moderate the relationship between FWA and WFC. Integrators are more prone to find FWA helpful in alleviating WFC, while separators might perceive that FWA contributes to their WFC. One justification can be that FWA generate psychological perceptions of autonomy and control over when and where work can be completed (Kossek et al., 2006). A person preferring a rigid boundary between work and family domains might not enjoy the extensive autonomy associated with FWA and may perceive that the permeable boundary increases her WFC. On the other hand, for those with a low preference for separating work and family domains, FWA may solve many of the problems associated with fixed work hours, enable them to take care of family-related and work-related tasks simultaneously, and perceive reduced work-to-family and/or family-to-work conflict.

*Proposition 1: Individual boundary management preferences moderate the relation of FWA and WFC such that the higher the preference for integrating work and family, the stronger the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*

#### **Moderator Two: Time Management Skills**

FWA provided academics with discretion over managing their time. Other than the fixed time devoted to teaching and administrative meetings, other responsibilities could be performed at times preferred by the individuals. It was evident that some participants interviewed in the studies had a high level of control over managing their time (e.g., Kalet, Fletcher, Ferdman, & Bickell, 2006; Sallee & Hart, 2015), while others thought they were working all the time (e.g., Solomon, 2011). In addition, some academics asserted that they preferred to do one thing at a time—also referred to as *monochronicity* (Kaufman–Scarborough, 2003), while others felt comfortable with doing multiple tasks simultaneously—also referred to as *polychronicity* (Kaufman–Scarborough, 2003)).

Having time management skills was perceived as an important contributor to managing WFC (e.g., Kalet et al., 2006). Among the time management strategies that academics adopted were avoiding long commutes (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012), saying no to unnecessary or unwanted projects (Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013; Reddick et al., 2012), creating space (Ylijoki, 2013), limit-setting (e.g., Kalet et al., 2006), and carefully planning childbirth with regard to career stage (e.g., Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

The other aspect of this theme had to do with individuals’ responses to time demands of their jobs—whether they followed what was expected of them or decided to let go some of the benefits associated with certain activities. For instance, one participant mentioned that “there are those who distance themselves from this ideal and the image of a proper academic associated with it, perceiving these as some trap into which it is easy to fall, but which must be resisted” (Ylijoki, 2013, p. 251). In the same vein, some participants believed that their family came first in any situation, and made sure their family demands were the major factor in all their life decisions (Santos, 2015).

Informed by qualitative accounts of academics, we argue that time management skills moderate the relationship between FWA and WFC. FWA gives individuals autonomy and

freedom in using their time and deciding when to accomplish their work responsibilities. According to self-determination theory, the need for autonomy—control over the course of one's life—is an underlying motivation for individuals seeking freedom, a larger choice set, and optional functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, research based on this theory has shown that too many options often lead to choice overload that subsequently makes choices less attractive (Allen & Shockly, 2009; Clark, 2000). We believe that individuals who have multiple options for using their time might or might not make effective use of it, which affects how they experience WFC.

Effective management of WFC is increasingly becoming a self-management competency (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). Time management skills are categorized under self-management (Claessens, Van Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2007) and include setting goals and priorities, using mechanics of time management to schedule and plan activities, and having a preference for organization (Fenner & Renn, 2010). Therefore, those who are competent in using their time develop plans for making the best of the time options provided by FWA, while those less competent in time management might struggle with prioritizing and planning for such options. Success or failure in managing time might contribute most to time-based conflict, which is one of the three forms of WFC suggested by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Time-based conflict denotes that the time requirements of one role limits the time available for fulfilling the requirements of the other role. Having FWAs requires the individual to decide when to devote time to work-related or family-related tasks, and a lack of time-management competencies might make it difficult to make such decisions.

*Proposition 2: Individual time management skills moderate the relation of FWA and WFC such that the more skillful the individual in managing the time allocated to work and family demands, the stronger the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*

**Moderator Three: Career or Family Stage**

Perceptions of academics’ WFC were not the same throughout their different career or family stages. Marriage (e.g., Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Schlehofer, 2012), childbirth, and having young children (e.g., Armenti, 2004; Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010; Strong et al., 2013; Toren, 1991) were highlighted as WFC antecedents among faculty members. Some participants clearly mentioned that their WFC increased after childbirth (e.g., Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009) or parenting (Darcy et al., 2012). Family stage, especially parenting age, make a significant difference in the experience of WFC (Darcy et al., 2012). Family-to-work conflict has been found to be higher for parents with pre-school children and lower among groups with older children (Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003); WFC then declines at later family stages (Moen & Yu, 2000).

Among different career stages, promotion for early-career academics (e.g., Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004) mainly those with young children (e.g., Acker, Webber, & Smyth, 2016; Armenti, 2004) contributed most to academics’ WFC. In the early stages of their careers, individuals are more pressured to sacrifice personal/family lives in the interest of career advancement (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1995; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). As individuals grow older (in mid-career and maturity stages) they place a greater emphasis on balance between their work and family lives when assessing their careers (Cohen, 1991).

*Proposition 3: Individual’s career/family stage moderates the relation of FWA and WFC such that during career/family stages with high demands, higher positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC can be expected.*

**Moderator Four: Nature of the Job**

Findings from our analysis revealed the unique nature of academic work, creatively described as ‘silver linings and dark clouds’ by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004). On the positive side, academic staff enjoy academia, appreciate the flexibility and autonomy of their

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3 occupation, and have a sense of personal growth in their profession (e.g., Fox, Fonseca, &  
4 Bao, 2011; Weigt & Solomon, 2008). On the negative side, they seem to struggle with  
5 meeting multiple expectations, the burden of juggling teaching, research, service and  
6 mentoring, and the need to keep an eye on the clock (e.g., for tenure), as well to produce  
7 tangible results (i.e., publications). As a result, most academics extended work hours and  
8 non-standard work days, as revealed by almost all the studies we reviewed (e.g., Kachchaf,  
9 Ko, Hodari, & Ong, 2015).

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11 Academics asserted that there is no typical day in academia (e.g., Rafnsdóttir &  
12 Heijstra, 2013), no end to the academic job tasks (e.g., Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012), and  
13 “there is always a manuscript to be written, an article to be read, a funding application to  
14 work on” (Birmingham & Wasburn, 2008, p. 257). Due to ongoing grants and to publications  
15 in the pipeline, academics could not take complete advantage of their breaks (e.g., paternity  
16 leave), and many kept on working while they were on leave (e.g., Craft & Maseberg-  
17 Tomlinson, 2015; Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009).

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19 Another important aspect of the academic job involved changes brought about by  
20 information technology. In many cases, the prevalence of the internet and use of email added  
21 to academic staff workloads (e.g., Reddick et al., 2012). Academics praised wide access to  
22 the Internet and email and the possibility of working anywhere and anytime; however, these  
23 advantages sometimes made disengagement from work difficult, caused expectations of  
24 having an around-the-clock work schedule (e.g., Heijstra & Rafnsdóttir, 2010), and were  
25 perceived to accelerate the pace of work (e.g., Ylijoki, 2013).

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27 Job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) partially explains the impact of  
28 the nature of the job on how individuals experiences FWA. Research suggests that high-status  
29 workers such as managers, and professionals—who often possess high levels of autonomy  
30 over their work schedules—are less positively affected by flexible work options (Baltes et al.,  
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1999) because of the high job demands they face (Kelly & Moen, 2007). Also, professionals whose jobs’ heavy reliance on portable devices such as pagers, cell phones, and laptops, reflects an on-call work nature, experienced higher flexibility in terms of coordinating schedules and saving time, but greater stress (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Chesley, Moen, & Shore, 2003). These paradoxical occupational characteristics (autonomous but high demand, and mobile but constantly connected) increase the probability of working during personal/family time (Kosseck, 2016), which may be reflected in the individuals’ accounts of WFC.

*Proposition 5: Nature of the job moderates the relation of FWA and WFC such that individuals in jobs that allow for around-the-clock work schedules would benefit less from the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*

**Moderator Five: Family-Friendly Organizational Culture**

Several participants highlighted the key role of the organizational culture when telling their stories regarding the applications of FWA in managing their WFC. This theme was more evident in the narratives shared by women; however, the recent studies described how male academics perceived the role of organizational culture in their WFC. The most emphasized aspects of the culture were supportive structures, leaders, colleagues, and work environments in general (e.g., Baker, 2010; Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009; Lester, 2013; Sallee, 2013). Participants expected to be understood by their employers when having child care or family care responsibilities or issues (e.g., Hall et al., 2004). Academics also expected their families to understand their work pressures (e.g., Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013), but this was less frequent than their demands for employer support.

One early-career academic asserted: “I have a female dean who is a mother and was a professor while her children were at home. So she knows exactly what I’m going through right now . . . and she is very quick to protect my family.” (Hall et al., 2004: 49). Another

senior male academic said “It's not that [universities are] gender blind it's that they're family blind. The two go together of course, but I'm really quite struck and often quite shocked by how invisible family is in a work setting.” (Baker, 2010). In cases where the individuals’ work-family needs were supported by their workplaces, they expressed more satisfaction with combining their work and family spheres (e.g., Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012).

*Proposition 6: Organizational culture moderates the relation of FWA and WFC such that the more family-friendly organizational culture, the stronger the positive effects of the FWA on lowering WFC.*

### Discussion

This review contributes to the scholarship concerning the relationship between FWA and WFC by synthesizing the findings of qualitative inquiries exploring WFC among academics, whose occupational nature offers high levels of FWA regarding where and when to complete work. Analyzing these findings, we developed six themes, five of which could be moderators in the relationship between FWA and WFC. Below, we will discuss the theoretical contributions of our findings. We acknowledge that work-family scholars have already discussed many of the themes that emerged from our review. However, we clarify that our findings target the literature involving the relationship between FWA and WFC. We address the gaps reported in meta-analytic reviews that in part examined the effects of FWA on WFC, and we propose that future quantitative researchers consider the recommended moderators.

Almost all studies included in the review revealed that although academics valued the flexible nature of their job and that flexibility helped them manage their work-family demands, they still experienced high levels of WFC, which is consistent with the findings of quantitative studies confirming that faculty members’ WFC is relatively high (e.g., 3.43 on a 5-point Likert scale; Grandey & Cropanzano 1999). This demonstrates that, based on the accounts shared by academics who participated in the qualitative studies, FWA help reduce

WFC, but their effects might be contingent on some moderating variables. As recommended by statisticians, when a study seeks to determine the degree of effects between two variables, it is proper to investigate the impact of moderators (Hayes, 2013). We propose that the themes identified in this review and discussed below, represent five potential moderator variables in the FWA-WFC relationship.

From quantitative reviews, we know that demographic characteristics—e.g., gender and parental status—moderate the impact of FWA on WFC. For example, female workers, and participants with children benefit more from flexible work schedules than men or participants without children (Byron, 2005). In this review, we propose three individual-level moderators. First, boundary management preferences moderate the relationship between FWA and WFC. Specifically, given different preferences for separating or integrating work and family domains, integrators may feel less conflicted if they have highly flexible work arrangements. Second, given that FWA provide individuals with discretion in managing their time, better time management skills may increase the chance of benefiting from FWA in alleviating WFC. Third, career and family stages affect the amount of time and energy employees have to invest in career or family activities. Thus, employees parenting young children and those in early career stages are more likely to benefit from FWA to decrease their WFC.

Our findings regarding individual-level moderators (i.e., boundary management preferences, time management skills, and career/family stage) contribute to the debate about the role of individual differences in managing WFC. Work-family scholarship has paid less attention to individual differences than to employer-centered and workplace solutions for employees’ WFC (Allen, 2012). It seems that work-family scholars have avoided looking into the role of individual differences as it would look like “blaming the victim” (Allen, 2012, p. 1185). As a result, most of the recommendations for managing WFC target organizations

and governmental policies. Accounting for individual differences has been called the “missing link” in FWA discourse (Shockley & Allen, 2010, p. 131). Our findings draw attention to three individual difference variables essential to the study of the effects of FWA on individual’s experiences of work-family conflict. We invite future quantitative research to measure the degree to which individual differences regarding boundary management preference, time management skills, and family/career stage moderate the impact of FWA on employee WFC.

The individual-level moderator variables also contribute to the debate about FWA availability and its actual use (Allen et al., 2013). A person with a strong preference for integrating work and family roles or excellent time management skills may be more likely to use FWA to avoid letting work overtake family roles. Parent workers with young children may also be more likely to use and benefit from FWA.

An insufficient number of quantitative studies have included descriptions of participants’ job characteristics or the examined flexible work interventions to enable meta-analyses to test the moderation effects of variables other than individual demographic differences (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). The only non-demographic moderator examined in FWA meta-analyses has been telecommuting intensity. That study showed FWA was more beneficial to high-intensity commuters (i.e., 2.5 or more days per week working remotely) than to low-intensity commuters (i.e., less than 2.5 days) (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). In our review, we propose that the nature of the job and family-friendly organizational culture are moderators that explain effects beyond individual differences. First, the nature of the job—specifically, a job that allows for an around-the-clock work schedule—may diminish the positive effects of FWA on lowering WFC. Second, given that a family-friendly organizational culture supports workers’ work-family needs, such a culture improves the chance of alleviating WFC through FWA.

Our proposition regarding the nature of the job supports work-family scholars advocating for an occupational perspective (see Kossek & Lautsch, 2017 for a review). Proponents of this view urge work-family researchers to explore the range of work-family experiences specific to particular occupations (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). In this review, we found that the occupational characteristics of academic jobs partially account for how individuals interpret the effects of FWA on their WFC. An academic job has a relatively unique characteristic of not only being accountable to the immediate employing organization of the individual, but also the wider academic community (Baruch & Hall, 2004; Harley, Muller-Camen, & Collin, 2004). Therefore, there might be no end to the number of scholarly publications and contributions that an individual could produce (Neumann, 2009). The heavy burden of never-ending requirements to publish more might not have been viable had the nature of the job not been flexible. That the majority of participants in the qualitative studies valued the flexible nature of their jobs—and some had even selected their job because of its flexible nature— might be valuable in this respect as well. Thus, the nature of the job moderator raises the question of whether the flexible work arrangements induce excessively high levels of work (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014; Kelly & Moen, 2015). It calls attention to the possibility that in jobs with high demands, especially those with around-the-clock characteristics, where workers are able to work whenever and wherever, the effects of FWA may not reduce WFC, but may actually increase it (Thomas, 2014).

We reviewed the FWA-WFC relationship among academics where the nature of the job allows a significant amount of work to be performed at different hours, around-the-clock, and even away from the office. The nature of the job moderator can apply to occupations with similar characteristics such as an on-call medical doctor, in which sustaining boundaries between work and family spheres is difficult because individuals have little control over the placement and transcendence of family boundaries (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Other

occupations might have additional specific characteristics that modify how individuals interpret the impact of FWA on their WFC.

The broad literature on family-friendly benefits suggests that despite the availability of work-family policies including FWA in many organizations, workers who can significantly benefit from it avoid using it (Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011; Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Boonn, 2016). Using FWA is not a standard way of working in many workplaces, and many employees still believe that using FWA signals to their supervisor or manager that they are not committed to the organization (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Kelly & Moen, 2007; Rogier & Padgett, 2004). Our findings emphasize the importance of an organizational culture that supports flexible workers and their family-related issues. We suggest that future research on the relationship between FWA and WFC should examine the extent of the moderation effect of an organizational culture that supports workers' family-related responsibilities.

It is important to highlight that this review only included qualitative papers that focused specificities would have added to the depth of our findings. Our findings rely on the reported accounts of the qualitative data included in the studies, and we could not access the actual datasets due to privacy and ethical considerations. Finally, we only included the qualitative papers that studies academics and published their papers in the English language. Adding languages other than English could have enriched our findings.

### Methodological Implications

In this paper, we demonstrated that qualitative research can not only contribute to building theories (Lee et al., 1999) that can be tested and extended by quantitative research (Bansal & Corley, 2012), but also can be useful in contributing to understanding some of the inconsistencies in quantitative findings. Rather than speculating about the reasons for the

inconsistencies, we might conduct qualitative inquiries or synthesize the findings of qualitative studies that target those inconsistencies. We argue that the narratives shared by the participants of qualitative research provide researchers with thick descriptions that have the potential to work hand-in-hand with quantitative scholars' endeavors in extending theories. We demonstrated that combining the findings of qualitative studies can be more commonly used to bring qualitative research into the mainstream of inquiry, and further legitimize the use of qualitative approaches (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Synthesizing qualitative research findings using a meta-synthesis approach will create an opportunity to use the available research evidence without methodological prejudice (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Since qualitative research is common in the field of HRD, we encourage future HRD scholars to conduct qualitative meta-synthesis to make theoretical contributions to our understanding of topics dominantly studied through qualitative methods. We hope our review sets an example of the benefits of using this approach in the field of HRD.

**Practical Implications**

Our findings have practical implications for HRD practitioners who need to design, determine or evaluate the provision of flexible work options. We demonstrated that employees' boundary preferences, time management skills, family and/or career stage, nature of the job, and family-friendly organizational culture might be considered before investing in one-size-fits-all FWA initiatives. To be satisfied with the introduction of their FWA (if their outcome criterion is WFC), organizations need to consider individual differences between employees. Specifically, in the case of costly interventions, we advise HRD practitioners to consider the variables suggested in this review in their decisions about the type and length of flexible work interventions. For example, costly FWA may be offered during the high-pressure early career or early parenting stages of individual workers. In addition, HRD

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3 practitioners could usefully take account of our findings in their wider work on designing  
4 career development interventions, and in providing career support advice to individuals.

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7 HRD practitioners may take a case-by-case approach instead of a generic one-size-  
8 fits-all approach towards offering flexibility solutions to alleviate WFC. As discussed in this  
9 paper, integrators (employees who prefer to combine work and family) may welcome/use  
10 FWA more and benefit from it more than separators (employees who prefer to maintain a  
11 boundary between work and family). HRD practitioners might offer relevant workshops, for  
12 example work-home time management skills, to the integrators to facilitate the ultimate goal  
13 of FWA, which is to improve work-life balance.

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16 This review provided support that specific job and occupational characteristics can  
17 determine how much FWA can influence WFC. When designing FWA solutions for different  
18 groups of professionals, the specific characteristics of their jobs and occupations need to be  
19 taken into consideration. For example, additional components, such as productivity training  
20 (Nippert-Eng, 2008), may be needed to ensure the effectiveness of flexibility in reducing  
21 WFC. In cases of jobs that are heavily dependent on technology, FWA may be more effective  
22 if accompanied by strategies such as forced quiet hours (Perlow, 2012) that require  
23 employees to be disconnected from the digital devices for certain hours of the day.

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26 Organizational HRD units offering FWA as a work–family benefit, may find that their  
27 employees experience greater reductions in WFC through a supportive culture for family  
28 concerns. This culture could be enhanced through cultural change initiatives such as “Results  
29 Only Work Environment” to encourage the notion that increased flexibility is beneficial  
30 (Kelly & Moen, 2007, p. 496), and/or initiatives that communicate mindfulness about work–  
31 family conflicts such as “no meeting Mondays” (Kelly et al., 2008, p. 310). HRD  
32 interventions on leadership and management development can also focus on relevant  
33 supportive leadership skills, as well as on building appropriate organizational cultures.



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Note: References marked with an asterisk indicate the studies included in this review.

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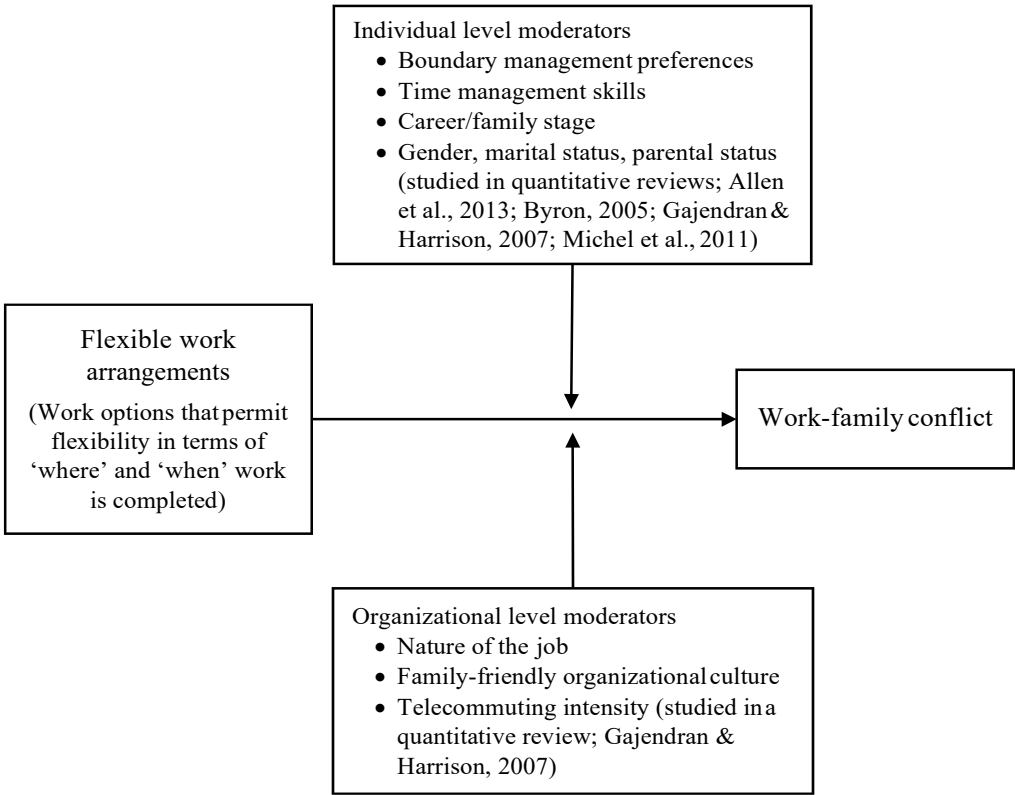
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Figure 1. Moderators of the relationship between FWA and the WFC



Thank you for considering our paper for review and publication in *HRDR*. We are very thankful for the helpful comments we received from the two reviewers and the associate editor.

We have highlighted the changes to our manuscript within the document by using colored text. Below, we have responded to the reviewers' and the associate editor's comments point-by-point.

Once again, thank you for the helpful and constructive feedback, and we look forward to hearing from you.

#	Reviewer	Comment	Response
1.	AE	1. Explain what makes "qualitative meta-synthesis methodology" (p. 4) uniquely different from a generic qualitative literature review methods such as integrative literature review or systematic literature review method. Comparing and contrasting traditional qualitative literature review methods used in HRD with yours might be useful to help readers appreciate the uniqueness of the method you used in this research.	Thank you for your helpful comment. On pages 6-7 we added a definition of the qualitative meta-synthesis approach. We also briefly compared this approach with integrative and systematic literature reviews and provided reference to sources where full comparison of qualitative meta-synthesis methodology can be found for future HRD scholars.
2.	AE	2. Clarify the data set you mentioned on page 8.  Did you classify the selected publications according to different timelines? If so, how did you do that?	The dataset on page 8 refers to the total of 45 publications that met our inclusion criteria; on page 8 we clarified this.  We didn't classify the selected articles based on a certain timeline. We have only described a pattern that emerged when examining the participants of the reviewed studies.
3.	AE	3. Reword the first theme because the current one seems to include two themes.	To address this comment we relabeled our first theme to: Valuing FWA while Experiencing WFC
4.	AE	4. You may move the last paragraph to the front of the synthesis section to make it clear.	As recommended, we moved the concluding paragraph from the end of the synthesis to page 8-9 before the first theme.
5.	AE	5. End the manuscript with Limitations does not seem to be the best idea, as a reviewer indicated. Why don't you add a conclusion section to allow for a better read?	To avoid being repetitive, instead of writing a conclusion, we moved the limitations paragraph to the end of our discussion section.
6.	AE	6. Correct your writing in APA because there are minor mistakes, particularly in the References section.	As recommended, we edited the references and corrected them to follow APA formatting.
7.	AE	7. On a technical note, there are a few minor mistakes such as (a) change Eric to ERIC; and (b) check the last citation on page 21.	As recommended we changed change Eric to ERIC. The citation on page 21 was removed to address another comment.
8.	R1	1) I have gone research in this area through	As recommended, we replaced two



#	Reviewer	Comment	Response
		the years, and we are now careful about using the word "balance" as it doesn't give the impression needed. Although you were careful not to use that too much, I would ask that you go back and carefully think about that use. It might be worth adding a line about it and putting "balance" in quotes or something the first time. It is something that is discussed in the literature. You use it a lot on p. 8.	of the "balance" terms on page 8 with "interface". We used "" for the remaining "balance" terms.
9.	R1	2) P. 4, line 29--I think "preventing" is too strong a word here.	On page 4, we replaced the phrase "effectiveness of FWA in preventing WFC" with "relationship between FWA and WFC" to eliminate the word "preventing".
10.	R1	3) WFC is such a complex thing (with many causes), so be careful inferring it is all the FWA because these same people would most like have even more WFC if they didn't have FWA. There are lots of reasons as you explain--but just read through your paper again and catch anything that might infer that it is a simple connection. Seems like there were 1-2. Page 10 ("compartmentalization" is what some of the literature call when people want to divide work and family).	We appreciate this careful observation. To avoid inferring causal or predictive associations, we replaced "effectiveness of FWA in preventing WFC" with "relationship between FWA and WFC" (Pages 1, 3, 4, 5, and 18).  To be consistent in our findings and discussion, we have used then tem "separators" which is also a common terminology in work-family literature.
11.	R1	4) p. 11, line 21--"...had to violate work-family boundaries"--word violate really is harsh here. Seems like there are assumptions here that may not be according to the literature.	We replaced the word "violate" with "cross".
12.	R1	5), p. 21--most professional jobs now days have the same struggles. It is wide spread and flexibility continues to come up with the latest studies on what millennials and women need to take care of family commitments. Nearly all positions (even sales) are not 9 to 5 jobs so most positions struggle with the same issues now.	We revised the last sentence of the first paragraph on page 21 to reflect this comment.
13.	R1	6) p. 22, line 18-29; old references with a current topic. There are just a few of those throughout. If you are inferring that it is the case today--then 10 year old references are not great on this changing topic.	We added the following recent reference to this page to address this comment.  De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017
14.	R1	7) I don't love limitations at the end, but I'll defer to the editors.	To avoid being repetitive, instead of writing a conclusion, we moved the limitations paragraph to the end of our discussion section.
15.	R2	My concern is over the FWA-WFC relationship. I have done extensive work in this area, and I believe you were liberal in	We appreciate this careful observation of reviewer 2. We addressed this comment by

#	Reviewer	Comment	Response
		<p>your treatment of FWA as a predictor. You cite Allen, et al., (2013) as the basis for effectiveness in FWA in preventing WFC. Allen's meta-analysis was correlational, not predictive. They speak of FWA reducing conflict, but not actually predicting it. Additionally, the findings were "small in magnitude" (p. 360), and indicated that the type of flexibility matters. The findings by Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2006) are similar. There is a small negative correlation between FWA and global(i.e., bi-directional) conflict, and essentially none between FWA and WFC or FWC. I recommend one of two things - frame this as a correlational, not predictive relationship or do a more thorough job in providing evidence that the predictive relationship exists. Honestly, I believe the former would be easier to achieve.</p>	<p>replacing the phrase "effectiveness of FWA in preventing WFC" with "relationship between FWA and WFC" (Pages 1, 3, 4, 5, and 18).</p>
16.	R2	<p>On page 21, you likened the nature of academic work to on-call physicians or stockbrokers. Physicians I understand, but stockbrokers? That is not a connection I believe most people would make. I would ask that you explain why they are similar, or remove it.</p>	<p>As recommended, we removed the example of stockbrokers in this section.</p>