

Meaningfulness of Work and Family in Working Parents as a Predictor of Work Family Balance,
Enrichment, and Conflict

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Abstract

There are arguably great benefits when employees experience a sense of purpose or meaningfulness in their work. The current study examined whether felt meaningfulness of work predicts one's tendency to manage work/life outcomes. Via survey methodology, 386 participants reported the sense of meaningfulness they derived from their work and from their family responsibilities. Analyses explored how individuals' relative ratings of work and family meaningfulness, as well as the similarity of these perceptions with those of their spouses/partners, affect Work Family Conflict, Balance, and Enrichment. Results showed that meaningfulness of work and family significantly affected work family outcomes. Furthermore, bigger differences within the individual with respect to his/her perceptions of work-versus-home meaningfulness predicted less balance and enrichment. Bigger differences between spouses with respect to perceptions of work meaningfulness predicted less enrichment while perceptions of family meaningfulness predicted more enrichment and less conflict. Additional detail about sub-factor dimension effects, as well as practical and theoretical implications, are provided.

Keywords:

Meaningfulness of Work; Meaningfulness of Family; Work Family Balance; Work Family Enrichment; Work Family Conflict; Partner Differences

Meaningfulness as a Predictor of Work Family Balance, Enrichment, and Conflict

One of the biggest realities in today's world of work is that employees strive to achieve a sense of balance between work demands and home demands. For dual-income families, where both partners work and care for children at home, the challenges are significant. In fact, dual-income families are a considerable majority of the United States population. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) reported that in 2016, over 60% of married couples with children reported having both partners work – a statistic that increase each year. The Pew Research Center has added that the number of dual income families with children under the age of 18 has increased by over 100% in the last forty years (Kent, 2015). Indeed, most American workers have dealt with some of the challenges of balancing work and non-work life.

The goal for employees seems to be the achievement of some semblance of balance: where neither work demands nor home demands dominates the energies of the employee. This is seen as both a personal pursuit of the individual employee and a business priority of organizations. In fact, as far back as 1999, the US Department of Labor recommended that business leaders should attend to helping employees manage the work and non-work balance in order to attract and retain their valuable talent (Bianchi, 1999). Accordingly, an increasing number of companies have started offering benefits that support the full lives of their employees, for example child care centers or subsidies, on-site laundry and dry-cleaning services, and fitness facilities and programs. Many have also enacted policies related to flexible scheduling, some form of telecommuting, and managerial acknowledgement of the legitimacy of family-related reasons for absence. On a macro-level, the question of paid family leave is receiving attention from state and federal government more than ever (Appelbaum & Milkman, 2011; BAUM,

1978). Research has also focused on the benefits of paid family leave (Allen et al., 2014; Hill, 2013, etc.)

Still, part of the answer to avoiding conflict and achieving balance may be in the individual's relationship with his/her work and family. That is, the person who is most aware and at peace with his/her professional and personal roles may be most equipped to escape undue stress and enjoy a sense of balance in life. In the current study, we explore whether the degree to which one experiences a sense of meaningfulness in his/her work, as well as a sense of meaningfulness in his/her family life, influences one's attitudes along these important work family outcomes. Recognizing that these dynamics are complex in nature, we also explore whether the individual's relative sense of meaningfulness derived from work and home, or as compared to his/her spouse's same attitudes, are influential in predicting work-family conflict, balance, and enrichment.

Work-Family Conflict

Consideration of the individual employee experience reveals that achieving a perfect balance is difficult. Much of the research in the work-life domain has focused on conflict present when managing competing priorities (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Work Family Conflict researchers have identified that there are three main sources of conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). First, time-based conflict stems from having multiple roles in one's life that compete for and steal attention from other roles. For example, how does one balance being at work, and being at a child's preschool graduation; we can't be in two places at one time and choosing between these roles can induce time-based conflict. Second, strain-based conflict occurs when the psychological energy involved in fulfilling one role compromises the ability to perform other roles. Stress in an individual's family life could carry over into the workplace and create a short-

tempered employee (or vice versa). Finally, role-based or behavior-based conflict occurs when an individual has difficulty adjusting between the expected behaviors of each role. A mother who is nurturing at home may be expected to be assertive in the workplace, but may struggle transitioning between her roles. These sources of conflict often lead to problems in the workplace including low job satisfaction, low confidence in the organization, high job-related tension, and withdrawal (Darr & Johns, 2008; Kain & Jex, 2010; King & DeLongis, 2014). These repercussions extend beyond life in the workplace, as explained by the three types of conflict (i.e. work conflict can spill into the home life resulting in similar effects). Furthermore, conflict can be qualified as either Family Interfering with Work (FIW), where the strain, time or behaviors involved in one's family responsibilities negatively impacts his/her work situation, or as Work Interfering with Family (WIF), where one's career activity negatively impacts his/her family responsibilities (Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003).

Work-Family Balance and Enrichment

In more recent treatments of the work family experience, there is an acknowledgement that these two competing domains of work and family may actually be complementary domains. Theories of work-family enrichment have illustrated a synergetic effect between roles such that high performance in one role leads to more positive affect in the role and higher performance in other roles. According to Greenhaus and Powell (2006), skills, attitudes or affect resulting from the work role serves to improve the home and family experience. For example, imagine the supervisor who becomes more empathetic or compassionate with his employees because his parenting experiences have led him to value listening and understanding others. A considerable base of research has supported that engagement in work and family contexts may be mutually beneficial in a variety of contexts and job types, and influenced by a host of variables (Annor,

2016; Sprung & Jex, 2012; Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013; Zhou & Buehler, 2016).

In line with this research, it might be that a balance in meaningfulness will lead to balance between work and family.

Still, the goal of most individual employees is to strike a comfortable balance between their priorities in the work and home contexts. Carlson, Grzywacz, and Zivnuska (2009) explain that Work Family Balance is not simply an absence of conflict or evidence of enrichment, but is its own distinct concept. Unlike conflict or enrichment, balance does not necessarily implicate the role of one domain on the other; rather, it signifies that the individual is able to meet his/her responsibilities in each domain, as negotiated along with his/her partners in each of these domains. In other words, balance occurs when an individual has achieved a level of stability between one's roles and furthermore has shared views of these roles with one's workplace and partner/family.

Meaningfulness of Work

Questions remain as to how some employees are able to achieve an appropriate balance and avoid conflict. In the current study, we examine an important element of the relationship between an employee and the work that he/she performs: namely, the degree of meaningfulness or purpose one finds in his/her work. It seems reasonable to assume that if employees are deriving some level of meaningfulness in their work then they can better withstand and cope with potential conflicts of strain, time, and role ambiguity. Likewise, they may more likely be positively disposed to experiencing other parts of their lives, or more likely to organize their lives' demands to accentuate what they consider the most meaningful. Indeed, the experience of expending time and energy is much more positive when you perceive the activity itself to be noble, gratifying, or worthy.

In fact, meaningfulness may be among the most widely accepted, but potentially underdeveloped, variables in the organizational sciences. When Hackman and Oldham posited the critical psychological states required for workers to be motivated and satisfied on the job, the first state was their perceptions of meaningfulness (affected by a job's task significance, skill variety, and task identity; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). When Kahn (1990) introduced the concept of Employee Engagement – a phenomenon that remains quite popular in the academic and practitioner agendas – one of the three psychological mechanisms connecting an individual and his/her authentic self in the job role was meaningfulness (along with availability and safety). Brown & Lent (2016) connect well-being with meaningfulness, concluding that well-being is achieved by living a good or meaningful life (along with having a sense of calling and engagement). Duffy, Autin, and Bott (2015) found that work volition mediated by person-environment fit and work meaningfulness accounted for 82% of the variance in job satisfaction when tested using structural equation modeling. These theories have suggested the importance of meaningfulness in the workplace in order to achieve engagement, well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction. While there is a strong recognition that perceived meaningfulness is a key predictor of work motivation and success, the concept has been under-developed in the literature.

Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) sought to more fully define the sources of Meaningfulness of Work and to more systematically and clearly operationalize this concept of work meaningfulness. Earlier developments measuring meaningfulness were certainly attaining the degree of perceived meaningfulness felt by individuals, but the items were not capturing *how* meaningfulness was achieved. These scales were allowing the subjective perceptions instead of measuring a consistent and operationalized degree of meaningfulness. Lips-Wiersma and Wright

(2012) set out to correct the fact that measures, to that point, were not giving way to how improvements could be made by the individual or the organization.

Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) defined meaningfulness as “the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual’s own ideals or standards.” Building from the ground up, they started by developing a qualitative foundation for meaningful work through daily diary entries in a small sample followed by group workshops, in which the goal was to identify when and what resulted in the feeling of meaningful work. This process resulted in three revelations: meaningfulness is a “natural and ongoing process,” “sources of meaningfulness are related and the relationship should be visible to create meaningful work,” and “meaningfulness and meaningless work should be communicated together” (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012: 659). Their work pointed to a balance across two dimensions: a ‘being’ versus ‘doing’ dimensions and a ‘self’ versus ‘other’ dimension. Indeed, they reasoned that in order for one to feel a sense of meaningfulness, there must be some balance among natural tensions in an environment or circumstance. The crossing of these two continua forms a conceptual framework of meaningfulness, whereby people are looking to develop a unity with others, to express their full potential, to serve others, and to develop one’s inner self. Additionally, they identified three supplemental factors that contribute to Meaningfulness of Work: reality, inspiration, and balancing these tensions of self-versus-other and being-versus-doing. In fact, similar to balancing work and life, meaningfulness requires a balance among these factors. With this strong qualitative base, Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) constructed a psychometrically sound Meaningfulness of Work scale. Ultimately, just like the working parent seeks to balance work and life, this new operational definition of meaningfulness requires the individual to balance the tensions of these continua; indeed, we are able to experience the most meaning when we can

balance an attention to being reflective versus contributing to the outside world, and an attention to serving our own goals versus those of worthy others.

Meaningfulness Related to Balance, Enrichment, and Conflict

In the current research, we investigate to what degree working parents experience meaningfulness in their work, and the effect on the levels of balance, enrichment, and conflict they experience in their work-family dynamic. The degree of felt meaningfulness relates to one's purpose in life, who we are, and how we fit into the world around us. Having an idea of how these pieces operate in our own lives and how our jobs fit into this puzzle make work and family more fluid. In other words, if we have a sense of purpose or meaningfulness in life along with an understanding of how our jobs meet this purpose or meaningfulness then we can experience overlap and facilitation of positive events in work and family. We can imagine how disconnect in felt meaningfulness/purpose would result in disconnect and a struggle to attain balance. The logic is that if someone achieves a sense of meaningfulness or purpose in his/her work, he/she has successfully found a way to balance these *self/other* and *being/doing* demands, and is more likely to balance the work/life tensions as well. This makes it more likely that he/she will successfully navigate the behavioral, strain, and time-based tensions inherent in the work/family scenario.

Furthermore, to truly understand how an individual can balance his/her parallel commitments of work and family life in this pursuit of balance and meaningfulness, it seems necessary to measure both domains similarly. In other words, people probably also differ in how much meaningfulness they derive from their home activities. Accordingly, in the current study, we applied the same measurement of meaningfulness to both the work and family contexts.

Taken together, the first hypotheses state that there are relationships between meaningfulness and work-life balance, enrichment and conflict. As individuals perceive more meaningfulness in their work and their family experiences, they are more likely to achieve work life balance and more open to achieve work family enrichment. They will be less likely to perceive significant work family conflict.

Hypothesis 1a: Both perceived Meaningfulness of Work and perceived Meaningfulness of Family will be positively associated with Work Family Balance.

Hypothesis 1b: Both perceived Meaningfulness of Work and perceived Meaningfulness of Family will be positively associated with Work Family Enrichment.

Hypothesis 1c: Both perceived Meaningfulness of Work and perceived Meaningfulness of Family will be negatively associated with Work Family Conflict.

Intra-Individual Differences

Our next hypotheses relate to the working parent's relative perceptions of work-related meaningfulness and family-related meaningfulness. We examine the distance between their reported work meaningfulness and family/home meaningfulness, and posit that when there is a large distance between these two (that is, when the individual experiences less balance in these two domains), this will create more conflict, less balance and less enrichment.

Hypothesis 2a: Intra-individual difference between one's felt Meaningfulness of Work and Meaningfulness of Family will negatively predict Work Family Balance.

Hypothesis 2b: Intra-individual difference between one's felt Meaningfulness of Work and Meaningfulness of Family will negatively predict Work Family Enrichment.

Hypothesis 2c: Intra-individual difference between one's felt Meaningfulness of Work and Meaningfulness of Family will positively predict Work Family Conflict.

Partner Differences

Finally, it has been said that while the pursuit of balancing work and family demands is significant, the key to success is being in sync with one's partner/spouse. That is, if both spouses have similar senses of meaningfulness from their jobs, then there may be less conflict and more balance and enrichment. As one example, (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014) found that in general, women report more family interference with work than men. It may be the case that if women report more family conflict with work than men, there may be differing levels of meaningfulness between men and women. Women's role in the workplace has had a consistent increase in presence and responsibility since World War II, and with this comes a shift in how women perceive the workplace and the home. With the ongoing transition and the debatable paid leave organizations allot, many women may struggle to find a sense of balanced meaningfulness. This struggle would not happen independent of one's partner. The implications of this disconnect are not well-studied in the literature; however, one study in paramedics found that stress from work was associated with withdrawal from their spouse and marital tension (King & Delongis, 2014). This study shows the importance of considering both partners' work stress in marital satisfaction; which is closely related to Work Family Balance. In this third set of hypotheses, we further examine the relationships between meaningfulness and work family outcomes by testing whether inter-partner similarity/difference in perceptions of meaningfulness affect balance, enrichment, and conflict.

Hypothesis 3a: Differences between partners' relative ratings of Meaningfulness of Work will negatively predict Work Family Balance.

Hypothesis 3b: Differences between partners' relative ratings of Meaningfulness of Work will negatively predict Work Family Enrichment.

Hypothesis 3c: Differences between partners' relative ratings of Meaningfulness of Work will positively predict Work Family Conflict.

Hypothesis 3d: Differences between partners' ratings of Meaningfulness of Family will negatively predict Work Family Balance.

Hypothesis 3e: Differences between partners' ratings of Meaningfulness of Family will negatively predict Work Family Enrichment.

Hypothesis 3f: Differences between partners' ratings of Meaningfulness of Family will positively predict Work Family Conflict.

Methods

Participants

To qualify for the study, individuals must have been in a dual-income family, with both partners working at least part time and having at least one child under the age of 18. Participants who met this description were recruited in one of two ways. First, researchers utilized a snowball sampling approach by contacting close friends, family, and local institutions that had access to such individuals (e.g., day care centers); accordingly, anyone who was contacted was encouraged to share the survey with his/her spouse/partner and to refer additional people who met the qualifying criteria. Participants were also recruited through Qualtrics' Panel Services. The vendor identified couples who met selection criteria and managed their timely completion of the survey. In exchange for participation, Panel Service respondents were compensated for their time and effort (\$7.50 per couple).

Data were collected from 386 individuals. This sample includes 155 couples plus an additional 76 individuals whose spouse or partner did not complete the survey. For Hypotheses 1 and 2, which do not require a partner for eligibility, all 386 responses were submitted for

analyses. For Hypothesis 3, only the 310 respondents with spouse data were used. Within the sample, 44% were men. The average participant age was between 30-39 years, and ranged from under 20 to 60 or older. Most (83%) participants were White, 7% were African American, 6% were Asian, 2% were multiple races, and 1% were American Indian. Nearly all (95%) participants reported being married, 4% were in domestic partnerships, and the remaining were single and living with their partner. In terms of employment, 86% reported working full time. The average number of children per couple was two (ranging from one to five children), with children's ages ranging from three months to 17 years. Participants' occupations were highly varied, with roles including office and administrative, education, healthcare, computer and mathematical, management, sales and related occupations, etc. Most participants (24%) reported a household income between \$75,000 and \$100,000, 18% earned less than \$50,000 in their household, 19% earned between \$100,000 and \$125,000, 10% earned between \$125,000 and \$150,000, 4% earned between \$150,000-\$175,000, 7% earned between \$175,000-\$200,000, and 13% earned more than \$200,000. Most participants (33%) reported having a bachelor's degree, 4% had less than a high school degree, 16% had a high school degree, 13% had some college without a degree, 22% had an associate's degree, and 13% have a graduate degree.

Procedure

In the snowball sampling recruitment method, individuals were sent a message via e-mail inviting them to participate in the study. The text of the e-mail message detailed the general purpose of the survey, estimated time of completion, a link where individuals could access additional information, the informed consent statement, and a link to continue to the survey itself. These participants were asked to invite their spouse/partner to complete the survey (a

unique code was used to match spouses), and were encouraged to share the survey with other people who fit the qualifying criteria.

With the Qualtrics Panel population, the research team shared the online survey and all qualifying criteria with the vendor's project manager, who sourced participants from their participant pool. They specifically recruited couples, where each partner completed his/her half of the survey in turn.

Participants from each sampling method were instructed to complete the survey without their spouse/partner in the room in order to increase honest responses from each individual partner. All participants completed the survey online and were thanked for their participation.

Materials

Meaningfulness of Work. As discussed above, Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) identified seven important dimensions for meaningful work: developing the inner self, unity with others, service to others, and expressing full potential, reality, inspiration, and achieving balance among tensions. These four dimensions are measured by 28 items. Cronbach's alpha for the overall instrument is .94. The first dimension, *Developing Inner Self*, is dependent upon an individual's unique perspective on the world and is defined as wanting to be a good person, or becoming the best an individual can be. Examples of the three items from this dimension include "At work we face up to reality," "I feel inspired at work," and "In this work I have the time and space to think." This subscale Cronbach's alpha was .82. The second dimension, *Unity with Others*, refers to the Meaningfulness of Working together with other individuals through a common bond of shared values and belonging. A sample item is, "We openly talk about our values when we make a decision." There are six items in this dimension, and the Cronbach's alphas was found to be .92. The third dimension, *Expressing Full Potential*, is focused on

expressing talents, creativity and having a sense of achievement. It is different from developing the inner self in that it is active and outward directed, whereas the former is inward and reflective. An example item is “I create and apply new ideas or concepts”. There are four items in this dimension, and the Cronbach’s alpha was .86. The final major dimension is *Serving Others*, which describes meaningfulness derived from making a contribution to the wellbeing of others on both an individual level and, on a larger level, the world. There are four items in this dimension, and one sample item is “I feel I truly help our customers/clients”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .85. Of the three additional dimensions, *Inspiration* describes the drive and creativity of an individual to achieve goals and balance and is measured by four items. An example item is, “The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future.” The Cronbach’s alpha for *Inspiration* was .87. On the other hand, *Reality* describes the practical perceptions that one feels and maintains in pursuit of these goals and balance. Of the three items, an example is “We recognize that life is messy and that is OK.” The Cronbach’s alpha for *Reality* was .74. Finally, *Balancing Tensions* wraps this balance continuum by describing the conflicts an individual faces in being and doing. Four items make up this scale, and an example is “I have a good balance between the needs of others and my own needs.” The Cronbach’s alpha for *Balancing Tensions* was .86.

Meaningfulness of Family. To examine participants’ perceived meaningfulness of home life in a way that is parallel to his/her perceived meaningfulness at work, the researchers adapted the 28-item Meaningfulness of Work scale to relate to home life. For example, *Meaningfulness of Work* item “The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future” was rewritten as “Regarding my family/personal life, how we live makes me feel hopeful about the future.” The Cronbach Alpha for this scale was .94. Cronbach’s Alphas for the various facets are as follows:

Developing Inner Self Cronbach's alpha .88, *Unity with Others* Cronbach's alpha .94, *Expressing Full Potential* Cronbach's alpha .87, *Serving Others* Cronbach's alpha .83, *Inspiration* Cronbach's alpha .88, *Reality* Cronbach's alpha .76, and *Balancing Tensions* Cronbach's alpha .89.

Work Family Balance was measured with a 6-item scale developed by Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska (2009). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements on a 5-point Likert-style agreement scale. Sample items include, "I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family" and "My co-workers and members of my family would say that I am meeting their expectations." Cronbach's alpha was found to be .90.

Work Family Enrichment. was measured with an 18-item scale developed by (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006). Whereas the Work-Family Conflict scale is based on the interference of one domain on the success of the other, this Work Family Enrichment scale is based on the facilitation of one domain from the other domain. Similar to the Work-Family Conflict scale, the Work Family Enrichment scale includes two subscales: Work-to-Family Enrichment and Family-to-Work Enrichment. Example items include "My involvement in my work helps me acquire skills, and this helps me be a better family member" (measuring work to family enrichment) and "My involvement in my family puts me in a good mood, and this helps me be a better worker" (measuring family to work enrichment). Cronbach's alpha was found to be .95.

Work Family Conflict. Levels of Work Family Conflict were assessed using an 18 item 7-point agreement scale instrument developed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000). The scale consists of two, nine-item subscales that measure Family Interfering with Work (e.g. "Due

to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work”) and Work Interfering with Family (e.g. “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like”).

Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .96.

Results

The means and standard deviations for the main variables of interest (Meaningfulness of Work, Meaningfulness of Family, Work Family Balance, Work Family Enrichment, and Work Family Conflict) by gender and race/ethnicity are shown in Table 1. An analysis of variance revealed that there were no significant differences between gender excluding average perceived Work Family Enrichment, and no significant differences based on race/ethnicity. The mean and standard deviation for the variables of interest are listed in Table 2, along with a correlation matrix. Each hypothesis discussed above was tested with simple regression.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis One explores the relationship of perceived Meaningfulness of Work (MoW) and Meaningfulness of Family (MoF) with the Work Life Outcomes (balance, enrichment, and conflict). Table 3 shows the coefficients and the effect size for each predictor and the corresponding dependent variable. It should be noted that separate analyses were conducted for the aggregate variables and for their seven facets. In regard to Work Family Balance (WFB), MoW was a significant predictor as well as the facets of *Serving Others*, *Developing and Becoming Self*, and *Balancing Tensions*. Meaningfulness of Family was also a significant predictor, as were its facets of *Expressing Full Potential* and *Developing and Becoming Self*. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1a. Table 3 also shows support for Hypothesis 1b as the averaged MoW variable was significant in predicting Work Family Enrichment along with the facets *Inspiration* and *Balancing Tensions*. Similarly, the averaged MoF variable was a

significant predictor as well as the *Expressing Full Potential* and *Developing and Becoming Self* facets. Hypothesis 1b was also supported with the *Inspiration* and *Balancing Tensions* facets of MoW being significant predictors of enrichment. *Inspiration* in MoF was also significant in predicting enrichment along with *Expressing Full Potential*. Finally, Hypothesis 1c revealed significant MoW predictors including the *Serving Others* and *Developing and Becoming Self* facets and significant MoF predictors including the *Expressing Full Potential* and *Developing and Becoming Self*.

Hypothesis 2

Table 4 shows evidence for Hypotheses 2a and 2b. The difference between individuals' MoW and MoF significantly and negatively predicted Work-Life Balance and Work-Life Enrichment. At the facet level, differences between *Serving Others* and *Expressing Full Potential* were significant in predicting both balance and enrichment while *Developing and Becoming Self* was significant only for balance and *Expressing Full Potential* was significant only for enrichment. Hypothesis 2c was not supported as the difference between an individual's overall MoW and MoF was non-significant in predicting conflict.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis was partially supported, as shown in Table 5. Neither partner differences in MoW nor partner differences in MoF were significant predictors of Work-Family Balance, resulting in no support for Hypothesis 3a. Interestingly, support was found for Hypothesis 3b; differences in partners' perceived MoW and differences in partners' perceived MoF were both significant predictors of Work-Family Enrichment. In terms of facet differences, *Unity with Others* was significant for MoW while *Expressing Full Potential* was significant for MoF. Partial support was found for Hypothesis 3c, as partner differences on average felt MoF

was found to be a significant predictor of Work-Family Conflict, but partner differences on average felt MoW was non-significant in predicting Work-Family Conflict. Only the partner differences in *Unity with Others* was significant at the MoF facet level.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship of meaningfulness and various work-family outcomes including balance, enrichment, and conflict. Meaningfulness was researched in terms of Meaningfulness of Work (following Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012) and Meaningfulness of Family (developed in a parallel fashion to MoW). The researchers took a deeper dive to examine which facets of meaningfulness were driving the Work-Family outcomes. Furthermore, differences in an individual's perceived MoW and MoF were analyzed in relation to Work-Family outcomes. Finally, partner differences in MoW and MoF were tested in relation to Work-Family outcomes. The goal of this research study was to provide insight on increasing Work-Family Balance and Enrichment while decreasing Work-Family Conflict. Additionally, this study further provided support for the Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) Meaningfulness of Work scale while introducing a parallel Meaningfulness of Family scale.

Findings

Results from the present study provide support that higher levels of MoW and MoF lead to greater Work-Family Balance and Enrichment and lower Work-Family Conflict. In the development of meaningfulness, Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) describe MoW as an ongoing search for meaningfulness as opposed to a construct that is achieved or not achieved. In this way, our findings are well aligned as neither Work-Family Balance nor Enrichment are simply achieved or not achieved but instead are a continuous development. In terms of both work and family, the facet *Developing and Becoming Self* was significant in predicting Work-Family

Balance. This finding suggests that the pursuit of becoming the best versions of ourselves is positively related to a higher feeling of balance between work and family. Future exploration may find that moderating variables such as self-efficacy or goal orientation may strengthen this finding. Somewhat encouraging is the finding that *Inspiration* was significant for both MoW and MoF in achieving Work-Family Enrichment. As an adult with some of the highest responsibilities (i.e. raising children), reality often overshadows the optimistic dreams. This finding provides evidence for maintaining a healthy focus on feelings of inspiration. Finally, as predicted, raw feelings of MoW and MoF are negatively associated with Work-Family Conflict. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Developing and Becoming Self* is significant in terms of both MoW and MoF. Although balance and conflict may not be polar opposites, it is intuitive that if the pursuit of being your best is significant on one outcome it would be significant in the opposite direction on the other.

The results of this study show the benefit of having a more balanced view of the meaningfulness derived from the work and family domains (in other words, smaller intra-individual differences between one's MoW and MoF). Having larger differences in raw feelings of MoW and MoF are associated with lower feelings of Work-Family Balance and lower feelings of Work-Family Enrichment. In terms of significant facets, differences in *Serving Others*, *Expressing Full Potential*, and *Developing and Becoming Self* are negatively associated with Work-Life Balance. This suggests that individuals with a high sense of balance have similar feelings in these facets between work and family. In other words, individuals are unlikely to feel a sense of balance between work and family if, at the same time, they feel a greater degree of service to others in the workplace versus at home. Achieving Work-Family Enrichment is less likely when an individual feels a disconnect between work and family when it comes to

balancing feelings with others. *Unity with Others* and *Serving Others* were negatively associated with enrichment. An individual focused more on belonging and contributing to one aspect of his/her life over another will be less likely to experience enrichment. For example, an individual focused more on building work relationships than family relationships is unlikely to experience a mutual benefit between work and family. Surprisingly, differences in an individual's felt MoW and MoF were found not to be significantly related to Work-Family Conflict. This is unexpected because these differences were significantly associated with balance, which can be argued as the absence of conflict. Future research should look into this relationship to understand why differences are associated with balance but not conflict.

Lastly, this study revealed important findings regarding the effects of partner differences in perceptions of work and home/life meaningfulness. It was hypothesized that there would be benefits to partners' being aligned in their senses of meaningfulness derived from work and from home. Surprisingly, results did not support these predictions in the case of the Work Family Balance outcome. Work-life Enrichment also revealed surprising results. Partner differences in MoW was negatively associated with enrichment as hypothesized (the more that spouses disagree in how meaningful their work is, the less opportunity there is for either to sense that one domain enriches the other), while partner differences in MoF was positively associated with enrichment. When there is a bigger gap between partners in their reported meaningfulness of family, then there is more of a chance for those partners to experience cross-domain enrichment. Yet, at the facet level, partners with more similar levels of MoF, specifically in *Expressing Full Potential*, tend to experience more enrichment. We would expect this, as an individual that outwardly experiences more meaningfulness in family than their partner may become consumed in this difference and struggle to allow the benefits from family to spill over to work. This is

especially magnified due to the underlying facet that drives the relationship, namely expressing and showing effort. This also provides evidence to the last finding that greater differences in partners' feelings of MoF is related to greater Work-Family Conflict. The facet driving this relationship is partner differences in *Unity with Others*. When partners disagree with each other on how much unity they feel with others in that domain (namely, each other), this translates into greater work family conflict.

Implications

Theoretical. The current study examined the phenomenon of meaningfulness, as well as the component facets under the Lips-Wierma model. Our findings showed that only a couple of the facets significantly contributed to life outcomes. This begs the question of how these facets are tied to other outcomes such as engagement, commitment, and performance. Finding a balance in meaningfulness requires a balance of each facet, however, it may be that certain facets are more important than others when developing a sense of engagement or performing well in a job. The present study provides a starting point in an investigation to direct linkages between facets of meaningfulness and various outcomes. In terms of meaningfulness as a whole, this study provides a baseline linkage between meaningfulness and the well-studied life outcomes of conflict, balance, and enrichment.

A significant contribution of the current research was the application of an organizationally relevant instrument to the home/life domain. Certainly, meaningfulness is a relevant psychological variable in the home domain just as it is in the work domain. Measuring both contexts in parallel fashion seems important when describing, understanding, and diagnosing work family issues and successes. We recommend that future research continue to explore both domains with similar degrees of attention.

Practical. Organizations have the power to help employees grasp and maintain a sense of meaningfulness at work. At the high level, simply taking steps to assure employees feel included and that their contributions help not only the organization but the greater good could help individuals develop and maintain a high level of meaningfulness. Management training should include instruction and reinforcement on how managers can reveal the purpose and importance of their staff members' tasks.

The results also provide evidence that organizations should invest in assisting employees' ability to experience a maximum level of meaningfulness at home. Because research has shown association between Work-Family Conflict and employee outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction and increased withdrawal, and because higher Meaningfulness of Family is tied to lower Work-Family Conflict, leaders at organizations have a vested interest in aiding individuals as they navigate the interface between their work and family domains. Perhaps by introducing the importance of seeking meaningfulness and purpose in one's work, and then encouraging employees to apply this pursuit to their non-work lives, organizations can help increase Work-Family Balance and Enrichment and decrease Work-Family Conflict. The bottom line results in more enthusiastic employees, which has been linked to bigger organization profits (Sirota & Klein, 2014).

Limitations and Future Directions

No study is immune to limitations, and this one is no different. Because the study employed a survey, the self-report nature of the data and the potential for social desirability bias affecting the responses should be noted. In addition, our interest in including instruments to measure key psychological variables in both the home and work domains increased the length of the survey, which may have increased survey fatigue or decreased participant attention. The

researchers took precaution with these foreseen limitations by using quality check points in the survey and removing individuals with short survey duration times (operationalized as one standard deviation below the mean response time). Unfortunately, apart from telling partners at the beginning of the survey and prompting them in the middle, there was no way to assure the partners did not take the survey together. This could result in some error in the results due to partners responding more positive than their true feelings or aiming to “match” (or even offset) their partner’s responses. This type of limitation is difficult to counteract, and therefore is something to be kept in mind when interpreting the results. Additionally, although there is a general lack of race/ethnic diversity in the sample, there were no significant mean differences for any of the main variables of interest.

Future studies should look into the direction of differences at the individual and partner level. Past research has found differences in direction of conflict, specifically women experiencing more family interfering with work (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014). It might be possible that greater effects of difference in perceived meaningfulness are found when direction is factored into the equation. Additionally, future research should look into how partners themselves interpret differences of meaningfulness in relation to the life outcomes of balance, enrichment, and conflict. If partners are unaware of the difference in meaningfulness they each feel, there is likely to be less balance and enrichment and more conflict. Finally, there are other potential moderators that would add insight to our findings. For example, the degree to which individuals or households value hard work, family and children, gender roles and equality would likely reveal interesting dynamics to these work family questions.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for MoW, MoF, WFB, WFE, and WFC

	MoW Mean (S.D.)	MoF Mean (S.D.)	WFB Mean (S.D.)	WFE Mean (S.D.)	WFC Mean (S.D.)
<i>Sex</i>					
Male (n=170)	3.79 (0.68)	4.18 (0.62)	4.15 (0.62)	3.78 (0.74)	2.79 (0.88)
Female (n=216)	3.91 (0.65)	4.19 (0.61)	4.17 (0.62)	3.97 (0.60)	2.63 (0.94)
<i>Race</i>					
White (n = 315)	3.89 (0.66)	4.20 (0.62)	4.18 (0.64)	3.89 (0.69)	2.68 (0.93)
African-American (n = 27)	3.81 (0.77)	3.93 (0.73)	4.07 (0.58)	3.92(0.66)	2.97 (0.91)
Asian (n = 2)	3.41 (0.13)	3.55 (0.30)	3.25 (0.35)	3.36 (0.35)	3.00 (0.63)
Two or More Races (n = 24)	3.54 (0.55)	4.16 (0.50)	4.10 (0.53)	3.85 (0.42)	2.84 (0.97)
American Indian (n = 8)	3.59 (0.99)	4.46 (0.34)	4.07 (0.38)	3.55 (0.64)	2.33 (0.51)
Not Reported (n = 4)	4.15 (0.48)	4.61 (0.23)	4.17 (0.62)	4.26 (0.25)	2.44 (0.73)

MoW = Meaningfulness of Work, MoF = Meaningfulness of Family, WFB = Work Family Balance, WFE = Work Family Insurance, WFC = Work Family Conflict.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for Variables of Interest

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
1. MoW	3.86	0.67					
2. MoF	4.19	0.61	.38**				
3. WFB	4.16	0.62	.42**	.53**			
4. WFE	3.88	0.67	.63**	.48**	.62**		
5. WFC	2.70	0.92	-.19**	-.33**	-.25**	-.07	

Note. N = 386. MoW = Meaningfulness of Work, MoF = Meaningfulness of Family, WFB = Work Family Balance, WFE = Work Family Insurance, WFC = Work Family Conflict. * p < .05. ** p < .01

Table 3
Regression Coefficients and effect sizes for Hypothesis 1

DV	Variable	β (S.E.)	t	R ²
WFB	MoW	0.39 (0.04)	8.98**	0.17
	MoW Unity with Others	-.02 (0.05)	-0.28	
	MoW Serving Others	0.15 (0.05)	2.52*	
	MoW Expressing Full Potential	0.06 (0.06)	0.93	
	MoW Developing and Becoming Self	0.08 (0.03)	3.19**	0.18
	MoW Reality	-0.06 (0.04)	-1.34	
	MoW Inspiration	0.02 (0.05)	0.41	
	MoW Balancing Tensions	0.17 (0.05)	3.65**	
	MoF	0.53 (0.04)	12.09**	0.28
	MoF Unity with Others	0.05 (0.06)	0.74	
MoF Serving Others	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.59		
MoF Expressing Full Potential	0.30 (0.06)	5.11**		
MoF Developing and Becoming Self	0.05 (0.02)	2.52*	0.29	
MoF Reality	0.03 (0.05)	0.69		
MoF Inspiration	0.07 (0.06)	1.12		
MoF Balancing Tensions	0.06 (0.04)	1.59		
WFE	MoW	0.64 (0.04)	15.71**	0.39
	MoW Unity with Others	0.05 (0.05)	1.07	
	MoW Serving Others	0.04 (0.05)	0.67	
	MoW Expressing Full Potential	0.08 (0.06)	1.46	
	MoW Developing and Becoming Self	0.04 (0.02)	1.55	0.42
	MoW Reality	-.03 (0.04)	-0.68	
	MoW Inspiration	0.24 (0.05)	4.85**	
	MoW Balancing Tensions	0.15 (0.04)	3.43**	
	MoF	0.52 (0.05)	10.55**	0.23
	MoF Unity with Others	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.43	
MoF Serving Others	0.10 (0.08)	1.2		
MoF Expressing Full Potential	0.18 (0.07)	2.71**		
MoF Developing and Becoming Self	-0.03 (0.02)	-1.32	0.28	
MoF Reality	-0.001 (0.05)	-0.02		
MoF Inspiration	0.22 (0.07)	3.33**		
MoF Balancing Tensions	0.05 (0.05)	1.02		

Table 3 Continued

	MoW	-0.26 (0.07)	-3.80**	0.03
	MoW Unity with Others	0.11 (0.08)	1.42	
	MoW Serving Others	-0.19 (0.08)	-2.22*	
	MoW Expressing Full Potential	0.03 (0.09)	0.31	
	MoW Developing and Becoming Self	-0.41 (0.04)	-10.97**	0.27
	MoW Reality	0.02 (0.06)	0.26	
	MoW Inspiration	0.06 (0.08)	0.78	
	MoW Balancing Tensions	-0.10 (0.07)	-1.48	
WFC	MoF	-0.49 (0.07)	-6.80**	0.11
	MoF Unity with Others	-0.13 (0.10)	-1.27	
	MoF Serving Others	0.07 (0.12)	0.62	
	MoF Expressing Full Potential	-0.22 (0.09)	-2.44*	
	MoF Developing and Becoming Self	-0.29 (0.03)	-8.41**	0.23
	MoF Reality	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.36	
	MoF Inspiration	0.08 (0.09)	0.85	
	MoF Balancing Tensions	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.40	

Note. $N = 386$. MoW = Meaningfulness of Work, MoF = Meaningfulness of Family, WFB = Work Family Balance, WFE = Work Family Insurance, WFC = Work Family Conflict.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Bold variables indicate significance at an alpha below .05.

Table 4
Regression Coefficients and effect sizes for Hypothesis 2

DV	Variable	Coefficient (error)	t	R ²
WFB	Overall MoW-MoF Difference	-0.20 (0.06)	-3.60**	0.03
	Unity with Others Difference	-0.08 (0.05)	-1.45	
	Serving Others Difference	-0.20 (0.07)	-3.04**	
	Expressing Full Potential Difference	-0.14 (0.06)	-2.24*	
	Developing and Becoming Self Difference	-0.09 (0.03)	2.78**	0.09
	Reality Difference	0.02 (0.05)	0.31	
	Inspiration Difference	0.06 (0.05)	1.1	
	Balancing Tensions Difference	0.04 (0.05)	0.84	
WFE	Overall MoW-MoF Difference	-0.49 (0.06)	-8.83**	0.17
	Unity with Others Difference	-.22 (.05)	-4.05**	
	Serving Others Difference	-.19 (0.07)	-2.83**	
	Expressing Full Potential Difference	-0.15 (0.06)	-2.41*	
	Developing and Becoming Self Difference	-.04 (0.03)	-1.34	0.25
	Reality Difference	0.00 (.05)	0	
	Inspiration Difference	-0.08 (0.05)	-1.55	
	Balancing Tensions Difference	0.03 (0.05)	0.54	
WFC	Overall MoW-MoF Difference	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.21	0.00
	Unity with Others Difference	0.01 (0.09)	0.1	
	Serving Others Difference	-0.02 (0.10)	-0.24	
	Expressing Full Potential Difference	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.39	
	Developing and Becoming Self Difference	0.14 (0.05)	2.72**	0.01
	Reality Difference	0.07 (0.08)	0.83	
	Inspiration Difference	-0.08 (0.08)	-0.96	
	Balancing Tensions Difference	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.27	

Note. $N = 386$. MoW = Meaningfulness of Work, MoF = Meaningfulness of Family, WFB = Work Family Balance, WFE = Work Family Insurance, WFC = Work Family Conflict. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Bold variables indicate significance at an alpha below .05.

Table 5
Regression Coefficients and effect sizes for Hypothesis 3

DV	Variable	Coefficient (error)	t	R ²
WFB	MoW Partner Difference	-0.10 (0.06)	-1.58	0.00
	MoW Unity with Others Partner Difference	-0.18 (0.06)	-2.82**	
	MoW Serving Others Partner Difference	0.04 (0.06)	0.57	
	MoW Expressing Full Potential Partner Difference	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.12	
	MoW Developing and Becoming Self Partner Difference	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.69	0.02
	MoW Reality Partner Difference	0.11 (0.06)	1.95	
	MoW Inspiration Partner Difference	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.32	
	MoW Balancing Tensions Partner Difference	-.03 (0.07)	-0.36	
	MoF Partner Difference	0.04 (0.04)	1.05	0.00
	MoF Unity with Others Partner Difference	-0.18 (0.09)	-2.10*	
	MoF Serving Others Partner Difference	0.04 (0.09)	0.41	
	MoF Expressing Full Potential Partner Difference	-0.21 (0.08)	-2.46*	
	MoF Developing and Becoming Self Partner Difference	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.21	0.06
MoF Reality Partner Difference	0.01 (0.07)	0.21		
MoF Inspiration Partner Difference	-0.07 (0.08)	-0.8		
	MoF Balancing Tensions Partner Difference	0.15 (0.07)	2.14*	
WFE	MoW Partner Difference	-0.24 (0.07)	-3.58**	0.04
	MoW Unity with Others Partner Difference	-0.28 (0.07)	-4.20**	
	MoW Serving Others Partner Difference	0.02 (0.07)	0.33	
	MoW Expressing Full Potential Partner Difference	0.04 (0.08)	0.51	
	MoW Developing and Becoming Self Partner Difference	0.02 (0.05)	0.34	0.08
	MoW Reality Partner Difference	0.11 (0.06)	1.75	
	MoW Inspiration Partner Difference	-0.12 (0.06)	-1.88	
	MoW Balancing Tensions Partner Difference	-0.12 (0.07)	0.25	
	MoF Partner Difference	0.13 (0.05)	2.83**	0.02
	MoF Unity with Others Partner Difference	-0.03 (0.09)	-0.29	
	MoF Serving Others Partner Difference	-0.15 (0.10)	-1.45	
	MoF Expressing Full Potential Partner Difference	-0.25 (0.09)	-2.80**	
	MoF Developing and Becoming Self Partner Difference	0.07 (0.04)	1.61	0.05
MoF Reality Partner Difference	0 (0.04)	-0.01		
MoF Inspiration Partner Difference	0.06 (0.09)	0.72		
MoF Balancing Tensions Partner Difference	0.10 (0.08)	1.23		

Table 5 Continued

DV	Variable	Coefficient (error)	t	R ²
WFC	MoW Partner Difference	0.03 (0.10)	0.31	0.00
	MoW Unity with Others Partner Difference	-0.02 (0.10)	-0.17	
	MoW Serving Others Partner Difference	0.12 (0.10)	1.29	
	MoW Expressing Full Potential Partner Difference	0.01 (0.11)	0.12	
	MoW Developing and Becoming Self Partner Difference	0.23 (0.07)	3.49**	0.03
	MoW Reality Partner Difference	0.00 (0.09)	0.04	
	MoW Inspiration Partner Difference	-0.09 (0.09)	-0.94	
	MoW Balancing Tensions Partner Difference	-0.01 (0.11)	-0.06	
	MoF Partner Difference	0.33 (0.06)	5.30**	0.08
	MoF Unity with Others Partner Difference	0.56 (0.13)	4.31**	
	MoF Serving Others Partner Difference	-0.19 (0.14)	-1.36	
	MoF Expressing Full Potential Partner Difference	-0.03 (0.12)	-0.21	
	MoF Developing and Becoming Self Partner Difference	0.05 (0.06)	0.87	0.10
	MoF Reality Partner Difference	0.06 (0.10)	0.63	
	MoF Inspiration Partner Difference	0.16 (0.12)	1.30	
	MoF Balancing Tensions Partner Difference	-0.03 (0.11)	-0.26	

Note. $N = 155$. MoW = Meaningfulness of Work, MoF = Meaningfulness of Family, WFB = Work Family Balance, WFE = Work Family Insurance, WFC = Work Family Conflict. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Bold variables indicate significance at an alpha below .05.