Culture, elder-care, interrole transitions, and work-family conflict: a U.S.-Chinese comparison

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by

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Abstract

This study provides an exploratory cross-cultural comparison of the role of culture, elder-care demands, and interrole transitions within the work-family conflict context. The two main research questions were focused on how eldercare demands relate to familial collectivism, and how these two constructs related to interrole transitions. One sample from the U.S. (n= 820) and one sample from China (n= 685) were obtained via online survey panels and compared on the same variables. The findings were for the most part similar for China and America overall, and mediation analyses indicated a relationship between elder-care demands and work-family conflict through family-to-work transitioning in the U.S. and this effect only replicated in China when age and gender were not controlled for. Eldercare demands were much larger and were not significantly related to work-family conflict in China, but the opposite was the case for the U.S. Limitations, future research suggestions, and implications are discussed.

Keywords: work-family conflict, cross-cultural, elder care, collectivism

Although conflict between work and family roles has been found throughout the world, the nature of these conflicts may vary across national and cultural contexts, particularly between traditionally Western settings such as the United States and Eastern settings such as China. Workers in China are over twice as likely to live with their parents as those in the United States. This, along with well-documented differences in individualistic and collectivist cultural values (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), has the potential to influence the family demands placed on the worker and the support received from elder family members. Examining these topics is important because China has been projected to become the largest world economy by 2030 (Barboza, 2010) and thus deserves continued research attention in this arena. Many Chinese cultural values stem from Confucianism, which had a major impact throughout Eastern Asia and “is considered the most influential philosophy for ordinary Chinese people’s deeds in everyday-life contexts” (Hong, 2004; p. 56; Ho, 1995; Hwang 1999; 2000). One of these Chinese cultural values is “filial piety or xiao,” which is multi-faceted and is discussed below.

Some work-family spillover and role theorists have also called on researchers to pay greater attention to the characteristics of boundaries that workers maintain between work and family roles (Hall & Richter, 1988; Matthews, Barnes-Farrell, & Bulger, 2010; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000). These boundaries are important in determining the extent to which individuals maintain separate and distinct work and family lives. These work-family boundaries may also be influenced by the cultural and national differences cited above.

The current study addresses each of these issues by connecting national and cultural context with work-family boundary characteristics, namely flexibility and permeability. Cultural
values have typically been studied as macro-level variables to account for entire countries’ patterns of behavior (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) in psychology. There is another way to frame cultural values, and that is at the level of individuals (e.g., Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Looking at culture from this perspective eliminates the national barrier (i.e., treating everyone from one country as if they all hold the exact same cultural values with little to no variation) when you want to compare many people within a sample or between samples on the same cultural value. The individual-level cultural value of interest in this study is called familial collectivism, which has an emphasis on authority ranking and collectivistic qualities in relation to the family unit. This is relevant to the work-family literature and further discussion can be found below.

Although there have been a large number of empirical studies conducted in the United States in regards to work-family conflict (WFC; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007), there is an unfortunate dearth of cross-cultural studies that have investigated these phenomena (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood & Lambert, 2007; Jin, Ford, & Chen, 2012). In addition, very few studies have examined the roles of elder-care demands (ECD) in the work-family context. One exception to this is a study by Barling, MacEwen, Kelloway, and Higginbottom (1994), which found that workers dealing with elder-care-based inter-role conflict reported psychological strain and partial absenteeism. Another unique component of this study is the inclusion of cultural values that could influence the way people experience work-family spillover. These cultural values are important because they could influence how workers manage and participate in their work and family roles. Differences in values could influence how workers allocate resources to work and family domains and the characteristics of the boundaries they set between these two roles. Values should also influence the level of importance of the different life domains to an individual.
Purpose of This Article

The purpose of the current study is to examine and compare the boundaries of work and family roles in China and the United States. More specifically, this study examines the role that ECD play in relation to work-family conflict and to the cultural value of familial collectivism, which will be discussed further below. The overarching research questions here are a) To what extent are familial collectivism and ECD related? and b) How do these two constructs relate to work-family boundary characteristics?

Familial Collectivism

Triandis (1995) introduced a theory of horizontal-vertical individualism-collectivism or HVIC in order to bring a more intricate understanding of how individualism-collectivism plays a role in our everyday lives. This comprehensive individualism-collectivism framework contains four dimensions: vertical collectivism, horizontal collectivism, vertical individualism, and horizontal individualism. Of these four variables, the current manuscript is most interested in vertical collectivism, which stresses hierarchy (or ranking of authority), obedience to authority figures, integrity for the in-group, placing in-group’s goals above one’s personal goals, and supporting competitiveness of one’s in-group with out-groups (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Triandis and Gelfand (1998) found support for the HVIC typology in Korea (a collectivistic culture) and the U.S. (an individualistic culture). The authors found that vertical collectivists endorsed authoritarianism, low emotional distance from in-groups, family integrity (i.e., more traditional family roles), sociability, and acceptability for large status differences between men and women.

A recent meta-analysis investigated the current trends of HVIC within the United States by comparing African, Asian, Latino, and European Americans and essentially found that when
comparing mean scores of vertical collectivism from these four cultural groups, there were no
differences among the groups (Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013). This finding is interesting when
confining research to the U.S. only, but does not generalize to Chinese samples because there
were no samples taken from China.

The current study focuses on familial collectivism (FC), a more specific form of vertical
collectivism, with one’s family being the referent in-group. By definition, then, individuals high
in FC are more likely to make personal sacrifices for the betterment of their families, be highly
supportive of family members competing with other people, derive joy from spending time with
their family, and abide to the decisions or rules made by family authority figures. Family has
always played an integral role in Chinese culture, especially due to the fact that in 1979, the
Chinese government created a law that restricted couples to having only one child. The one-
child law suggests that families were typically very large and that family members would rely on
each other to take care of everyone. However, it could be argued that the families that were
forced to have only one child developed a stronger family unit because life is easier to manage
with only one child. Relatedly, it could be argued that the importance of family would be
increased because there is only one child who must take care of his/her parents versus having
siblings to share the responsibilities with. I will make no predictions regarding any differences
between countries because Chen (1995) has found that Chinese workers are being influenced
more by economic values and goals rather than traditional cultural values (e.g., social harmony,
economic egalitarianism; Bond and Hwang, 1986) in their preferences of resource allocation.
This trend suggests that times were (and still are) changing in China, and that money now plays a
larger role than it used to.
Several authors (Chen, 1995; Chen, Meindl, & Hunt, 1997; He, Chen, & Zhang, 2004) have argued that the extensive reforms in 1992 to Chinese state-owned enterprises, which placed a paramount importance on economic and productivity growth, market survival and competitiveness, were the primary reason for this trend. Chen (1995) speculated that these national economic and business reforms would over time alter employee-level attitudes and behaviors (e.g., productivity goal orientation, rewards-allocation preferences) from a more traditional egalitarian/equalitarian preference to a more differential preference (i.e., unequal distribution of rewards), through a trickle-down effect from the organizational-level values and goals. Chen (1995) found support for the new trend and obtained similar findings to marshal more confidence for the trend and the stability of employee attitude changes through later studies (Chen et al., 1997; He et al., 2004). Other results found in these studies are that vertical collectivists are more accepting and embracing of the productivity orientation and differential allocation preferences, because they attach more importance “to the economic and productivity goals of the organization” (He et al., 2004; p. 228). Based on these findings in China, it could be argued that individuals high in vertical collectivism work harder than those low in vertical collectivism. In other words, based on these findings, vertical collectivists could work more hours and put in more effort and energy into their work in order to maximize their organization’s revenue and productivity or output because they find those aspects of the organization important.

Because FC is an individual-level construct (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), cross-cultural work-family spillover research can benefit from measuring these value differences at the individual level to see variation within and across countries, as opposed to only measuring culture at the societal or national level (e.g., Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007; Brockner, 2003).

Boundaries and Inter-domain Transitioning
Boundary theory (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Michaelsen & Johnson, 1997; Nippert-Eng, 1996, Zerubavel, 1991) essentially states that individuals form and maintain psychological boundaries between their different life roles as a way to help cognitively organize the environment. At boundary theory’s core is role theory (e.g., Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Role theory essentially posits that everyone has different “hats” that they wear (i.e., roles) and if these roles are ambiguous or are not compatible with each other, then the likelihood of conflict within or between them increases. When role conflict occurs, it causes individuals higher levels of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). Based on role theory, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p.77). Implicit in this concept is there are boundaries between and transitions among these roles (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Along the lines of boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) is border theory (Clark, 2000). Both of these theories posit that these borders/boundaries feature a flexibility and a permeability component, among other features. Both of these features determine how “strong” a boundary is. The flexibility component describes how much capacity one has to contract or expand a boundary/border, either temporally or physically, in reply to a separate domain’s demands (Hall & Richter, 1988; Clark, 2000). For instance, if an employee perceives that he or she could leave work and tend to a family matter, then the work boundary is flexible. The permeability component describes how much someone is either behaviorally or mentally involved in one domain, while physically located inside another domain (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Hall & Richter, 1988). For example, if an employee is contacted by a family member while at work, the work boundary is permeable. However, permeability is a problematic construct due to a lack
of accord in the construct’s definition within the literature. This point will be addressed shortly.

In summary, boundary theory and border theory basically argue that people manage their borders or boundaries in different ways, and certain boundary management styles can lead to lower or higher experiences of WFC.

Matthews and colleagues (2010) proposed and quantified a construct called *inter-domain transitions* to capture aspects of the boundary or border transition process. They also noted that Clark’s (2000) definitions emphasize spillover between domains, but fail to account for the “can” and “do” of elements entering one domain from another. The notion of transitioning was first discussed by Greenhaus and Beuttell (1985) and later expanded by Ashforth et al. (2000) to include both macro (e.g., retirement or promotion) and micro role transitions (e.g., commuting to work from home). Matthews et al. (2010) draw from systems theory, specifically the concept of “flow” (i.e., movement between two role domains) when describing inter-domain transitions. They define inter-domain transitions as “the number of physical and cognitive transitions made from one domain to another” (p. 449).

The current study integrates portions of these more recent approaches (e.g., border/boundary theories, inter-domain transitions) with more classic and well established theories, namely role theory (Kahn et al., 1964) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) to explain within- and between-nation cultural differences in one large sample of workers in China and one large sample of American workers in their boundary characteristics and experiences of work-family conflict.

Recently, Matthews and Barnes-Farrell (2010) and Matthews et al. (2010) argue that boundary flexibility is comprised of two elements (flexibility-ability and flexibility-willingness). Flexibility-ability represents the extent to which one perceives an ability to expand or contract
the boundaries of a domain. Flexibility-willingness refers to one’s willingness to expand or contract domain boundaries. Furthermore, both Matthews and Barnes-Farrell (2010) and Matthews et al., (2010) argue to replace the permeability construct with the idea of transitioning or inter-domain transitions. They point to inconsistent or disjointed definitions put forth by prior theorists for this replacement. In addition to their argument, Matthews and Barnes-Farrell (2010) and Matthews et al., (2010) devised a scale to assess transitioning that has some construct validity evidence.

The current manuscript is concerned with work-to-family transitioning (WFT) and family-to-work transitioning (FWT). The WFT concept captures the degree to which a worker switches from the work role to the family role. Conversely, FWT captures the degree to which a worker switches from the family role to the work role. Matthews et al. (2010) found that FWT is positively related to WFC. Their results make sense because stepping into the work role while you are with your family should result in conflict with obligations to one’s spouse, children, or other relatives.

Matthews et al. (2010) found that if a domain is central to one’s self-identity, then one has greater flexibility-willingness to transition into that domain (i.e., willingness to transition from or leave a different domain and transition to/enter the more central domain). FC may be an indicator of one’s family domain centrality. Stryker and Burke (2000) argue that a domain is central if people define their self-concept in that regard. As previously mentioned, individuals who are high familial collectivists sacrifice whatever is necessary for their families. It is important to familial collectivists that the decisions made by higher ranking family members are respected. Moreover, Matthews et al. (2010) modified Amatea, Cross, Clark, and Bobby’s (1986) measure of Marital Role Values to measure family domain centrality by changing the
items to reflect one’s family rather than one’s marriage. One sample item from the Martial Role Reward Value scale by Amatea et al. (1986) is “Having a successful marriage is the most important thing in life to me.” (p. 838). The four other items on the Marital Role Reward Value scale are similar, but instead of asking about one’s marriage, items by Matthews et al. (2010) were framed around one’s family to capture family domain centrality. An example item of family domain centrality is “My life would seem empty if I never had a family.” (p. 454) Therefore, someone who endorses FC would be very likely to agree with the five statements on the family domain centrality measure used by Matthews et al. (2010) because the family unit is of most importance to a familial collectivist.

Matthews and colleagues (2010) found that family centrality was negatively related to family flexibility-willingness (i.e., the willingness to leave the family domain and transition to another domain), and positively related to work flexibility-willingness. These findings make sense because a person who is family centric would be less willing to transition out of the family domain and more willing to transition from a competing domain such as work. Granted, I did not measure any domain flexibility components, but I argue that FC mirrors family centrality.

Hypothesis 1: FC is negatively related to FWT.
Hypothesis 2: FC is positively related to WFT.
Hypothesis 3: FWT is positively related to WFC.
Hypothesis 4: WFT is positively related to WFC.

Elder-Care Demands

The present study makes an important addition to the research catalog due to the dearth of papers examining the impact of ECD in the WFC context. Because of the global financial crisis, many recent and upcoming American retirees have lost or will lose portions of retirement
savings and might need to move in with their children who may have families of their own (Altman, 2009). If these elders happen to be in good health, they may not be a burden to these working adults. However, if elders are not well, this could require considerable extra time, care, and effort from their children to help assist and take care of them. Hence, workers will be more likely to experience WFC if they have ECD because they are expending more of their personal resources to the family domain, which may reduce resources used towards the work domain.

Working couples or individuals are sometimes referred to as the “sandwich/sandwiched generation” (e.g., Durity, 1991; Hammer & Neal, 2008; Miller, 1981), because they are caring for their own children and their elders. Furthermore, it has been projected that one fifth of the U.S. population will be 65 years or older by the year 2030 (Bronfenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington, Moen, & Ceci, 1996). This projection tells us that there will likely be a greater number of sandwiched generation individuals because there will be fewer Americans under 18 years of age than Americans over 65 years of age. Research has shown that people with elder and child dependents report higher amounts of overall life stress (e.g., Fernandez, 1990; Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001; Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993; Neal & Hammer 2007; 2009) than those who do not need to care for both sets of dependents. Aside from higher stress, other negative outcomes found in the literature among individuals with child and elder care responsibilities include perceptions of unfair division of labor in the household (when compared to individuals who do not have multigenerational caregiving responsibilities; Loomis & Booth, 1995), negative work attitudes (Buffardi, Smith, O’Brien, & Erdwins, 1999), and higher absenteeism from work (Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Neal, 1994).

On the other hand, it has also been found that sandwich generation people report some positive outcomes when certain conditions are met. Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, and Hammer (2001)
reported a finding that suggests that sandwiched adults receive assistance from their parents, in addition to providing them with care. Also, Ward and Spitze (1998) found a positive relationship between overall marital happiness and higher-quality relationships with both children and parents in sandwiched individuals.

Throughout the literature, there have been several different interpretations of what elder care means. Some researchers use a more narrowly defined operational definition (e.g., Stone, Cafferata, & Sangl, 1987) and others use a broader definition (e.g., Neal et al., 1993). The current paper defines elder care as the demands placed on an individual in regards to helping an elder (i.e., ECD). ECD could be how many times one assists an elderly family member in various daily tasks, how much financial assistance one provides for various items and services, or the number of hours per week that one must provide care to his/her elders. A comprehensive measure of the construct should include each of these dimensions (e.g., Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Of interest here is how ECD differ across the U.S. and China and how these demands influence WFC through boundary characteristics.

A paper by sociologists Zhan and Montgomery (2003) discussed the Chinese cultural construct called “filial piety or xiao…a Confucian concept that encompasses a broad range of behaviors, including children’s respect, obedience, loyalty, material provisions, and physical care to parents” (p. 210). Traditionally, filial piety has influenced patterns of socialization within China for hundreds of years and it is one of the central tenets of Confucianism (Ho, 1994; Ho & Kang, 1984). Schwartz (2007) cites Bond and Hwang (2003) as having related filial piety to a stronger inclination to care for elder parents. This may help explain why institutions such as nursing homes have not been prevalent in China for many years, as opposed to Western countries such as the United States.
In the U.S., it is common to place one’s parents or elders in a nursing home to provide them with the care they need 24 hours a day. According to a recent report by the National Center for Health Statistics, in 2012, the U.S. utilized nursing homes and related long-term care facilities for approximately eight million people, mostly composed of the elderly and other adults with functional deficiencies (Harris-Koj etin, Sengupta, Park-Lee, & Valverde, 2013). Further, these types of facilities and services “are a significant component of personal health care spending in the United States.” (Harris-Koj et al., 2013; p. viii). By contrast, in China, it is traditionally frowned upon to put an elder in a nursing home, as there is a Confucian social norm to take care of or “give back to” one’s parents because they were the ones who raised you and brought you into the world (Hwang, 1999). Furthermore, taking care of your elders is considered to be a good virtue in China (Hwang, 1999), so traditional Chinese workers would be less likely to place elders in nursing homes. This may be part of the reason it is the norm in China for working-age adults to have elders living with them.

There is only one limited nation-wide health insurance program or publicly funded program for Chinese elderly called the New Rural Cooperative Medical Care System which could help to pay for elderly care in China, but lacks the stability and comprehensiveness of programs like Medicare or Medicaid in the U.S. Therefore, the onus is placed on the younger family members to pay for and provide care for elderly family members. However, with the one-child only policy, it makes elder care increasingly difficult (Feng, Zhan, Feng, Liu, Sun, & Mor, 2011). In contrast to traditional Chinese beliefs, there is a growing number of Chinese who are (and who have) “given up their traditional ways of life and adopted modern ones.” (Hwang, 1999; p. 178). These attitude changes challenge the Confucian principle of filial piety. Moreover, this is one of the reasons why the number of elder care homes in China has
skyrocketed over the past few decades to take care of approximately 112 million Chinese over 65 years of age (Feng et al., 2011). Thus, there is likely individual variability in the strength of traditional Confucian values such as familial piety or collectivism.

It is reasonable to surmise that the presence of elders at home would lead to more ECD and WFC. ECD drain one’s time and energy resources, and thus should increase WFC. Logically, ECD (e.g., taking a phone call at work from a family member or making a phone call at work for a family member) would affect the ability for a worker to be fully productive while at work, and this could increase the frequency of a worker’s being required to step into the work role while in the family role (i.e., FWT) to complete the work that was unable to be finished due to the extra family demands. Further, ECD should increase WFT, by increasing the demands from the family role that one needs to attend to during work hours. This increase in time spent within the family role results in greater transitions into the work role.

*Hypothesis 5:* ECD will be higher in China than in the U.S.

*Hypothesis 6:* ECD will be positively related to (a) FWT and (b) WFT.

*Hypothesis 7:* WFT will mediate the relationship between (a) FC and WFC and (b) between ECD and WFC.

**Method**

**Recruitment Procedure and Samples**

In order to test the cross-cultural work-family balance hypotheses, data were collected from two heterogeneous samples of workers, one from the U.S. and one from China. Similar methods were implemented to obtain both samples and all participants were given the same measures. To try to offset organization-specific contextual effects that groups of workers could be influenced by, individuals from a variety of occupations and organizations were sampled.
U.S. Sample

The U.S. sample was recruited through Qualtrics.com, a voluntary online panel used in other recently published studies (e.g., DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceramic, 2012; Long, Bendersky, & Morrill, 2011). Using this panel method provided a way to recruit participants from a more diverse and representative array of work and family experiences than would be reachable through most other means. Research suggests the use of online panels produces data of acceptable quality (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Goslin, 2011). Panelists who were working full-time and were married were recruited and included in this study. In total, 1,050 individuals submitted completed surveys. Participants were compensated with a small gift card for their participation. Only participants who worked at least 20 hours per week were included in the analysis, resulting in a final sample size of 820. Participants received intermittent questions where they were told to simply pick a particular response to move on in the survey. This method was used to detect, discourage, and eliminate random responders. Approximately 64 percent of the sample were women, 19.3 percent had one child, and 25.6 percent had more than one child. They worked an average of 39.7 hours per week and averaged 45.6 years of age, with an age range from 21 to 79. A parent or other relative lived with 13.5 percent of the participants.

Chinese Sample

Chinese participants were recruited from Sojump.com, a voluntary online panel in China similar to StudyResponse.com. This panel includes 2.6 million individuals across China and is frequently used for market and academic research by multinational corporations and scholars (e.g., Shaobing & Wenxia, 2010). This survey was sent to 2,012 full-time workers on this panel, all of whom were offered $1.50 to answer the questionnaire. Only participants who worked at least 20 hours per week were included in the analysis, resulting in a final sample size of 685. Of
these, 685 (47.7% women, mean age of 32.2, ranging from 20-64 years) provided usable responses to all of the survey measures, resulting in a response rate of 22 percent. Almost 28% of the sample had missing data for how many children under the age of 18 are living with the participants, leaving 494 responses. Of these 494 responses, 16.2% reported no children under 18 are living with them, while 78.1% reported 1 child, and 5.7% reported two children under 18 are living with them. The average number of hours per week working was 42.9. A parent or relative lived with 49.3% of participants.

Measures

Both samples were given the same measures, all of which were originally developed in English. The measures were translated into Chinese Mandarin and then back-translated into English by a colleague using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). The Chinese sample received the measures in Chinese and the U.S. sample received the measures in English. All responses were on a 5-point scale.

WFT. Matthews et al.’s (2010) six-item scale measures the frequency that workers transition to the family role while physically and temporally in the work role. A Likert scale was used for the response categories ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (All of the time). The stem to all items is “How often have you….. “ and one sample item is “Received calls from family members while at work?” The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was .835 for the U.S. sample and .799 for the Chinese sample.

FWT. Matthews et al.’s (2010) five-item scale measures the frequency that workers transition to the work role while physically and temporally in the family role. A Likert scale was used for the response categories ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (All of the time). The stem to all items is “How often have you….. “ and one sample item is “Answered work related e-mails
while at home?” The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was .810 for the U.S. sample and .857 for the Chinese sample.

WFC. Gutek, Searle, and Klepa’s (1991) four-item scale was used to measure WFC. A Likert scale was used for the response categories ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A sample item from this scale is “After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I’d like to do.” The coefficient alpha was .797 and .720 for the U.S. and Chinese samples, respectively.

ECD. Zhan and Montgomery’s (2003) 15-item scale assesses how frequently one assists an elderly family member with daily care/chores (e.g., shaving and bathing), and helping them out financially (e.g., for food, clothing, and medicine), as well as an estimate of how many hours are spent a week caring for elders. A Likert scale was used for the response categories ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost every day). Only the non-financial assistance scale, which is composed of six items, was used in this study. A sample item from this sub-scale is “How often do you assist an elder family member with the following? Bathing.” The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was .943 for the U.S. sample and .931 for the Chinese sample.

FC. Triandis and Gelfand’s (1998) four-item measure of vertical collectivism was used. The four items were altered to measure FC instead of vertical. A Likert scale was used for the response categories ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The first item is “It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want.” The second item is “Parents and children must stick together as much as possible.” The third item is “Family members should stick together, no matter what sacrifices are required.” The last item is “It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my family members.” The internal
consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was .824 for the U.S. sample and .735 for the Chinese sample.

**Results**

Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the variables of interest for the U.S. and Chinese samples, respectively.

Hypothesis 1 stated that FC would be negatively related to FWT, but the results were nonsignificant for both samples \((r = .03\), U.S. and \(r = .009\) in China). Hypothesis 2 stated that FC would be positively related to WFT, but results were nonsignificant for both samples \((r = .015\), U.S. and \(r = -.018\) in China). Hypothesis 3 stated that FWT would be positively related to WFC. Results supported the hypothesis, as there were significant positive relationships, \(r = .39\) (U.S.) and \(r = .42\) (China), \(p < .01\). Hypothesis 4 stated that WFT would be positively related to WFC. Results supported the hypothesis, as there were significant positive relationships, \(r = .20\) (U.S) and \(r = .12\) (China), \(p < .01\). *Cohen’s d* was calculated to test for the difference in ECD between the U.S. and China. The *d*-value was 1.446 (U.S. \(M = 1.2, SD = .70\), China \(M = 2.8, SD = 1.4\)) which indicates a large effect size. This supports Hypothesis 5 which stated that ECDs will be higher in China than in the U.S. Hypothesis 6 stated that ECD would be positively related to FWT and WFT. Results supported the hypothesis, as there were significant positive relationships, \(r = .18\) (U.S. FWT), \(r = .22\) (U.S. WFT) both \(p < .01\), and \(r = .09\) (China FWT), \(r = .09\) (China WFT) both \(p < .05\).

Figure 1 depicts the empirical model including the path diagram with all the variables and coefficients for the mediation analyses. Hypothesis 7 stated that WFT mediates (a) the relationship between FC and WFC and b) the relationship between ECD and WFC (b). Using the SPSS bootstrapping MEDIATE macro procedure (Hayes & Preacher, 2013), the model was
run with gender and age controlled with FWT included as a mediator as an exploratory test (using 10,000 bootstrapped samples). For the U.S., FC did not predict WFT ($b = .007$, $p = .84$) or FWT ($b = .05$, $p = .31$). By contrast, ECDs predicted both WFT, $b = .20$, SE = .03, $p < .0005$ and FWT, $b = .21$, SE = .04, $p < .0005$). WFT did not predict WFC ($b = .04$, $p = .42$) but FWT did predict WFC ($b = .41$, SE = .04, $p < .0005$). After the mediators were accounted for, FC predicted WFC ($b = .14$, SE = .05, $p = .002$), but ECDs did not predict WFC ($b = .07$, $p = .11$). There were no indirect effects for FC or ECDs on WFC through WFT (FC, $b = .0003$, SE = .0026; ECDs, $b = .0075$, SE = .0102). However there was an indirect effect for ECDs on WFC through FWT ($b = .09$, 95% CI [.044, .128]; SE = .02).

For China, FC did not predict WFT ($b = -.009$, $p = .82$) or FWT ($b = .01$, $p = .82$), whereas ECDs predicted WFT ($b = .03$, SE = .02, $p = .03$) and approached significance in predicting FWT ($b = .04$, SE = .02, $p = .051$). Further, WFT did not predict WFC ($b = .05$, $p = .31$) but FWT predicted WFC ($b = .46$, SE = .04, $p < .0005$). After the mediators were accounted for, FC predicted WFC ($b = .14$, SE = .05, $p = .006$), but ECDs did not predict WFC ($b = -.005$, $p = .79$). There was no indirect effect for FC or ECDs on WFC through WFT or FWT. Thus, Hypothesis 7 (a) and (b) were not supported.

**Discussion**

This study helps to fill the gap in the limited literature investigating cross-cultural work-family spillover with an emphasis on the intersection of (i.e., transitioning between) the work and family life domains, and ECD. Some of the results coincide with what has been seen in the literature so far. As did Matthews et al. (2010), I found that WFT were positively related to FWT, and each was positively related to WFC. This study also found that ECD were positively related to both types of transitions. Contrary to expectations, results suggested FC was
unrelated to both types of inter-domain transitions (H1) and ECD (H5). One possible explanation for these results is that it could be that while FC and ECD are strongly associated between countries, they are unrelated within countries, as studied here. In other words, taking a between country-level perspective (i.e., comparing Americans to Chinese), FC and ECD are significantly different from each other in the U.S. and China in terms of the size of their means, however, when taking a within-country perspective (i.e., only comparing Americans with Americans or Chinese with Chinese), FC and ECD are similar within a country, so results do not turn out statistically significant.

The mediation analyses revealed interesting findings counter to the hypothesis that WFT would explain WFC when FC and ECDs are the antecedents. ECDs have not been explored as a predictor of inter-domain transitioning in a cross-cultural comparison. The present results show that for the U.S. and China, ECDs significantly predicted both transitions (only marginal significance on family to work transitioning in China). Additionally, ECDs indirectly affected WFC through FWT in the U.S., but this effect only replicated in China when age and gender were not controlled for, and the effects in both samples were small. Based on the results, it appears that ECDs are a more powerful predictor of inter-domain transitions than is FC, which did not predict either inter-domain transition in either sample. One explanation for these findings is that ECDs have to be dealt with one way or another (e.g., through more frequent transitioning), whereas workers may not be so consciously aware of FC and therefore it does not predict transitioning. However, FC did predict WFC after accounting for both transitioning effects in both samples, whereas ECDs did not. Ashforth and colleagues (2000) suggested cultural values probably would affect transitioning processes and role segmentation/integration preferences. Although my results do not support that idea for transitioning, FC did predict WFC.
This is the first study incorporating FC to the work-family balance literature, so it should be examined further with other samples.

Consistent with Matthews et al.’s findings (2010), FWT predicted WFC well (betas above .4 in both samples) but WFT did not. This makes theoretical sense because the more workers leave the family role to enter the work role, the more likely they are to experience WFC. Interestingly, this effect was found in both countries. Perhaps WFT would have played a mediating role if family-to-work conflict was examined.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study suggest that the basic propositions of role theory and boundary/border theory generalize to the Chinese cultural context, as many of the effects found followed similar patterns in both the U.S. and Chinese samples. Based on these results, FC plays an important role in predicting WFC after accounting for inter-domain transitioning effects in the U.S. and China (i.e., support for direct effects). Additionally, the results from this study suggest that boundary theory should consider ECD and probably child-care/marriage demands to add more explanatory scope to the theory. More research is needed on cultural values of different sorts to start to advance work-family balance theory, as well as practical methods to support the betterment of employees everywhere. Indeed, cultural values do influence the way people experience work-family spillover and influence how they manage and participate in their work and family roles.

Relatedly, more research is needed to examine China and other countries in different continents to be able to test these theories. Furthermore, it appears that inter-domain transitioning is a promising way to be able to quantify the intersection point where roles collide, which has been theorized by Ashforth et al. (2000; boundary theory), Clark (2000; border
theory), and others, as one of the best ways to understand role conflict. Inter-domain transitioning has been shown in this study to have the potential to advance boundary theory and help researchers and practitioners better predict work-family outcomes. Inter-domain transitions have been shown here to play mediating roles and warrants more inclusion in future studies.

Finally, the dimension of eldercare needs more consideration by work-family researchers in the U.S. and in other countries. The current study found empirical support for relationships and predictions between ECD and WFC. Specifically, ECD had indirect effects on WFC through FWT, as well as significant relationships with inter-domain transitions in the U.S. Indirect effects did not replicate in China. Also, Chinese ECD were positively related to WFT, and this effect was stronger than it was in the U.S. sample. Taking into account the eldercare role in work-life balance will broaden I-O psychologists’ utility to organizations in trying to reduce role conflict for employees who care for elders.

**Practical Implications**

As many businesses across America are becoming more global and expanding their markets to new territories, it is meaningful to obtain a snapshot of what role cultural values and ECD play in work-life balance to possibly help strengthen business relationships with countries such as China. Moreover, taking a more global perspective, multinational companies should consider the role culture and elder care plays across workers from different locations around the world, and try to be more flexible to accommodate people who fall in different areas of those spectrums. Cross-cultural comparisons in the work-family spillover literature would be quite valuable to organizations that are trying to expand the diversity of their own workforce because they might have organizational policies about managing life demands (i.e., work and family, not being family-supportive) that are incompatible and unsupportive of the cultural values that East
Asians, for example, might hold (e.g., FC). Information of this type would be significant for organizations to learn about, especially if they are attempting to diversify their staff with individuals from different countries. Moreover, there is a strong theoretical need to empirically explore the nature of these understudied variables. Perhaps the policies currently in place at an organization are not conducive to the type of conditions workers from different countries are used to or prefer. Avoiding these kinds of mismatches would be valuable to companies in order to avoid low job performance, turnover, and losing out on excellent talent abroad. Similarly, recent research has revealed that when organizational policies on work-life balance are beneficial to workers, they respond with higher commitment (Lourel and Gueguen, 2007; Smith and Gardner, 2007; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Some limitations of this study are that the data is cross-sectional and from a single source. This could lead to common method variance and result in inflated observed relationships, although some have argued that such designs are not necessarily problematic (Spector, 2006). Other relevant variables, such as family-to-work conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), domain centralities, domain flexibility-ability, and domain flexibility-willingness, were also missing from this study and may have yielded a more comprehensive investigation. Future research could benefit from replication studies that address the limitations of the current one via suggestions in the discussion and by including other variables.

Although logically, it makes sense that family centrality and FC would both be similar indicators of how important the family domain is to a person, perhaps they are actually distinct from each other. This could have led to the divergent findings from previous research. Maybe characteristics of the samples in the current study are the reason for not finding a relationship
between FC and inter-domain transitioning and with ECD. The sampling method used in this study is a more modern one which is not seen very often in the work-family literature, and it is a convenience sample. Future research should incorporate both family centrality and FC measures to directly compare the effects or opt to use one or the other to see if any effects of this study or prior studies’ effects can be replicated.
References


Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Study Variables for the U.S.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. WFC</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>(.797)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. FWT</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.39** (.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. WFT</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.20* .38** (.84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. FC</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.12* .03 .01 (.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ECD</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.14* .18** .22** -.01 (.94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N = 820. Correlations are 2-tailed Pearson’s r
* p < .05  ** p < .01
Bold-faced coefficients represent supported hypotheses.
Coefficients on the diagonal represent the coefficient alphas for the measures.
SD = standard deviation. WFC = work-family conflict. FWT = family-to-work transitioning.
WFT = work-to-family transitioning. FC = familial collectivism. ECD = elder-care demands.
Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables for China.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. WFC</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. FWT</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.42*</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. WFT</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>(.80)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. FC</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ECD</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N = 685. Correlations are 2-tailed Pearson’s r  
* p < .05  ** p < .01  
Bold-faced coefficients represent supported hypotheses.  
Coefficients on the diagonal represent the coefficient alphas for the measures.  
SD = standard deviation.  WFC = work-family conflict.  FWT = family-to-work transitioning.  
WFT = work-to-family transitioning.  FC = familial collectivism.  ECD = elder-care demands.
Figure 1

Empirical Path Model Used to test Hypothesis 7

Note. Path coefficients for U.S. sample are displayed first, followed by Chinese sample in red.
* p < .05  ** p < .01
Curved lines represent effects after accounting for the mediators.
Dashed lines represent exploratory mediation analyses.
SD = standard deviation. WFC = work-family conflict. FWT = family-to-work transitioning.
WFT = work-to-family transitioning. FC = familial collectivism. ECD = elder-care demands.