NEGOTIATING WORK-LIFE BALANCE WITHIN THE OPERATIONAL CULTURE OF A CHAEBOL IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

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The purpose of this study is to examine the work life balance negotiations of three distinct culture groups employed by South Korean conglomerates located within the southeastern United States. These three cultural groups are: Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and non-Korean Americans. It is proposed that each culture will negotiate work life balances in their own manner based upon their specific inherent cultural understandings. This study is a cross-cultural examination through thirty-two open-ended interviews of employees working for large multinational Korean companies with facilities in the southern United States. Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and Americans implement different work-life balance negotiation tactics in the workplace based upon each one’s cultural association. While all three cultural groups experience difficulty in obtaining a work-life balance working for a Korean company, the Korean Americans seem to suffer the most.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to compare and contrast the daily work life balance negotiations of South Koreans, Korean Americans, and non-Korean Americans employed by a transnational South Korean corporation in the southeastern United States. These organizations have come to be known as chaebols and are often referred to by this term (Chang, 2008; Janelli, 1993). Since large South Korean companies, or chaebols, are continuing to expand their operations within the United States, it is important to understand their cultural influence on the local workforce. For the South Korean companies, this importance lies with employee retention and productivity. In America, workers who are dissatisfied with their work-life balance stand a greater chance of being less productive or quitting their jobs. This adds to the overall cost of doing business, which companies do not want to have happen. Traditionally, large multinational firms have trouble recruiting and retaining a local workforce (Froese, 2011). In order for a multinational organization to become successful, it must comprehend the culture within which it operates (Butler & Earley, 2001).

Additionally, Kalliath and Brough (2008) demonstrate how an employee’s work-life balance experience is directly correlated with his or her health. Employees who experience minimum conflict between work and home tend to be happier and healthier. Conversely, those who constantly experience conflict between the two tend to be unhappy and more prone to sickness.

There are a number of factors that can affect a person’s work-life balance as past studies have shown (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Choi & Kim, 2012; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Lim, Song, & Choi, 2012). Researchers have focused on variables such as long work
hours, unreasonable superiors, and a demanding home life (Ford & Collinson, 2011; Hill, Erickson, & Holmes, 2010). Work and home variables are of equal importance in this equation of balance and proper attention should be paid to both (Devi & Kumari, 2012). Yet, the definition and importance of work-life balance also varies by culture (Chandra, 2012; Cooke & Jing, 2009; Galovan, Fackrell, Buswell, Jones, Hill, & Carroll, 2010; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). This study seeks to further illustrate this point by focusing on multiple cultures in a single operational location. To date, this has not yet been accomplished.

The recent economic powers stemming from the East have given rise to many Asian firms establishing facilities within the United States. It is important to understand the impact, if any, of the Korean culture in the American workplace for various reasons. Based upon the simplest of understandings, it is safe to say that the Korean culture and the American culture tend to stand apart on various aspects (Hofstede, 2014). As such, it is prudent to investigate how these cultural differences may transfer to the work environment. This is especially true if a worker enters into employment with a Korean firm in America ignorant of any work expectations that the chaebol might have that are different from the worker’s previous experience. It is also important for the Korean firm to understand the work expectations of those it employs in America. If not, it risks high employee turnover due to different work expectations between the firm and its employees due to dissimilar cultural understandings between the two. This cultural dichotomy in the workplace is also important to the local community in how its members are treated. Healthy and happy community members lead to a healthy and happy community. The workplace environment can also drastically affect the family unit. Both work and family can be time consuming and demanding of a person’s attention. There is a growing trend of employee work overload and several authors cite long work hours as the primary source
of work-life conflict (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Rigby & O’Brien-Smith, 2010; Skinner & Pocock, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand how the two coincide under the influence of Korean corporate control of the workplace. The cultural impact should also be of concern to the various Korean American immigrants in their struggle to adapt to life in America. A Korean company can influence their careers and the nature of their surrounding community.

While the corporate tactic of offshoring may not be new, western corporations have been the ones who have historically done it (McMichael, 2008). Moreover, these corporations tended to offshore their facilities to poorer developing countries far from home. This led to the study of globalization’s effect on culture, but usually in terms of how the Western culture may be diluting the culture of the place of occupation (Zhou & Belk, 2004). For instance, American companies would open up facilities in countries like China, India, and South Korea, exposing them to the Western culture of America (McMichael, 2008; Ritzer, 2013).

Now this trend seems to be reversing course. One set of developing Asian nations known as little tigers are now host to some of the world’s largest multinational corporations that are beginning to do some offshoring of their own (Jain, Malik, & Cruickshank, 2006). Companies like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai that are headquartered in South Korea and have begun to open up manufacturing operations overseas in the United States. However, it is not cheap American labor that is driving this trend. Arguably, the labor is cheaper in the homeland of these countries. Instead, it is speed to the American marketplace that is the driver (Chang, 2008; Jo & You, 2011). By establishing local manufacturing and distribution centers, South Korean conglomerates are able to sell goods to the American public in a cheaper and faster fashion. Access to the American individualistic consumer is the goal. Company names that were once
considered by Americans to be subpar and producers of low quality goods are now considered top brand names that offer top quality products.

Some American municipalities even lobby these big firms to open facilities in their area by offering them huge tax incentives (Jacobs, 2012). It is not the larger cities like Los Angeles or Chicago that are courting these companies. It is the smaller townships in the rural South that are doing so. Not only can they offer tax incentives but also relatively cheap land and operating costs when compared to their larger counterparts. The labor force tends to be less expensive in the southern area of the United States as well (Jo & You, 2011). These factors, along with quick access to the marketplace, continue to drive the trend of South Korean companies opening facilities within the United States.

In doing so, South Korean firms must employ American workers in order to remain cost productive. It would not make sense for Hyundai to export Korean workers as the sole employee source of their plant in Atlanta for instance as this would be too expensive. Therefore, these firms have to employ a large amount of Americans in order to keep costs down. Yet, these firms are also not likely to relinquish the control of their overseas operations to Americans alone. They typically reserve the higher managerial roles for only Korean nationals or ensure that every senior foreign manager has a Korean counterpart or overseer (Moskalev and Park, 2010).

Rationale for Research

The establishment of Korean facilities within the Deep South of America makes for an interesting mix of two traditionally different cultures, the East and the West. No longer is this interaction limited to the likes of heads of state or leaders of companies. It is now happening daily between individuals who are on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum.
Understanding the culture of an organization is critical to the success of that organization, its employees, and to its business partners as well (Hansen, Tanuja, Weilbaker, & Guesalaga, 2011). Therefore, it is important to explore what cultural differences emerge, if any, between the employees of such firms (Steers, 2009). Specifically, this study seeks to determine how employees of a South Korean chaebol located in Atlanta, Georgia negotiate the daily conflicts that arise in their efforts to achieve work life balance. The emphasis will be on the cultural differences among the employees in doing so.

Even though some Asian companies have already established a presence in the United States some years ago, they were primarily limited to the automotive industry and located in the customary industrial regions of the country (Hofstede, 1998; Moskalev & Park, 2010). These companies have since expanded into other industries and into other regions of America (Chang, 2008; Shim, 2010; Yasuaki, 1999). Technology has increased the exchange and development rate, dramatically speeding up the movement of Asian companies within the United States (Carl, 2009; Martin & Shim, 2010; Ritzer, 2013). Moreover, these facilities are no longer limited to only manufacturing, but now include other operations as well such as: sales, service departments, distribution centers, and others (Ashrae Journal, 2009; Jo & You, 2011; Jones & Lee, 2006).

Whereas before, manufacturing could primarily be kept separate from the rest of the business units, Asian companies are now becoming more vertically integrated and involved with their facilities that are located abroad (Chang, 2008). Companies are realizing more efficiencies and benefits in this matter; not the least of which being the ability to take advantage of these foreign marketplaces where their manufacturing is located. Transnational corporations are now able to offer those overseas consumers cheaper goods in a faster manner. Asian companies are
beginning to apply the McDonald’s business method in their own right in the United States (Jo & You, 2011; Ritzer, 2013).

With new Asian transnational facilities arising throughout the American landscape, there has also been an increase in Asian nationals who are sent overseas to operate them (Ritzer, 2013; Rutherford & Parker, 2001). These companies also realize the importance of hiring local workers to help run these facilities as well (Jo & You, 2011). The result being that the Asian and American cultures operate and interact with one another on a daily basis. These are two drastically different cultures that have come together in the universal pursuit of economic gain (Kwon, 2003). Given the collective nature of the Asian culture and the individualistic nature of the American one, does this pursuit of economic gain bear the same meaning for both cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)? How is the work balance dynamic negotiated in these types of companies?

To further complicate matters, no longer is the Asian transnational corporation presence in America primarily limited by only Japanese companies (Froese, 2011). Other Asian companies from South Korea, Vietnam, and Singapore, to name a few, have become household names in America as well (Chang, 2008; Jones & Lee, 2006). Arguably, some of these Asian corporations and their investment practices have become so intertwined with America’s economy that they rise and fall together (Grusky, Western, & Wimer, 2011; Jeong, 2004). This is evidenced by the recent Asian Financial Crisis that acted as a significant catalyst in America’s recession of 2007 (Temin, 2010).

The continuing trend of emerging Asian conglomerates within the United States leads to the possibility of various aspects of sociological research. However, to try and make bold predictions based solely upon the Asian category as a whole becomes problematic. Froese
(2011) demonstrates that although many Asian nations have similar cultural influences such as Confucianism, workers in each individual nation possess remarkably different work values. In other words, lumping all Asian nations together as one variable would not lead to reliable results unless the comparisons where macro in nature. If national cultures are to be investigated, then nations should be the units of comparison. Culturally comparing the continent of Asia to the country of the United States is much akin to comparing apples with oranges. Given the cultural diversity among the Asian nations, and the many different Asian nationals operating within the United States, it only makes sense to examine them separately in order to garner valid results (Hofstede, 1980). Like variables must be compared with like. If the culture of Asia is to be compared, it must be done so with that of another continent. Take for example, the culture of Asia versus that of Europe. While there may be some basic generalities among these Asian nations, there are certainly significant differences among them that must be acknowledged as well. Therefore, it is only sensible to investigate each nation separately. Otherwise, one risks the danger of making false assumptions and predictions about a solitary nation based upon findings encompassing the entirety of the Asian continent. It is doubtful that this is the case.

The purpose of this study is to examine the employee work life balance in a South Korean (hereby after referred to as ‘Korean’ for brevity’s sake) chaebol established within the southern United States. Specifically, the research will focus on the effects of the Korean operational work culture and environment on the work-life balance of Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and those classified as non Korean American citizens, or those employees without any Korean heritage or relation. As more and more chaebols expand and develop their operations and facilities throughout America, it becomes necessary to understand how the work life balance is negotiated.
Although there have been studies of work life balance in Asian conglomerates, none take a qualitative approach in their methodology, nor do they specifically focus on facilities operating within the United States. So far, most of these studies employ purely quantitative measures that incorporate large secondary data sources, or sizeable self-reported surveys. These are mostly done on a national scale, encompassing several different firms in their respective Asian country of interest. Furthermore, most studies are limited to investigating only one nationality and do not include employees of different nationalities. For example, Lim, Song, and Choi (2012) investigate work life negotiations of employees of multiple Korean firms operating only in Korea. Their sample includes graduate students in Korean universities as well as full time employees located solely in Korea. Many studies employ this technique of incorporating graduate students in their sample population; probably in an effort to increase their sample size in order to make the conclusions valid in their chosen scale of statistical measurement. This, of course, makes the assumption that these graduate students will indeed be employed in the workforce and within a Korean firm. It also assumes the graduate students will take the same work life negotiation actions once they become a full time employee as they presumed they would.

Again, most studies of Korean work life balance focus on the Korean population and implement only quantitative methods (An, Yom, & Ruggerio, 2010; Eun-Suk, Jae Yoon, & Hyosun, 2011; Froese, 2011; Seong, Hong, & Park, 2012; Lee & Kim, 2010; Lim, Morris, &McMillan, 2011; Lim, Song, & Choi, 2012; Luthans, McCaul, & Dodd, 1985; Park, Nakata, Swanson, & Chun, 2013; Sommer, Bae, & Luthans, 1996). No samples were taken from Korean workers operating within the United States, nor of non-Korean employees working for a Korean firm. No studies have actually focused on cultural comparisons between employees of the same
Korean firm. Additionally, no study on Korean employee work life balance examines the issue over time, or in a longitudinal fashion.

This study furthers the existing literature because it focuses on the work life balance negotiation tactics and attempts at work conflict resolution of chaebol employees with cultural differences. Furthermore, this research is centered on a single Korean chaebol facility operating within the southern United States. The qualitative approach of this investigative inquiry allows for a more intimate understanding of the issue through open-ended interview questions. Also, since a chaebol employed the author for the better part of a year, this study will offer a unique perspective that has yet to be established in the literature. Some researchers have pointed to this lack of insight and have called for research that offers more detail in the day-to-day operations of a chaebol (Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001; Steers, 2009). More importantly, this research will compare and examine the work life balance negotiations between American and Korean employees of the same chaebol firm operating within the southern United States, otherwise considered the traditional South, or South. To date, this research has yet to be accomplished.

Research Questions

My research seeks resolution to the following questions:

1. How do Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and non-Korean American employees negotiate the daily work life balance issues that arise at the same chaebol? Why do employees perform the actions that they do? Are employees conscious of their decisions and on what factors do they base these decisions?
2. How does the management of a chaebol operating within the South treat the different cultures employed by the company? Are all employees treated the same, or can a difference be ascertained in the treatment Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and American nationals? What are these differences and how do they come about?

3. How does a chaebol operating within the United States adjust its human relation policies? Are local cultural traditions and practices taken into account? If so, how and to what degree? Which traditional Korean employee work life practices transfer over to the United States facility?

4. Based upon gender, what, if any, differences in policy (formal or informal sanctions) can be seen? Do females of all cultures have equal opportunity to advance within the company? Are females treated the same or differently? How does treatment compare to their male counterparts?
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL EXAMINATION

This section details the theoretical foundation of this study by giving a basic review of the major theories in the role of culture and organizational management. It is divided into two parts. The first section acknowledges Geert Hofstede as the primary theorist on the cultural organizational management. The majority of the theoretical basis of this paper is based upon his research. As later shown, even his critics acknowledge that he is an authority in this field, and much of what is known about culture and organizational management is due in large part to Hofstede’s groundbreaking work. The second portion seeks to give proper attention to the critics of Hofstede in an effort to present a fair and balanced overview of the matter discussed.

Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede)

A majority of the theoretical foundation of this paper stems from the work of Geert Hofstede, who has been thoroughly cited throughout the literature on organizational culture. While not the sole voice of culture and organizational management, Hofstede’s work has laid a basic foundation for its research. Studies of organizational management that fail to take culture into account will certainly fail to fully comprehend the true operating nature of organizations (Schein, 1996). It is not the countries themselves where the difference lies, but in the institutions of those countries (Hofstede, 1996). Institutions and culture go hand-in-hand. Hofstede (1996) posits that organizational theories become problematic and unrealistic when applied universally. Despite globalism, there is little evidence that cultures are merging (Hofstede, 1996; Hofstede, 2014; Ritzer, 2013). Cell phones and similar clothing do not symbolize a country’s core values or beliefs (Hofstede, 1996). The organizational practices that are effective in one country may
not be so in another (Hofstede, 1998). He calls for more examination of the effects of nationality on organizational management. So far, this has been lacking in the literature.

While working for IBM, it was Hofstede who brought culture to the forefront of management concerns by demonstrating how it plays a significant role within organizations (Hofstede, 1980b). Hofstede defines culture as “the collective mental programming of the people in an environment” (Hofstede, 1980c, p.44). Schein (1990, p.115) posits “culture perpetuates and reproduces itself through the socialization of new members entering the group.” This means that individuals living in the same place within relative close proximity to one another and who engage in on-going interactions with one another tend to behave in a similar fashion. They have been socialized through their society’s various macro and micro institutions to act and behave in a particular way given a particular circumstance (Ritzer, 2013). It is not necessarily a conscious act on the individual’s part, but more of an automatic set of behaviors that has been engrained by his or her community over his or her life span. People are in essence taught how to behave or act. While one can almost certainly ascertain differences among individuals in a specific society, there is also clearly a pattern of certain collective behaviors that links them together (Hofstede, 1980; Cooper, Cartwright, & Earley, 2001; Carl, 2009; Ritzer, 2013).

Since his first revelation in 1980 on organizational culture, Hofstede’s research continues to concentrate on how multinational organizations face the challenge of operating within different nations (Hofstede, 1980a; Hofstede, 1980c; Hofstede, 1996; Hofstede, 1998; Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). Over the years, he has examined how these organizations deal with the different cultures within which they find themselves operating. Before Hofstede’s research, little, if any, attention was paid to the role of culture in terms of organizational management.
(Gofee & Jones, 2001). Until then, organizational management was considered to be mainly an economic endeavor based mostly upon rational choice (Hofstede, 1980b). The argument being that organizations, or individuals within organizations, base decisions and perform actions upon economic rationality alone; or those actions that will yield the greatest economic gain in the most efficient manner. This theory appears to assume that individuals or organizations hold to the western model of rational economic choice. Hofstede argues otherwise (Hofstede, 1980b; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Perhaps Hofstede’s most recognizable contribution to the field of organizational research is his cultural dimensions theory where he created five dimensions in order to compare the different culture of nations (Hofstede, 1980b). He created these five dimensions in order to place nations on the same cultural scale for comparison purposes. He decided to examine nations as the unit of analysis because he posited that the inhabitants of most countries act in a similar fashion that seems to be noticeable to an outsider even though the inhabitants of that nation might not be actively conscious of the behavior themselves (Hofstede, 1980b).

The five dimensions are as follows (with no one any more significant than any of the others): power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long term orientation. Initially, Hofstede limited his dimensions to the first four (Hofstede, 1980b). It was not until sometime later that he added the fifth dimension, long-term orientation (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). Power distance indicates the degree to which individuals in a society accept the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980b). For example, people from an Asian nation are probably more likely to accept and even endorse the fact that certain members of their society have more power than others possess (Kwon, 2003). This inequity in power distribution is seen as a necessary dynamic in many Asian cultures so that
their society runs in an optimum fashion that will ultimately benefit all citizens. It is not necessary for all members of society to have equity as that might slow down the decision process. This is because all members very rarely agree on all issues and to try and come to a common consensus takes too much time. Furthermore, the majority might not decide to take the necessary action for the greater good either because they are misinformed or misled.

Conversely, Americans for the most part, have been socialized to believe that all members of society are to be held in equal esteem. This can be seen in the mantra that every person has an equal vote. The reality of power distribution may in actuality be something different in America, but it is not formally recognized or sanctioned. Furthermore, Americans have a history of rebelling if it comes to light that certain individuals have more power than others and don’t have at least the perceived chance of obtaining equal power or status, no matter how small that chance may be. Americans tend to push for equal power distribution. Hofstede’s (1980b) Power Distance is an effort to successfully compare the tolerance for unequal power distribution among different national cultures.

The second dimension, labeled individualism, also encompasses the collectivist mentality. In other words, it is an effort to depict if members of a society lean more towards being individualistic or more towards acting collectively (Hofstede, 1980b). People in an individualistic society tend to focus their efforts on themselves and their immediate relatives. There is little active concern shown for other members of society. This is not to say that individuals are uncaring about one another; just that there is no strong social pressure to act out of obligation toward other people. It is the exact opposite in a collectivist society. There, members of society are obligated to act out of concern for all members, even if it means to their own detriment as an individual (An, Yom, & Ruggerio, 2010). Here again, the difference can be
exampled by comparing the individualistic nature of American society to that of the collective nature of the Korean one (Kwon, 2003).

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance attempts to capture the amount of tolerance people in a society have for uncertain and ambiguous situations (Hofstede, 1980b). Some societies try to prevent these situations by creating more formal rules. Some societies may even go so far as to formally sanction any ideas or behaviors that go outside of the societal norm (Hofstede, 1980a). Hofstede (1980b) found that people in societies with high anxiety avoidance also suffer from high levels of stress and anxiety. Yet strangely enough, this tends to produce a sense of urgency and a strong desire to work even harder. These individuals believe that experience is of high value, and that they should work hard to achieve it. People in these collective societies also usually believe in absolute truths with very little deviation (Hofstede, 1980a). Truth can be defined by that which people understand the answer to a certain matter to be, or course of action that should be taken in certain circumstances (Schein, 1990).

Hofstede’s (1980b) fourth cultural dimension is masculinity, but this is not meant to be a measurement of gender dominance within a society. It is simply an effort to capture what type of values a society embraces. Some values are classified as being more masculine, while others are deemed more feminine. This is formulated from the historical roles of the male and female in a family unit (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Men were traditionally hunter-gatherers while females were primarily caregivers. Today for example, assertiveness and the acquisition of capital are identified as being masculine, while submissiveness and care giving is still considered to be feminine in nature. So a society that tends to reward assertive behavior more so than submissive behavior is rated high on Hofstede’s Masculine cultural dimension scale.
Long-term orientation, or pragmatism, is the dimension that measures a society’s value of absolute truth in terms of time, with short-term orientation being on the opposite end of the spectrum (Hofstede, 1980b). This dimension is perhaps best explained by offering examples of what each type of society values. A long-term oriented society tends to believe that truth is dependent upon the situation and thus subject to change. This is not only accepted, but expected as well. Traditions tend to change over time as well, depending on the context of the situation. People in these types of societies are more inclined to save capital and be parsimonious by nature.

Short-term oriented societies usually hold to the already established absolute truth and are bound by unchanging traditions (Hofstede, 1980b). Also, these societies are inclined to save less and strive to produce quick results. Long-term planning does not factor into the equation of normative behavior for these types of societies. Hofstede (1993) admitted that the primary purpose of this added dimension to his original culture scale is to differentiate the cultures of the Eastern (Asian) societies, which he considers as short-term oriented and the Western (European) ones which he considers as long-term oriented.

Hofstede’s model continues to prove even more dynamic as he has recently added a sixth dimension coined indulgence versus constraint (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). As the terms in the description imply, this is a measure of a society’s need for the satisfaction of individual gratification of more superficial desires. For example, a society comprised of mostly individuals who buy a lot of consumer goods on credit would rank high in terms of indulgence. Conversely, a society where individuals are pressured through social norms to forgo such desires would rank high in terms of constraint.
Later in his work, Hofstede (1998) recognizes that culture is not restricted to national boundaries. It would be more accurate to ascribe these five dimensions in terms of geographical regions where a particular group of people with similar cultural values reside as opposed to classifying them in terms of national borders. It can be inferred in his earlier works as well, but it is not specifically addressed until later revisions.

Critics of Hofstede

Even though Hofstede is often cited in organization cultural research, his theory is not without its critics. McSweeney is one such critic who has often questioned the validity of Hofstede in his categorizing culture, especially on the national level (McSweeney, 2002b; McSweeney, 2008; McSweeney, 2009). He argues that culture is not confined, or rather defined, by an individual’s citizenship of a nation alone. This may be why Hofstede later specifically addresses this issue and clarifies that his definition of culture is not bound by national borders (Hofstede, 1998).

Furthermore, McSweeney (2002b) argues that the main dimensions of Hofstede’s theory is based on IBM self-reported data collected in 1980, and that alone, it is insufficient to be able to base conclusions on culture. McSweeny posits that the culture of a nation, or an organization, cannot be discovered in the deterministic fashion that Hofstede lays out. Instead, it should be viewed in a probabilistic fashion, taking into accounts the variables of that specific time and place or organization. Others feel that a more robust cultural scale based more upon self reported data should be implemented in organizational research (O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991).
It is unreasonable to assume that all organizations carry within them a singular lone culture by which all members abide (McSweeney, 2006). Unlike national citizenship, it is relatively easy for individuals to move from organization to organization. This transitory nature of organizations makes it arguable that there is more than one corporate culture within any particular organization.

Gerhart (2009) is another theorist who also argues that Hofstede’s approach is too macro in that it restricts the definition of culture to the boundaries of a nation-state. Gerhart’s argument is that the majority of organizational culture variance is not explained by the host nation alone, but within the organization itself. The nationality of the organization only accounts for a relatively minor amount of the variance (Gerhart, 2009; McSweeney, 2002; Jones, 2007). Gerhart (2008) contends that there is evidence of multiple cultures within nations making it difficult to ascertain one dominant form that will thus affect organizational management in a firm. Schein (1990) states that culture cannot simply be represented by large-scale abstract data alone. This fails to fully take into account the individual nature of each organization. A more intimate form of research is needed to ascertain to what degree culture affects an organization. Additionally, Schein (1996) questions whether or not culture can be captured on a survey scale. He recommends the use of more qualitative methods such as ethnography in order to gain a more accurate view of culture not only in an organization, but also in a society as a whole. Relying solely on secondary data allows for a greater propensity for false assumptions to develop.

The main criticism of Hofstede seems to focus solely on his quantitative methodology. These critics appear to make recommended adjustments to Hofstede’s quantitative methods as opposed to anything drastically different in terms of theory (Gerhart, 2009; McSweeney, 2006). In summary, critics of Hofstede hold that there is probably no true national culture and that the
data by which Hofstede formulates his conclusions is limited. Furthermore, they question if
individuals take actions based only upon a perceived national culture or that these individuals
consciously and constantly identify with one.

McSweeney and Hofstede have confronted one another in the literature with Hofstede
giving answers to McSweeney’s critiques and McSweeney being unwilling to accept them
(Hofstede, 2002; McSweeney, 2002a). McSweeney continues his belief that Hofstede’s cultural
assumptions are too bold and cannot be quantifiably supported (McSweeney, 2009). Yet,
without Hofstede’s initial research exposing culture’s consequences on organizational
management, McSweeney would have little to refute and thus little to offer. Moreover, Hofstede
does seem to satisfactorily address most, if not all, of McSweeney’s criticisms in his later works
(Hofstede, 2002; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). It may serve better to continue to build
upon Hofstede’s work as opposed to focusing resources on tearing it down (Bond, 2002).

Overall, there seems to be overwhelmingly more support for Hofstede’s theory than
opposition to it (Jones, 2007). Hofstede continues to be cited in the literature with his current
count at over 94,000 (“Geert Hofstede,” 2013). One can only assume that his theory and its
relevance will continue in the field of organizational culture for quite some time to come.

Taking his critics into account, the intent of this study is to draw upon Hofstede’s cultural
dimension framework in examining the work life balance negotiations of employees in a Korean
chaebol newly established in the southern part of the United States. Accounting for these
cultural dimensions should prove insightful, given the fact that Korea and the United States stand
drastically apart on most of them (Hofstede, 1980a). This research proposes that there will be
notable differences in how Korean, Korean American, and non Korean American employees of
the same chaebol negotiate work life balance situations given their respective differences in cultural backgrounds.

The Cultural Dimensions Comparison of the United States and South Korea

Hofstede (2014) established a foundation devoted to the understanding of the various cultures by country. The Hofstede Centre breaks down the culture of each of the world’s known countries by his cultural dimensions. The description is a basic overview to help foster a better understanding of each culture. Additionally, the website offers a comparison tool that allows the reader to view one country’s cultural dimensions next to another’s. The centre offers a numbered rating for each of these dimensions per country on a scale of 1 to 100; with 1 being the lowest value and 100 being the highest. This allows the reader to numerically compare the two countries. Below is the cultural depiction of each nation as viewed by the cultural dimensions theory.

South Korea’s culture has been developed over a span of centuries dating back to 2333 BC (Choy, 1979). Koreans are acutely aware of their origins and strive hard to maintain their traditions and customs. Hofstede attempts to capture the primary traits of the South Korean culture in the six dimensions of his theory that follows.

As previously stated, power distance recognizes that to some degree, there is a difference in the distribution of power in most societies. It is the extent to which the less powerful members of a society accept the authority of the more powerful members. On Hofstede’s (2014) cultural scale, South Korea is represented by a score of 53. This means that the country is somewhat hierarchical in its organization and that a member’s position in it is relatively accepted without need of much explanation. Control in organizations is centralized with subordinates
expecting to be instructed and readily doing so. The ideal superior is expected to behave in a benevolent manner, and is ultimately in control with little input from those below him or her. Koreans believe that some individuals are superior to the masses and should lead the nation and make decisions for the sake of everyone (Shim, 2010).

Individualism is the sense of interdependence a person in a society feels. The two ends of the scale or individualistic or collective. South Korea is considered to be a very collective society with a score of 14 (Hofstede, 2014). A person’s commitment to all societal relationships, both personal and organizational, is long-term and treated with the utmost loyalty. This collectivism is institutionalized throughout society (Shim, 2010). Any resistance to this, either formal or informal, results in staunch penalties, both formal and informal. All individuals take on responsibility for all other members of society. The greater good must be considered before the individual (Shin, 2010). The primary penalty for putting oneself before the whole results in a loss of face. This means the individual carries a heavy sense of shame (Hofstede, 2014; Lim et al., 2012).

In terms of employment, subordinates tend to work as a group and try not to stick out as an individual. If a person is successful, it is only because his or her group is successful as a unit. No one person is more or less important than others in the same group. Subordinates expect to be told what to do by their immediate manager and rarely if ever take any initiative for fear of bringing shame upon themselves, their group, or their manager (Hofstede, 2014; Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001). Managers seek little to no input from any one certain employee. Rather, he or she does so from the group as a whole in order to promote harmony (Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001). A manager’s success or failure depends on his or her ability to
conform his or her team to the confines of the overall organization. The object is to succeed collectively, and not as an individual.

Masculinity represents what types of attributes a society values most, masculine on the high end of the scale, or feminine on the low end (Hofstede, 2014). Masculine traits are represented by behaviors such as competition, achievement, and aggressiveness. Feminine ones consist of things such as caring for others and quality of life. Individual success is not recognized or rewarded.

With a score of 38, Hofstede (2014) considers South Korea to be a society that values more of the feminine traits. Here, managers try to resolve conflicts by directing the involved parties towards compromise and negotiation. It is believed that this fosters a better sense of harmony and balance within the organization if all parties eventually come to an agreement. Furthermore, subordinates realize this and strive to cooperate accordingly. Conflicts are usually resolved through acceptance and compromise. Outright individual disagreement is frowned upon and not tolerated.

Uncertainty avoidance depicts the amount a society is willing to accept their fate, or try to control it (Hofstede, 2014). In other words, to what degree is the future known? It is an effort to explain how a society handles the anxiety that comes with the ambiguity of the future. On Hofstede’s (2014) scale, South Korea ranks as one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world with a score of 74. As such, it values tradition and holds to known customs in efforts to avoid the unknown. Koreans are risk averse (Froese, 2011). Its citizens do not accept any radical behavior that deviates from the cultural norms of South Korea. It is feared that this type of action will bring about unknown results, which is the source of great anxiety. As such, new ideas or ways of doing things are hard to come by. People have a great need for rules, which
they tend to follow even if they do not fully understand the meaning of the rules; or if the rules do not seem to produce any results.

Long-term orientation (pragmatism) attempts to capture the need a society has to explain the events of life (Hofstede, 2014). Does a society need to have an explanation for everything that happens, or does it accept events with little to no need for explanation? Again, South Korea falls on one of the extreme sides of this scale with a score of 87. This means that the country is one of the most pragmatic nations in the world and people tend to behave with the long-term in mind. People are more prone to consider future generations in their actions as opposed to focusing on near-term results.

Relative to organizational commitment, the higher a person’s position is in the firm’s management structure, the more committed he or she is to the organization (Sommer, Bae, & Luthans, 1996). Length of time also affects commitment. Due to their seniority at the company, older Koreans are shown to be more committed and are less likely to leave.

Indulgence is the sixth dimension and has been recently added to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions model (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). This dimension measures the extent to which people control their wants and desires. This dimension measures the degree that a society either indulges or restrains itself. This is primarily captured in the way a society socializes its children (Hofstede, 2014). South Korea scores 29 on this dimension denoting that its citizens tend to value a great deal of restraint (Hofstede, 2014). Immediate individual gratification in South Korea is considered wrong. It is not sought nor rewarded. Moreover, an individual’s leisure time is not considered a priority and is of little consequence.

American culture can be difficult to conceptualize and Hofstede recognizes the fact that it can vary by region throughout the country (as it does in others) (Hofstede, 2014). However, he
fittingly points out that Americans can move throughout the states successfully without having to be briefed on the cultural differences of each. There is a central culture that exists throughout the United States. Below is Hofstede’s conceptualization of the nation’s culture in terms of his six cultural dimensions.

Americans tend to realize that the power in society is distributed unequally with certain individuals having more power than others. A score of 40 on Hofstede’s scale represents the notion that people are somewhat excepting of this inequality, but also seek to resolve it to an extent. This is slightly lower than South Korea’s score demonstrating that Americans are not as readily excepting of society’s inequity of power as are the South Koreans. Americans seek equal rights for all members of their society. Organizations are fairly hierarchical with managers seeking input from subordinates and relying on their cooperation (Hofstede, 2014). The purely autocratic style of leadership is rarely accepted or successful.

No other nation ranks higher on the scale of individualism as does the United States, which scores 91 in this dimension (Hofstede, 2014). This means that Americans place the ultimate value on their own individual needs. People consider themselves and that of their immediate family or group members before all others. There is little evidence of Americans taking actions for the sake of other society members who are unknown to them. Most members of society look out for themselves and expect little help from those in authority. Conversely, they feel little need to ubiquitously help strangers.

In terms of work, each employee considers himself a valuable and unique part of the organization. Americans expect that their employer will institute policies and procedures that will help take of them and their families and will allow for a healthy work-life balance (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Successful managers realize this fact and treat their subordinates
accordingly (Hofstede, 2014). Employees must have some degree of input and allowed to express their individualism to a certain degree. Subordinates are expected to be self-reliant and take the initiative whenever possible in order to speed up productivity. Those who have to be constantly told what to do by their managers are not held in high regard by the organization. Promotions and rewards are supposedly based on an individual’s merit as opposed to his or her seniority.

With a score of 62, the United States is considered to place a high value on masculine traits such as competition and individual success (Hofstede, 2014). American organizations tend to reward individuals by basing one person’s actions against that of another’s (Gofee & Jones, 2001). Organizational cohorts are viewed more as competitors as opposed to colleagues. This competition is continually reinforced by the actions of the organization in hopes of realizing everyone’s best efforts. What is especially interesting about this measurement of American success by Hofstede is that he posits that people value the ability to be able to demonstrate their individual successes openly as opposed to just merely being successful (Hofstede, 2014). In other words, being successful alone does not mean much. One must be able to also demonstrate this success to others. More value is placed on the demonstration of success. Therefore, it means more in American society to look successful as opposed to actually being successful. This can be evidenced by the desire for name brand consumer goods and clothes, expensive cars, and large houses. Even if the person is heavily in debt and does not own these things outright, it appears as if he or she has ownership; therefore denoting his or her success.

Conflict is seen as necessary and valued by Americans. It forces individuals to do their best in order to succeed. If individuals are successful, the organizations they belong to tend to be
considered successful as well. This competitive spirit is socialized early in American children through various sports and school class rankings.

Hofstede (2014) scores the United States 46 in this dimension. This means that Americans tend to be innovative and try new things without knowing the outcome ahead of time. They allow others to express new ideas without fear of reprisal. As a result, Americans tend to be less emotional about the future and less beholden to long-established rules. However, Americans demonstrate a tendency to worry about threats to their freedoms and tend to allow for certain government regulations in efforts to preserve them (Hofstede, 2014).

Americans score relatively low on the pragmatic scale. They tend to want an explanation for most events and are unwilling to accept things as merely being an eventuality. They have a strong idea of what is good and what is evil. This aids Americans in explaining the nature of events. It is one of the only western countries where church attendance has risen in the 20th century (Hofstede, 2014). Businesses look for short-term results and measure themselves quarterly as opposed to being measured by any number of total future years. For example, a company that has and works towards a successful five-year plan may ultimately fail if this same plan does not produce quarterly successful results within the first year. This dimension coupled with the high individualism score means that employees are less likely to feel any sense of long term loyalty to their company, nor is the company likely to feel any sense of loyalty to the employee.

Americans are represented on this scale with a score of 68. This means that people tend to act on their personal wants and desires. Hofstede (2014) demonstrates how this combined with their low pragmatic score makes for certain contradictions in American society. For example, drugs have been illegal and fought against for some time in the United States, but
Americans’ illegal drug use continues to rise. Overall, it appears to be a prudish society, but pornography and divorce are on the rise (Hofstede, 2014). This is difficult to understand for many outsiders.

**Figure 1.** A cultural comparison of the United States and South Korea.

This figure provides a visual demonstration of the clear cultural difference between the United States and South Korea (Hofstede, 2014). The two nations experience some difference in every dimension with the most notable being Individualism, Pragmatism, and Indulgence. South Koreans feel a strong sense of collectivism and focus on long-term success. They tend to think and act as a group (Gofee and Jones, 2001). Korean companies are extremely homogeneous and as such do not often benefit from outside ideas (Butler & Early, 2001). They tend to be ethnocentric with little tolerance for other cultures’ ways of doing things. As such, it becomes difficult for these companies to accept change or quickly adapt to new market circumstances (Chang, 2008).
In contrast, Americans are one of the most individualistic people on Earth and tend to focus on near-term success. Where loyalty between the company and its employees is paramount to Koreans, it is rarely realized in America. Korean workers view their job as a sacred duty and a matter of personal honor with a sense of responsibility for their fellow workers’ and company’s overall success (Steers, 2009). They typically work longer hours than their American counterparts (Lee & Kim, 2010). On the other side, the competitive nature of American companies leaves little room for any sense of long-term allegiances and employees tend to view work as more of a necessity than an obligation (Cooper, Cartwright, and Earley, 2001). Lasting business relationships in America depend more upon a constant sense of quid pro quo between involved parties.

The United States and South Korea are polar opposites when it comes to indulgence versus restraint as well. While Americans tend to indulge in their immediate desires, South Koreans tend to show restraint and delay any immediate satisfaction in hopes of possible rewards later on in the future. South Koreans are less likely to be innovative or take chances than Americans. To do so would cause major anxiety for fear of the unknown outcomes that will result in doing so. Furthermore, South Korean employees require much more direction and attention than do their American counterparts. If an American manager provided constant direction to his or her employees, he or she would be seen as a micromanager and would be resented by his or her employees. Conversely, if a Korean manager failed to provide constant direction, he or she would be considered incompetent and resented by his or her employees for not paying enough attention to their tasks. It causes great stress in a South Korean employee if he or she hears very little from his or her boss (Lee & Kim, 2010). The person feels as if he or she is doing something wrong.
The masculine traits of individual success in terms of competition are celebrated in the United States. Individuals seek to publically display their success and look to be rewarded for doing so. This is not the norm in South Korea. Groups tend to ostracize any individual who displays his or her personal achievement above that of the group. The country embraces the more feminine traits of caregiving and consensus by group.

It is important to understand the theoretical comparison of the cultures above in order to determine an employee’s actions in terms of his or her work-life balance. Hofstede (1996) argues against economists who say that action is purely a rational play based upon efficiencies of exchanges. He posits instead “power and the ability to put constraints on the behavior of others are also structural or systemic, precisely depending on the position of the firm within the structures of inter-firm relations” (Hofstede, 1996, p. 529). Given the drastic cultural differences between the two cultures, this study investigates how employees of a South Korean company located in the United States handle conflicts in their work-life balance.
CHAPTER 3  
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is presented in the following five sections: (1) Work-life balance definition and origin, (2) Work-life balance gender differences, (3) History of the Korean chaebol, (4) Work-life balance in South Korea, and (5) Korean Americans.

Work-life Balance Definition and Origin

This study focuses on cultural differences among employees within the same work force in how they each manage their respective work-life balance. While the study of work-life balance is nothing new, there has yet to be a study that focuses on the multicultural aspect. The studies that do account for culture do so in a homogeneous fashion. These researchers simply compared two or more nationalities in their respective countries to determine if there are any differences among employees (Chang, 2012; Choi and Kim, 2012; Galovan, Fackrell, Buswell, Jones, Hill, Carroll, 2010; Hill, Erickson, and Holmes, 2010; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Lyonette, Crompton, and Wall, 2007; Mortazavi, Pedhiwala, Shafiro, Hammer, 2009; Verma, Chang, Kim, and Rainboth, 2009). This is certainly a sound research method and much can be learned from these studies. However, there is much still to be learned that this method is not designed to discover. Specifically, there is no accounting for a multicultural work force within the same facility. Since globalization seems to be continuing, it only stands to reason that more and more multinational work forces will emerge. The likelihood of a purely homogeneous work force in an industrialized or a developing nation is most likely minimal. Therefore, it only makes sense to devote attention to the subject now to better understand this phenomenon as it develops.
The subject of work-life balance has become a significant area of research in academia. Its emergence can be traced back to the early days of the Industrial Revolution, which transformed the way in which the world viewed and treated work. The actual term work-life balance may not have been coined then, but the subject was certainly discussed by the likes of Marx, Weber, and others. The world had shifted and work was no longer limited to one’s community where work tasks were more likely to be divided equally so that everyone was treated fairly in terms of the division of labor when compared to others in the same community (Tonnis, 2001). In the small rural towns that existed prior to the Industrial Revolution, there was no such thing as a third shift. Most community members farmed the land on which they lived and interacted with those around them. There was no such thing as commuting to work. This is not to say that there were never imbalances between one’s work and one’s family, or personal life. On the whole, the two were merely more integrated with one another and not easily separated. For example, if a family had a farm, their lifestyle most likely revolved around that farm and it was harder to draw a clear divide between efforts devoted for the sole purpose of work and efforts towards the sole purpose of family. In past times, certainly one could distinguish leisure time, but that is not the complete definition of what constitutes the life side of work-life a balance. There is more to it than merely one’s devotion of time to leisurely events.

It is an effort to describe those times in which a person’s work and personal life requirements interfere with one another. The demands of family and work on the individual are defined by how his or her surrounding society has socialized them to be (Shenkar & Ronen, 1987). The community defines the values, beliefs, and roles associated with work life and home life. It is the community’s culture that tells the individual which role takes priority over the other. It is when the demands of each role has been assigned equal value and present themselves
simultaneously, that an individual experiences conflict. This is because he or she cannot devote the same needed time and energy to both sets of demands at the same time and there is pressure to do so. One cannot easily prioritize these demands to the equal satisfaction of all parties involved.

While leisure activities are included in the definition of one’s personal life, it is not the primary focus of concern. In terms of life balance, a person’s responsibilities to matters such as family, personal health, and local community are some of the more important variables of investigation. This is not to say that work is always the culprit in terms of the balance equation. A person’s personal life can also be the cause of distress in his or her workplace environment (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Devi & Kumari, 2012). A person’s troubled marriage, or home life can negatively influence his or her work experience. Several authors have actually demonstrated that many people use their workplace as an escape from the perils of their private life (Choi & Kim, 2012; Ford & Collinson, 2011). They employ their place of employment as a refuge and simply disengage from their personal life responsibilities.

The actual phrase work-life balance came about in the late 1970s, gained momentum as a field of study in the 1980s, and was indoctrinated formally into the business world with the implementation of human resource departments throughout corporate America (Devi & Kumari, 2012; Ilgen & Hulin, 2000). The increasing number of women entering the work force has made the study of work-life balance more prevalent than perhaps it was one hundred years ago. The 1970s brought about the sustained trend of women entering the work force and developing their careers (Rudd, & Descartes, 2008). In industrialized western societies, women are no longer limited to the role of primary care giver in the home. The nuclear family in the traditional sense as the ideal model is no longer the reality for a majority of families in America (Ritzer,
For a variety of reasons (globalization, single parenthood, slow economy) more and more women are taking on the role of primary breadwinner in their home (Rudd, & Descartes, 2008). As such, women are now commanding a more fair and equitable treatment in terms of work and career when compared to that of their male counterparts. While many western societal laws and global corporate conglomerates have instituted formal sanctions to facilitate fair workplace practices for women, there are still many informal social factors and social institutions that have so far prevented ultimate gender equality in the workplace (Lyonette, Crompton, & Wall, 2007).

So in large part, the issue of gender equality in the workforce and life at home has led to a more focused attention on the overall study of work-life balance. The simple fact that women no longer bear sole responsibility as the primary caregiver at home does not negate the need for that role to be fulfilled (Jang & Appelbaum, 2010; Koo, 2001). Therefore, much of the work-life balance literature has focused on not only what work-life balance means for women, but for men as well. This is because an increasing amount of men have had to either shift from their role as primary breadwinner to caregiver, or at the very least take on more of a caregiver role (Ritzer, 2012). Men in America now have to balance more of their home life and responsibilities with that of their work responsibilities when historically that has not been the case.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) provided one of the first formal recognitions of the phrase in the literature describing the conflicting roles of work and personal life that can arise. In today’s globalized economy, the pressures of both family and work continue to increase (Ritzer, 2013). Family life in terms of parenting, care giving, and relationship with significant other can be equally demanding as work requirements in one’s job or career. For example, Lareau (2011) details the pressure today’s parents feel relative to that of previous generations in providing for their children. Many parents feel the need to provide significant amounts of time towards their
children’s extracurricular activities and scholastic endeavors. Many others feel the strain and embarrassment of not being able to provide these things for their children due to their lack of funds or conflict with work, or both. An individual’s conflicting roles of parent and worker seem to be a continuing trend in the literature that has expanded beyond the borders of America (Choi, Kim, Park, and Dancy, 2012; Hurh, 1998; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Jang & Appelbaum, 2010; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997; Moon, 2008; Rudd and Descartes, 2008).

Because one’s job and one’s family function are the two most dominant roles in a person’s life, how he or she feels at one role, is how he or she tends to feel at the other (Rudd and Descartes, 2008). If a person is happy at work, then he or she tends to be happy at home. If a person is happy at home, then he or she tends to be happy at work. When facing a strain in one role, a common tactic might be to spend more time at the other. While one might easily draw the conclusion that a person will seek out more ways to spend time at home when he or she is unhappy at work, the opposite has been found to be true as well (Rudd and Descartes, 2008). If a person is experiencing problems at home, he or she can shift to spending more time at work. This tactic is more readily accepted and harder for family members to oppose given the possible monetary gain and security experienced by all family members by the person doing so. This does not solve the family conflict however. It merely delays or exacerbates it.

Work-Life Balance Gender Differences

As more women left their home and entered the workplace, a void in what was considered the traditional caregiver role at home developed (Rudd and Descartes, 2008). Given a woman’s responsibilities at work in terms of time, she was no longer able to devote as much time to her traditional home care responsibilities. Women tend to work long hours and put in
extra effort in order to advance their careers (Rudd and Descartes, 2008). At the same time, men continued their role as the traditional breadwinner and had not adjusted to abate the caregiving needs at home. Moreover, the rapidly deteriorating nuclear family meant that either fewer men were involved in the family, or more extended family members were present. Either way, this caused more stress on the career, or working-woman who had to not only take care of her career but was expected to continue to fulfill the role of traditional care giver at home as well.

As women continued to enter the work force, many companies adjusted their employment policies to allow employees to devote more time and resources to their responsibilities at home (Ford, and Collinson, 2011). Companies do so not so much out of good will, but in efforts to decrease overall cost in employee turnover and retention (Hill, Erickson, & Holmes, 2010). Even though these policies are geared towards both male and female employees, it is still women in most societies who feel the most stress arising from conflict between work and home or private life (Chandra, 2012). Lyonette et al. (2007) found that women across all occupations demonstrated high levels of stress developed from long hours at their place of employment combined with their anxiety over the childcare arrangements for their children. This source of stress was not present at the same level in their male counterparts.

For example, a mother might feel the need work late in order to keep her job when many of her peers are being fired due to a recession in the economy and a downturn in company revenue. This is especially true if her direct manager is encouraging this behavior. At the same time, she has to pick up her kids from child-care at a certain time or be charges a hefty increased charge for the extra child-care. Moreover, there may be no late time child-care available. So what is the mother to do? If she leaves work on time, she is able to reasonably take care of her home responsibility, but places her job in jeopardy and therefore placing her home life at risk.
At the same time if she works late, she is either charged a fee that would erode her salary or is forced to leave her children on their own. Of course, most laws would not allow this even if the mother may be so inclined to do so. This is just one type of scenario that causes stress from a work-life balance issue.

**History of the Korean Chaebol**

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the relevance of culture in relation to the work-life balance issue in large Korean companies, it is important to appreciate the history of such organizations. Even though chaebols are considered global companies that appear to be similar to their counterparts that stem for the West, these Korean companies have a distinct developmental history that sets them apart. One of the main differences is their rapid ascension to global reach. Whereas western business models have developed over generations since the time of the Industrial Revolution, South Korean conglomerates did not begin until some time after the Korean War (Chung, 2007; Jain, Malik, & Cruickshank, 2006; Janelli, 1993; Shim, 2010). Since that time, they have achieved global dominance in their respective industries under the guidance of the same ownership, or a single generation (Chang, 2008; Gray, 2008; Janelli, 1993; Jeong, 2004). In the 1950s, South Korea ranked as one of the poorest nations in the world and had to rely on large amounts of foreign investments and loans in order to provide for its people (Chung, 2007). Chung (2007) reveals how many Koreans resented having to rely on foreign aid in the past and still see it as a source of shame. In 1960 at the beginning of South Korea’s industrialization, the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) was only $2.3 billion (Chung, 2007, p. 64). Manufacturing comprised only 15% of this number with the majority of the rest stemming from agricultural sources. Now, South Korea is an economic center whose
industry spans everything from automobiles to electronics. The country is a world leader in technologies that are high-tech, such as flat screen televisions, mobile phones, and especially semi-conductors (Froese, 2011). In less than fifty years, South Korea transformed from a poor agricultural society into a vibrant industrial hub and global power (Chang, 2008; Chung, 2007).

The chaebols played a large part in this economic turnaround. Most of these companies started in a similar fashion after the war (Chung, 2007; Janelli, 1993). A single owner would start a very small local operation and begin to grow his business with help from the government and some foreign investors (Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001; Shim, 2010). Many of these owners would then look to western business models in order to make their operation successful. Some eventual chaebol owners first attended advanced business schools in America or Europe and incorporated what they learned into their own business when they returned to South Korea (Janelli, 1993). Others would seek information and training from western companies after they began their initial operation within Korea. For the most part, these owners wanted to be able to duplicate the success of American companies but without compromising the Korean culture (Chang, 2008; Janelli, 1993).

Many Korean owners also looked to Japanese companies for guidance, but only those companies that had already proven successful in productivity and profitability (Janelli, 1993; Lie, 1990). While similar with respect to loyalty and collectivism, Korean management style and operational vision does differ from that of the Japanese (Lie, 1990). There is more emphasis on seniority in a Japanese company where workers of large companies enjoy lifetime employment guarantees. Even though longevity in a Korean company is pretty standard, their employment is by no means formally guaranteed (Lie, 1990; Steers, 2009). Another difference is that Japanese companies tend to design and develop their own line of product internally, often introducing new
technologies. Sony’s Blu-ray player is an example of this (Chang, 2008). Conversely, South Korean companies tend to wait for other companies to introduce a new technology and then quickly copy and commoditize it (Chung, 2007). They reverse engineer a technology and then mass-produce it, capitalizing on economies of scale. Their goal is to be able to make a competitor’s product of equal quality in a faster and cheaper manner. By doing so, they are able to capture market share and become an industry leader in that product category. Samsung has a strong history of this business model (Chang, 2008; Steers, 2009). For instance, Apple developed and launched its iPhone well before the Samsung launched its Galaxy, which has a strikingly similar look, feel, and technology. As such, a priori technological innovation does not seem to be a core value in chaebols.

From the beginning, chaebol owners managed their companies from the top down and were involved in most of the decision-making (Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001). An idea has to originate at the top of the organization. There is no allowance for any bottom up planning or decision input. This trend continues today (Moskalev, & Park, 2010). Of course, this falls in line with the hierarchical culture with which Koreans are familiar and have come to expect (Hofstede, 2014).

These chaebol owners courted the Korean government and a strong bond between the two institutions was soon formed (Janelli, 1993; Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001). As a result, many of the political leaders over the years came from the country’s army (Kim, 2007). The South Korean army was also a source of leadership for both the chaebols and the government alike. This is much akin to C. Wright Mill’s theory, the power elite that he posited for the leadership and control of American society (Mills, 1956). One such person was the Park Chung Hee who left his role as a general in the army to become the president of South Korea.
from 1961 to 1979 (Janelli, 1993). When he became president, Park was faced with an impoverished nation. He reasoned that he could help bring the nation out of poverty by exerting authoritarian control and directing aid towards these fledgling chaebol companies (Chung, 2007; Janelli, 1993; Shim, 2010). As such, the government implemented many policies such as import tariffs and employment laws that had a direct positive influence on chaebol businesses (Chung; 2007; Janelli, 1993). As the government took care of the chaebols, the chaebols in turn took care of the government. Taxes from these companies supported many community development and government projects (Janelli, 1993). Chaebols also historically represent the majority of South Korea’s Research & Development (R&D) investment. It grew from $526 million in 1981 to $26.3 Billion in 2005 to which chaebols account for 57% of the overall spend (Chung, 2007, p.65).

As the chaebols grew, they were able to offer more and more jobs to the public. The more the company grew in size, the more committed its employees were to the organization (Sommer, Bae, & Luthans, 1996). The growing job market and declining rate of poverty aided in making the government look good to the public who continued to tolerate its authoritative control as a result (Shim, 2010). The public’s tolerance was aided by the fact that the government invested heavily in education and human resource development (Chung, 2007). Additionally, chaebol management played to the general public’s deep sense of nationalism that arose from years of occupation and conflict (Moskalev, & Park, 2010). They marketed their tactics as necessary for the overall good of the country. The public’s tolerance of the tight bond between the chaebols and the government reached somewhat of an end in 1979 when President Park was assassinated (Hurh, 1998). Many workers were frustrated at the governments apparent lack of concern at the long work hours and poor working conditions experienced at most of the
chaebols. While the South Korean government continued to be highly centralized and influential to businesses after the assassination, the dictatorial type degree of its strict authoritarian nature somewhat lessened in the following years (Janelli, 1993).

Even though this type of trickle down economics was substantial in forming a strong bond between the South Korean government and the chaebols, it was not the only factor involved. Perhaps a more important factor to the growth of the chaebols was the fact that they contributed campaign funds to loyal government officials and provided these officials with personal financial encouragement for continued support of the chaebols as well (Janelli, 1993). Formal and informal financial support of government officials became the norm. Chaebols would contribute to campaign funds, provide personal financial incentives for continued support, and offer high-level jobs to officials retiring from government positions. These types of actions have sustained the bond between chaebols and the South Korean government over the years.

The Korean chaebols continue to be held by the initial owner, or the initial owner’s immediate family (Chang, 2008; Moskalev & Park, 2010). Unlike American publically held companies who for the most part are run by people without familial blood ties to the original owners (General Electric is not run by Thomas Edison’s family for example), chaebols continue to be run by members of the company’s founder. Chaebols are distinctive in that they are effectively controlled by the owners who only have a small equity stake yet are in command of all member firms (Moskalev & Park, 2010). Even though most chaebols have business units and sub business units that have outside chaebol family executives, all of these units report into the central holding unit controlled by the chaebol family members (Chang, 2008; Kim, 2007). This means that a very few families are in charge of a majority of South Korea’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
The financial make-up and fund distribution is also different than that of American companies. An American company that is public pays dividends to its shareholders. Shareholders also have a vote in company officers and certain company strategic operations. While there are certainly episodes of nepotism within these American companies, they are not formally accepted by the public. Meaning that the general populace would become outraged at the hint of any type of favoritism that prevented an equitable distribution of funds the rightful shareholders. Or worse yet, an insider type action by a CEO or senior leadership that caused shareholders to wrongfully loose their money. Enron and MCI WorldCom are two such examples.

However, this same type of public scrutiny is not exactly the same for Korean conglomerates. While publically traded, the owner’s family stills maintain control of the company with little to no authority given to outside shareholders (Chang, 2008; Janelli, 1993; Kim, 2007; Rowley, Johngseok, & Tae-Won, 2001). Even though they may own shares in the chaebol, shareholders outside of the family do not have a real voice in company operations or leadership. While outright formal acceptance of company financial transgressions is very limited, the informal acceptance rate from the public is quite high (Chang, 2008; Kim, 2007). The general South Korean populace tends to accept the dominance of the chaebol family in their nepotistic management and distribution of funds given that the chaebol provides for the greater financial good of the public at large (Hurh, 1998; Kim, 2007). The company’s transgressions historically have been seen as a necessary evil.

This public acceptance of indiscretions has been shown to lessen over time however. The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the Korean credit crisis in the early 2000s that followed have shaken that public acceptance of chaebol dominance (Jeong, 2004; Kim, 2007; Moskalev &
Park, 2010). During those times, chaebols distorted their balance sheets to reflect growth when in actuality there was decline (Moskalev & Park, 2010). Additionally, many chaebol executives engaged in tunneling, or the act of directing company assets or future business to themselves for personal gain. These executives also awarded themselves excessive compensation packages and guaranteed personal loans (Moskalev & Park, 2010). Due to their highly centralized and hierarchical structure, chaebols did not have an effective internal review or third party audit process that ameliorated the pending financial crises mentioned earlier.

Actions such as these have caused the general population to be torn on their support of the chaebol system. Some Koreans still posit that the past abuses of the chaebols were necessary to help develop and industrialize South Korea. Others blame the actions of chaebol ownership for bringing about these financial crises regardless of their role in industrialization. These financial crises threw the country into heavy debt and the country had to seek a $21 Billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to prevent a full blown economic depression (An, Yom, Ruggiero, 2011; Moskalev & Park, 2010). Many Koreans saw this as a source of national shame in the face of the rest of the world. From the time of those crises, many Koreans have pushed the South Korean government for chaebol financial reform, tighter security exchange laws, and employment reforms (Kim, 2007; Moskalev & Park, 2010; Verma, Chang, Kim, & Rainboth, 2009). Foreign investors have also begun to apply pressure for financial reform as well. People are no longer willing to categorically accept the traditional chaebol owner-manager style of control (Moskalev & Park, 2010). The historical close ties between the government and the chaebols gives an indication as to why these reforms have been slow to develop.
The majority of South Koreans acknowledge the part that chaebols played in bringing their country out of poverty. Historically, the South Korean people have been supportive of the chaebol initiatives and even acknowledge that the companies’ close relationship with the government is a necessity. They also posit that it is necessary for these companies to be run by one family. Being collective in nature, the Korean people tend to believe that it is necessary for one person to ultimately be in charge and that person’s direction should be followed with little question. This is necessary to avoid uncertainty in their life. Also, they believe that they will ultimately benefit from the direction of these chaebol owners even if they do not necessarily agree with everything the chaebols are doing. This much resembles the ideal of a benevolent dictator (Hofstede, 2014). Certain unpleasantries must be endured for the greater good.

This ideal has presented some strain over the past few years in South Korea. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government support chaebol work policies that in essence forced workers to suffer long work hours. The increased labor time meant more profits and growth for the chaebols and thus their continued financial support of the government. In the past, the general populace generally supported increased work hours as it still allowed for a better quality of life than the person had prior to chaebol existence. Many of the chaebol workers could remember a time when they were starving in their rural homesteads, so they accepted the increased work hours as a lesser of two evils.

This acceptance seemed to last until employees entered the work force that were not born during those days of starvation. These younger workers did not understand why their elders continued to support such elongated work hours. Many companies continued to increase the work requirements to the point that many workers barely had enough time to sleep and no time for any activities outside of work. Many of these younger workers expressed their feeling of
hopelessness against this social structure and began to rebel. They formulated many anti-labor demonstrations, several of which led to violent confrontations with the police. One young man even set himself on fire in protest to the long work hours that people were being forced to undergo. Finally, enough civic unrest transpired that the government finally intervened and put several human rights sanctions into place. Chaebols had to abide by certain labor laws and human rights initiatives. While these formal sanctions abated the labor issue, the culture of long work hours continues to endure in South Korea.

Work-Life Balance in South Korea

The rapid industrialization of South Korea over the past half-decade has also meant rapid change in the nature of the labor force (Chung, 2007). Prior to World War II, Korea was primarily an agricultural society comprised of small farms that operated on a local level. Due to Japan’s occupation of the country in the many year’s leading up to the war, there was little to no industrial activity and no involvement with the outside world other than with Japan itself (Lie, 1990; Moskalev & Park, 2010). In a relatively short amount of time, South Korea transformed from a community based agricultural society into an industrial one. This has caused some significant changes in the work-life balance of the average Korean worker. However, the literature does not show a plethora of South Korean work-life balance studies. A few of the more relevant ones to this study will be discussed below.

Lim, Morris, and McMillan (2011) performed a large-scale quantitative comparison study of the United States and South Korean employees. Its purpose was to see if a Korean version of an American work-life balance measurement tool yielded similar results if applied to South Korean workers. In other words, do South Korean workers understand work-life balance
variables in the same regard that American workers do? Even though the authors concluded that the Korean version of the measurement tool yielded similar results, it is not definite. First, the authors implemented a self-report survey that included Korean graduate students as well as full time employees. Secondly, the authors only focused on one work-life balance tool and there are several used in American research, none of which are universally accepted (Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1998; Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Frone et al., 1992; Gutek et al., 1991; Kopelman et al., 1983; MacDermid, 2000; Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992). In does indicate however that the subject of work-life balance in South Korea with reference to culture has become a greater topic of interest in the academic community than it appears to have in the past.

Lee & Kim (2010) researched the growing trend of family friendly practices and their effect on a Korean organization. Specifically, they concentrated on what the effects the implementation of these practices has on performance measurements such as employee turnover, labor productivity, and labor–management relations. The authors concluded that family friendly practices do not always benefit the organization. They point out a negative correlation with organizational success and the practice of dependent care assistance. Unfortunately, their conclusions may be errant due the fact that they are based upon self-reported financial data and surveys from the human resource departments of Korean companies. Additionally, their study’s measurement of success is the overall profitability of the company that does not capture the intangibles of employee work-life balance. Given the fact that the balance sheets of chaebols are historically less than full disclosure, it is difficult to replicate this study and prove consistent results across all large Korean companies (Chang, 2007; Janelli, 1993). It is hard to imagine that company employees who receive assistance for day-care for their children while they are work does not ultimately help the company. Yet, this is what Lee and Kim (2010) posit. They also
find that allowing employees to schedule their own hours, or flex time, also negatively impacts
the organization’s profitability. It tended to cause stress among the employees. It should be
noted that there is no mention of culture in their study. It assumes that Korean work values and
American work values are the same (Froese, 2011). Could this be a determining factor based
upon the traditional co-dependency of the Korean employee and manager previously noted? Or
could it be because of the strong sense of collectivism among the work groups that may be
affected when each individual member is forced to develop his or her own schedule without
group consensus?

An, Yom, & Ruggiero’s (2011) research is perhaps a better indication of the Korean
cultural effects on employee work-life balance and overall organizational success. This is a
quantitative study that has a relatively small sample size of 125 nurses employed by Korean
university hospitals. Based upon self-reported surveys, the authors concluded that there were
highly significant correlations between organizational culture and quality of work-life (r = .46, p
< .0001), quality of work-life and organizational effectiveness (r = .61, p < .0001), and
organizational culture with organizational effectiveness (r = .36, p < .0001) (An, Yom, &
Ruggiero, 2011, p.27). This indicates that when Korean workers perceive a healthy work-life
balance, then the overall organization succeeds. There are very few studies prior to this one in
the literature that specifically focus on the work-life balance of Korean workers.

Korean Americans

This section of the literature review is presented in two sections. The first covers the
brief history of Korean Americans in general. The second section offers a more detailed review
of Korean Americans in Atlanta, Georgia.
Korea can trace its origins as far back as 2333 B.C. as one of the world’s oldest civilizations (Choy, 1979; Hurh, 1998). While the beginning of the country is storied in varied fables depending upon whom you ask, the general Korean public cites this time period as the society’s beginning. Therefore, the Korean culture has been shaped through over 4,000 years of tradition. In contrast, most historical accounts of American society only stem back some 300 years.

Korea has a long history of conflict and foreign occupations and has undergone several transformations as a result (Choy, 1979). For the better part of the 20th century up until the end of World War II, the Japanese army occupied Korea and the Korean people suffered many transgressions as a result (Hurh, 1998; Lie, 1990). The Japanese tormented the Korean people, seizing their lands and forbidding the Korean language to be spoken. Not until the Allies won World War II did this Japanese oppression end (Shim, 2010). Unfortunately, Korea was spilt in two after the war and has remained separated ever since.

Koreans have been migrating to the United States for quite some time. In essence, their migration has occurred in three stages (Choy, 1979; Hurh, 1998; Schaefer, 2012). During these stages, majority of the population tended to center around major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and Atlanta (Hurh, 1998). The first stage began in the early 1900s when single Korean males went to Hawaii to work as day laborers on the various farms and plantations (Schaefer, 2012). At the time, Korea was very poor and many thought life would be better elsewhere. Life on the Hawaiian farms was difficult and many Korean immigrants bonded together in efforts to protect and support one another. Many sent their earnings home to Korean to help support their families they left behind and several started auxiliary businesses from their earnings on the Hawaiian farms. This trend continues today in the United States’ mainland where Korean
entrepreneurs establish small businesses funded through local communal efforts (Schaefer, 2012). While some eventually returned to Korea, many more decided to remain. Their efforts set the precedent by which others would follow.

The second stage occurred after the end of the Korean conflict in the 1950s. The ravages of war and the political split of the country in half sent many Koreans in search of a new beginning (Schaefer, 2012). Given America’s part in the conflict and its support of anything against communism, the country offered an attractive alternative to life in Korea. Besides, Korea still ranked as one of the poorest nations in the world and life anywhere else was not a bad alternative. To give a rough estimate during this time frame, Korean Americans only numbered 70,000 in 1970 (Hurh, 1998).

The largest migration of Koreans into America occurred between 1990 and 2011 (Schaefer, 2012). During this time, South Korea was no longer considered an impoverished nation. In fact, it was firmly entrenched in its economic rise into an industrial power in the world. The globalization of business allowed for many Koreans to migrate into the United States in pursuit of better educational and economic gains. This migration trend dramatically dropped off after 2011. Very few Koreans have permanently migrated to the United States since that time (Schaefer, 2012). Today, their number is an estimated 1.7 million (Census, 2012).

Even though they have a long history of migration into the United States because of its attractive characteristics, Koreans still make an effort to remain culturally distinct from the rest of the nation. They have a strong sense of ethnic pride and make efforts to remain attached to their cultural base (Hurh, 1998). Only 21% of Korean Americans over the age of 5 speak English at home (Schaefer, 2012, p.295). The rest speak Korean. This statistic becomes even
more fascinating when one considers the second generation Korean Americans who were born in the United States, but speak Korean at home.

In terms of religion, Korea has a long history of following the teachings of Confucius and Buddha. Buddhism was introduced to Korea in the 4th century (Choy, 1979). Confucianism replaced Buddhism in the government during the Yi period (1392-1910) which is known as the most historical cultural advanced period of Korea (Choy, 1979). Rather than focus on a particular deity or Supreme Being, this religion is centered on the teachings of the ancient Asian philosopher Confucius who emphasized personal empowerment and responsibility of the individual (Angle, 2012). The primary tenets of Confucian are order and harmony (Hurh, 1998). A person should make it his or her highest priority to maintain them even at perceived personal costs. An individual’s uniqueness is of little consequence and to pursue it or to try and capitalize upon it for personal gain will result in disharmony and shame upon the individual. Confucianism also instills ancestral worship, as it is important to give reverence to those who came before you (Hurh, 1998). A person must also place a high value on the ritual of things (Angle, 2012). Harmony is best achieved by accepting the societal norms that have already been established.

Over the years and somewhat still to this day, the Korean government has been heavily influenced by the teachings of Confucius (Yu, Tao, & Ivanhoe, 2010). Confucianism posits that society’s few best men, or its sole best man must rule the greater majority and the greater majority should not only accept this fate, but seek it out as well (Angel, 2012). Given the quarrelsome nature of any vast majority of people, it is unlikely that any consensus will ever be reached and thus a society will not be able to grow and flourish. Instead, it will be marred in unending arguments and entanglements, even with the best of intentions. Therefore, it is necessary for one individual to accept the leadership role and ultimately be in charge of all
things. Even though a few may suffer under this type of rule, their suffering is should be seen as a necessity for the betterment of society as a whole. While their fate may be regrettable, it must ultimately be accepted. If this person follows the teachings of Confucius to the best of his or her ability, then he or she will be benevolent and seek justice for the people as a whole. If this person goes against the teachings of Confucius, then he or she will ultimately fail in the task of caring for the people and should be disposed without hesitation. This is the best manner for society to achieve harmony (Angle, 2012).

This ideal leads many Koreans to the conclusion that a hierarchical government ruled by a decisive leader is the best way to achieve harmony. Thus, the presidents over the years have had great autonomous control over the country. Additionally, if one wished to be successful in government, then he or she must have also demonstrated a mastery of Confucianism (Angel, 2012). This led to a vast majority of Koreans studied Confucianism thus continuing to influence the Korean government and the Korean way of life. Confucians believe that multiple viewpoints should always be considered as each one has its own strength through which knowledge or harmony can be gained (Yu, Tao, & Ivanhoe, 2010). Furthermore, because Confucianism did not necessarily directly conflict with Buddhism or Christianity, it flourished and still maintains influence over the nation.

The primary tenet of Buddhism is to relinquish worldly goods (Hurh, 1998). The pursuit of which will cause suffering. Because of the similar nature of their teachings, Buddhism and Confucianism have been able to peacefully coexist in Korea along with other religions less represented in the country.

Even though Christianity was introduced into the region as early as the 17th century, it was not until the late 1800s that Christian missionaries came to the country and converted a
significant amount of the populace (Hurh, 1998). As such, many Koreans were already Christian when they migrated to the United States. However, they established their own Christian churches upon arrival in the States and their services continue to be in the Korean language only (Schaefer, 2012). Many are abandoning Confucianism and converting to Christianity because the Confucian practices of obedience and deference are not highly valued in America (Rudd & Descartes, 2008). In many Korean American communities, the church serves as the epicenter.

Korean American children, regardless of their generation, attend Korean schools as well as American ones. First generation Korean American parents feel a strong sense of pressure to provide a top education to their children and thus continually pressure them to succeed scholastically (Hurh, 1998). The children attend the American schools with other children during the week, and the Korean schools during the weekend. These schools teach the formal Korean language along with Korea’s customs and traditions (Schaefer, 2012). There is a great deal of pressure on Korean American children to not only to fit into American culture, but to maintain a strong sense of their Korean heritage as well. Given the drastic difference in the two cultures, these children are sure to feel a sense of strain and conflict in certain situations (Hofstede, 1980). Hurh (1998) demonstrates that Korean American children do indeed face a daily conflict of learning to maintain their Korean customs while adapting to American customs as well. Rudd and Descartes (2008) illustrate how some Asian Americans have to surrender complete control of their children in order for them to better adapt to the American culture.

As far as extended family is concerned, the elderly relatives are highly revered in Korea. It is the adult child’s responsibility to care for their parent once that parent is retired. So many elderly live in their adult child’s home. The adult child must continue to seek direction from their parents and follow the parent’s guidance to the best of their ability (Hurh, 1998). Often
times, the adult child takes passive aggressive measures to negotiate any conflict that he or she might have with their parents’ guidance (Hurh, 1998). For example, if an adult child does not agree with doing what his or her parent wants, he or she will often pretend as if they did not understand the parent’s guidance after the fact. This is because direct confrontation of one’s elder is not allowed in the Korean society.

Respect for the elderly is very similar with Korean Americans. However, more and more, the elderly are feeling marginalized by their children. They do not experience the same sense of respect and are not given the same amount of authority as their counterparts back home in Korea experience. As a result, the Korean American elderly are starting to demand to leave their adult child’s home and live on their own (Hurh, 1998). This is still considered shameful by a majority of Korean Americans who wish to avoid upsetting their parents to this point.

In terms of gender equality, Koreans have a long history of discrimination towards women. Many Korean folk songs are about women lamented about their oppression by men (Choy, 1979). These songs are full of sad occasions made humorous by women in effort to overcome their persecution. Korea has a solid history of the man being very much the head of the household and the primary breadwinner (Choy, 1979). Historically, women were forced to submit to their husband’s desires and seek from him direction on most matters. More recently, the country has taken steps towards more gender equality, but it is still nowhere near the level of equality experienced in America (Hofstede, 2014).

Korean American women enjoy more freedom to work in America than their counterparts do back home. In the United States, over 60% of Korean American women work outside of the home (Schaefer, 2012, p.295). In Korea, a majority of women are still regulated to the role of primary caregiver in the home. Women, who do have careers and are married, tend to quit their
job after giving birth in order to focus on the caregiver role (Hurh, 1998). However, a majority of Korean American women work outside of the home (Hurh, 1998).

Atlanta is one of the main cities with that is home to a majority of Korean Americans. According to the Atlanta Regional, a local community informational website, the region is home to just over 17,000 Korean Americans (Global Atlanta Snapshots, 2014). This number equals 75% of Georgia’s Korean American population. Both males and females who hold a variety of both white and blue-collar type jobs equally represent this number. The median income of the average Korean American family in the region is $43,000, which is about 17% below the overall average. A majority of the population has concentrated in the north with many preferring the suburbs to the city proper.

As a result, many Korean businesses have opened in the northern suburbs as well. These businesses are the typical types that support a suburb community: gas stations, grocery stores, beauty salons, and restaurants. At first, these entrepreneurial operations were small and limited to one location. However, that trend is beginning to change. Many of these small business owners are beginning to expand their operations and increase the scope of their overall business (Global Atlanta Snapshots, 2014). Many have opened multiple locations or have begun to diversify into other types of businesses as well.

Politically, Korean Americans have not shown much participation. While no specific reason has been specifically cited, the lack of understanding of the English language and American political system may be a cause (Global Atlanta Snapshots, 2014). However, this may change as second generation Korean Americans come of age and begin to take a more active interest in the community.
Various Korean media outlets and religious organizations represent the community support system. There are over 200 Korean American churches in the area that serve not only as places of worship, but as sources of community information as well (Global Atlanta Snapshot, 2014). These churches also offer classes to help new immigrants learn the English language. As such, the church tends to serve as the community center (Rudd & Descartes, 2008). Additionally, there is a number of Korean American community newsletters, websites, and television programming in the area.
CHAPTER 4

METHODS

This section of the paper is devoted to detailing the research methods employed in this study. This includes: the rationale for employing a qualitative method instead of a quantitative one, the sampling technique for the study’s participants and their ensured confidentiality, how the data was collected and analyzed, a discussion on the validity and reliability of the research, and the limitations of the methodology.

Rationale for the Qualitative Method

The method employed for this study is a qualitative approach on a local level. Specifically, I conducted open-ended interviews with workers of large South Korean companies located in the Atlanta, Georgia area of the United States. This allowed for the discovery of several details that have remained unmentioned in previous quantitative studies that also take more of a macro approach to work-life balance negotiations. Another primary reason for the qualitative approach is that this inquiry focused on a chaebol operating within the United States for which there is, at present, no secondary data set. It would be difficult to garner such a quantitative data source, or collect enough data points to satisfy most quantitative statistical methods given the limited number of opportunities available and the unlikelihood of any chaebol releasing data about its employees. For the most part, these companies tend not to release any information about internal operations unless they are mandated to do so by law, and even then that information might be hard to verify.

The current literature on the subject of Korean work-life balance is rather parsimonious. The research that does exist does not take a cross-cultural inter-firm approach, and does not
focus on the phenomenon of a Korean company located and operating within America. Those who have studied the issue so far have noted the difficulty in investigating it at the micro level and have called for further detailed research at the local firm level (An, Yom, & Ruggerio, 2010; Eun-Suk, Jae Yoon, & Hyosun, 2011; Froese, 2011; Jee Young Seong, Hong, & Park, 2012; Lee & Kim, 2010. Lim et al. (2012) point out the lack of longitudinal research. For example, does an individual in a Korean firm face and navigate the same work life crisis situations in the same manner over an extended period of time? So far, there is little qualitative insight into the internal procedures and the work life balance tactics of employees of major Korean business firms (Steers, 2009).

Eun-Suk et al. (2011) conclude that the cultural implications of employee work life balance in a Korean firm are presumptuous at best and need to be further explored scientifically. As far as methodology, the authors also call attention to the sample size implemented in quantitative studies that have been performed so far. Many implement graduate students in their sample population. Few draw from samples that consist of actual employees of a chaebol. Furthermore, many take the homogeneous approach to the subject by only including the Korean national population within the borders of South Korea. The authors call for future studies to include both Eastern and Western populations in order to produce additional comprehensive results.

Jee Young Seong et al. (2012) focused on the fact that an individual’s behavior might be affected by the culture of the organization to which he or she belongs. Even though all individuals sampled in a study may be Korean, the firm by which he or she is employed may affect work life balance behaviors and attitudes. The relationship between employer and employees in multinational firms should be further explored (Hansen, Tanuja, Weilbaker,
Researchers must somehow allow for this. There is a need to include a qualitative component within the research design to accompany any quantitative steps that have already been measured (Jee Young Seong et al., 2012).

A qualitative approach is able to capture the nuances of the subject matter that would be more difficult to depict quantitatively. The sensitive nature of employee work-life balance negotiations makes it difficult to gain a truly accurate account of events. For example, an employee might be reluctant to report on a survey how many times he or she called in sick for work when in reality he or she was not really ill. This scenario may have in fact been a work-life balance negotiation effort to make time for necessary family matters such as a parent-teacher meeting that otherwise the employer might not have allowed the employee time off work to attend. The fear of discovery, even after the fact, may prevent a true representation of the event being captured in a survey model. Even if the survey is anonymous, research shows that respondents tend to be reluctant to provide full disclosure (Berg, 2012). This is especially true when examining a firm stemming from such a culture that is typically distrustful of outsiders as that of Korea’s (Foster, Stewart, & Fenkl, 2003; Jee Young Seong et al., 2012; Seo, Leather, & Coyne, 2012).

Gender also tends to affect survey responses. Thompson, Zhang, and Arvey (2011) have successfully demonstrated that men and women approach and answer the same survey questions differently. Their study shows that as much of 45% of the variance in survey responses can be attributed towards genetic differences. Thompson et al.’s (2011) findings become particularly relevant to this study as they directly address job satisfaction responses in their research. This becomes significant when considering how one aspect of this study looks to explore the differences in the treatment of men and women at a Korean firm and if there is a difference in
employee work life negotiation tactics by gender. Given the propensity for variance in survey responses not only in terms of gender, but in reference to job satisfaction as well, the conclusion can be drawn that a qualitative approach is a choice method to be implemented in order to examine these differences towards work-life issues among males and females. This is especially true in an organization whose host nation’s culture historically holds males as the dominant gender with females typically being submissive or marginalized (Jee Young Seong et al., 2012; Kwon, 2003).

The qualitative interview process allowed me to probe deeper into workplace scenarios that offer insight into the work-life balance of a South Korean company within the United States. Some issues might not have been discovered otherwise given the lack of knowledge on the subject. To capture the same information quantitatively, a researcher must know enough in the first place in order to implement the proper variables in the research design of survey methodology. Rudd and Descartes (2008) stressed the importance of this approach in their study. Furthermore, it is difficult to foster a complete understanding of certain scenarios by only employing quantitative methods. The below conversation with a Korean national female illustrates how the qualitative interview helps overcome this:

Researcher: Was it difficult adjusting to life in Atlanta when you first came here?

Participant: Oh yes!

Researcher: Why is that?

Participant: I was very scared when I got here. My parents told me to take my brother with me when they found out I was going to America to work. They say, “You take your brother with you.” They gave me a hand full of money and said take care of your brother.

Researcher: How much money did they give you?

Participant: I don’t know. I didn’t count it. They just handed me the money and said go. So I did.
Researcher: So what happened when you got here?

Participant: I was so scared. I did not understand English.

Researcher: I thought you studied English in Korea?

Participant: I did. And I got higher marks on my English exam than my Korean one. But the English over here is different than what you learn in school. I was so scared when I go here. I didn’t know what to do. We just took a taxi from the airport to the hotel and stayed there. My brother got so upset he called my parents and complained. He wanted to go back home [Korea]. He was so mad at me.

Researcher: Why was he mad?

Participant: We had not eaten for three days.

Researcher: Three days!? That is a long time. Why did you not eat? You had money, right?

Participant: Yes, money was not the problem. I just did not understand anything. I thought I understood English when I was in Korea, but when I got here I didn’t know anything. I could not understand it. I was afraid to go out. I did not want to make a mistake. I did not know how to order food. I was scared to make a mistake. So we did not eat for three days. We just stayed in the hotel room. My brother got so mad at me that he called my parents and they made me take him to get something to eat.

Researcher: Where did you go?

Participant: We went to IHOP across the street.

Researcher: How did you order?

Participant: I just point to a picture on the menu for the waitress (as she ducted her head down into her shoulders in a submissive manner as she imitated ordering). I was so scared (she laughed and rolled her eyes).

The qualitative interview above is able to depict a feeling and offers a more complete understanding of the immigrant’s plight in the United States that is hard to capture quantitatively. I would not be able to see the manner in which the participant told her story (Weil, Eberly and Flick, 2008). I would not be able to hear the inflections in her voice or see the terror in her eyes as she recounted her experience. I also would not be able to deduce that she has obviously come
to terms with this experience and has somewhat adjusted to the American culture by observing her eventual laughter at her past self in that scenario. The participant was so scared when she came to America to work, that she nearly starved herself and her younger brother. That is not much of a life balance.

Sample Population

The population of interest for this study is employees, or former employees of a South Korean chaebol operating in Atlanta, GA. There has been an upstart of Korean companies within the Atlanta region in recent years that has led to one of the largest influxes of Korean immigrant populations within the United States (Seo, Leather, & Coyne, 2012). The individual must have been employed by the Korean firm no less than 6 months and within the past 5 years in order to be considered for the study. From there, the participants were classified as Korean nationals, Korean Americans, or non-Korean Americans. This basis of each classification is discussed in more detail below.

After a possible participant was identified, I then checked the validity of that participant through either my first hand knowledge of the individual or from a known source’s recommendation. I also reviewed any employment profile the individual might have posted onto the social work web site LinkedIn. While LinkedIn is not an official resume, it has become commonplace in the business world with many companies’ human resource departments and hiring managers using it for a first source of information to be later verified through official background checks (Gofee & Jones, 2001). Since that process is beyond the financial scope and timeline of this project, it is assumed that the employment information the individual posted about himself or herself is for the most part true. Yet, LinkedIn was certainly not the sole source
of validity of the possible participants’ background. I was also able to confirm the person’s work history through the person who recommended them for the study and I was able to ascertain for myself the individual’s validity by asking a few common type industry questions to gain confidence in his or her background as well. Through this process, I have a strong confidence level that each participant was indeed employed by a Korean chaebol within the Atlanta region.

I targeted the initial participants meeting this qualification criterion through first-hand knowledge of their background. This is because I was employed by a South Korean chaebol for close to a year in 2011 and have been able to maintain many of my South Korean contacts from that time. In an effort to ensure complete confidentiality and participant anonymity, I do not disclose whether or not my primary contacts participated in this study, or how many of their referrals I contacted. It should be sufficient to state that I was able to garner a majority of this study’s participants from this initial procedure.

Second to this, there are many people in my current industry who currently work for Korean chaebols whom I also polled for possible participants who reside in the Atlanta area. The remainder of the participants was targeted through this secondary source of informants.

The Korean national category is comprised of individuals who were born and raised in Korea and already employed by their respective chaebol with whom they are employed in the American facility. These individuals could also be considered ex-pats of Korea. Ex-pats is a commonly used euphemism in the business world that is applied to any countryman or countrywoman who works abroad for a relatively short amount of time before eventually returning to their home country. The company for which an ex-pat works typically identifies a need to send the employee abroad for anywhere from 2 to 5 years and then sponsors that employee’s move to usually include arrangements for housing and immediate family members.
In some circumstances, the employee can remain in the foreign country longer if their host company requests them to do so, or if the individual makes a request and is allowed to remain for another tour so to speak. In the United States, these foreign individuals are allowed to live and work in the United States under a work visa. However, should an individual lose his or her employment status with his or her host company, then he or she has to return to their home country unless they apply for and are granted American citizenship.

The individuals classified as Korean nationals are Korean citizens who are employed in America for various limited amounts of time by their chaebol, depending on their position, and then eventually sent back to Korea by the same company. All of the Korean nationals interviewed for this study fit this definition with the exception of one. This was a Korean female in her 40s whose move to America was sponsored by her chaebol, but has chosen to remain in the United States past the company’s allotted time of sponsorship. Also, given the definition of the three categories as relevant to this study, she was adamant about her classification as a Korean national given that she maintains a Korean citizenship and has most of her professional, social, and personal ties to that country.

Korean nationals consider themselves first and foremost Korean and maintain Korean citizenship. While some of the participants have plans to retire within the United States, they are still classified as Korean nationals for purposes of this study given that all of them only have experience working for Korean companies both in Korea and the United States. Furthermore, none who expressed a possible desire to retire within the United States could speak to a definite plan of action to accomplish this goal, and all had plans to return to Korea in the next 1 to 5 years. All participants placed in the Korean national category were done so because when
questioned about their nationality and the nature of this study, they still identified with the Korean nationality and culture as opposed to Korean American ones.

There were eight Korean nationals interviewed for this study. They varied in age and work experience. All are currently employed by a chaebol and reside within the Atlanta region.

For purposes of this study, the Korean American category is either first, second, or third generation Koreans who have obtained American citizenship or who were born with American citizenship and have no intention of moving to Korea for sole purposes of employment with the same chaebol. For the most part, the definition of this category primarily falls in line with the common academic definition of a Korean American.

Many of the first generation Korean Americans in this study moved to the United States at different ages. Several moved here upon graduation of Korean secondary school to attend American universities. Upon completing their degree, they had received American citizenship and have remained in the United States since that time. Their time and place of employment was not determined or sponsored by any one chaebol. In fact, many have moved on to work for American companies.

There were also several second-generation Korean American participants. Their parents migrated to the United States before they were born, but the participants still maintain a strong sense of identity with the Korean culture. They did so at the direction of their parents who insisted that the participants adapt to the American culture while at the same time maintaining a strong sense of their heritage. All of the Korean American participants reside in a Korean American community in the Atlanta region, or did so during their time working for a chaebol.

While there was no third generation Korean Americans interviewed in this study, there was an interesting discovery of a previously unknown classification of Korean Americans.
Many Korean Americans classified themselves as the 1.5 generation. In their terms, the 1.5 generation consists of those Korean Americans who moved to the United States from Korea late in their secondary education either with, or without their parents, and then graduated high school in America. Upon graduation, they attended an American college and then entered into the work force in the Atlanta area.

The primary determinant of those classified as non-Korean Americans in this study is United States’ citizenship. Of course, the individual must not have any known Korean heritage or identify with the Korean culture in any way. Any U.S. citizen employed by a South Korean chaebol in the Atlanta area is labeled as a non-Korean American regardless of his or her ethnic or racial background so long as neither one is Korean. While there is certain to be individuals with other ethnicities and races present, taking each individual’s racial background into consideration beyond that of eliminating the Korean one proved too cumbersome and is beyond the scope of this study. This research seeks to make a simple comparison between the Korean culture and the generic southern American culture in terms of work life balance negotiations. One would have to conduct another separate study to break down any further southern subculture comparison to the Korean culture.

Location of Study

The location chosen for this research is Atlanta, Georgia. Recently, there has been an influx of South Korean multinational firms in and around the Atlanta area. It appears that after Hyundai entered the region, other chaebols followed suit and set up operations in the area as well (Jacobs, 2012). While these firms vary in operation and size, they seem to center on either the automotive or electronics industry. This has created a large presence of Korean and Korean
Americans who have moved in and around the northern Atlanta suburb of Duluth, GA where these firms are mostly located. As such, a pocket of Korean culture has emerged and sustained in the area. It stands in stark contrast to its southern surroundings. This location was chosen because the South is traditionally considered a relatively conservative version of America’s culture and there is a large Korean population there. By focusing the efforts of this study in Atlanta, a clear contrast to the different cultures investigated emerged. Moreover, it simplifies the various different cultures that are present throughout America by focusing only on one region. Even though it is one of the more cosmopolitan cities in America, its surrounding territory is typically considered closed off to outsiders, both foreign and domestic even though. The Traditional South is a distinctive American subculture in which a strong argument could be made that Atlanta serves as its center base. This limited the variability of the American culture that can be hard to quantify and should allow for future research to implement and compare other regions of the United States in a like manner if so desired.

South Korean Conglomerate Companies (Chaebols) Involved

Many of the participants work for different chaebols in the Atlanta region. At first, the intent of this study was to focus on one particular chaebol. This quickly presented several problems however. First, to do so would risk the exposure of the participants to their parent company as their identities might be deduced through someone’s knowledge of my past work experience combined with the participants’ specific examples cited. As such, I made the decision to widen the scope of the project to include any and all chaebols operating within the Atlanta territory. Secondly, there were not enough volunteers for the study to legitimize the focus being on any one chaebol in particular. Furthermore, to focus on any one chaebol location
or operation might not give an accurate portrayal of cultural differences as there would be no way to account for an individual manager’s operating behavior. For example, if different employees of the same location had different experiences with the same manager, is that because of culture, or is it because of that boss’s style of management at that particular time? By widening the scope of the study through looking at various chaebols in different industries in the same area, this study is able to depict a common cultural management and operational theme of chaebols as a whole, while at the same time not risking the depiction of any one off anomaly of an operation that may or may not be true to the Korean culture.

The companies in this study include those with operations in the following industries: electronics, construction, manufacturing, and air transportation. While it is certain that if these company names were presented here, most of the common public would recognize and relate to them in some fashion. However again, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the common elements of the Korean culture as whole in relation to employment practices and not to risk the exposure of any one company’s practice especially. Also, to state the companies by name might bring about unnecessary legal risks not only to the researcher, but to the participants as well. As such, no formal chaebol company names will be stated.

Data Collection

The qualitative method chosen for this research is the open-ended interview (Berg, 2012). This method afforded the researcher the opportunity to ask leading questions that uncovered more meaningful concepts and themes than would otherwise have arisen out of conducting just a standard close-ended interview or a standard survey. I was able to adapt my line of questioning according to the various responses that the participant yielded. A deeper understanding of the
work life balance in a chaebol manifested through this process as the interviews uncovered more themes as the conversations evolved (Kvale, 1996).

It is essential to gain the trust and respect of the participant in this type of interview. Otherwise, the responses will likely be limited, leaving very little for the interviewer to work with or explore (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). When interviewing Asian immigrants, one must also be culturally competent (Suh, Kagan, & Strumpf, 2009). This means that a researcher must be somewhat knowledgeable of the Asian culture in order to begin to comprehend what is being observed. Otherwise, he or she runs the risk of misunderstanding the real meaning behind a certain word or phrase, or fail to realize the significance of a certain action or inaction.

This research also relies on the institutional ethnography method first pioneered by Dorothy Smith in her exploration and development of feminism (Smith, 2006). Even though it is rooted in feminism, many different sociologists have adopted institutional ethnography in the pursuit of their own interests. This method has been implemented in everything from environmental sustainability to economic and social reorganization (Smith, 2006). It allows the researcher to bridge the gap with the participant in experiences of which the researcher may be ignorant. Institutional ethnography is also extremely appropriate in examining subject matter in which little is known. It allows the researcher to understand situations as they develop assisting in the expansion of the research’s grounded theory (Smith, 2006). More importantly, institutional ethnography produces data from the point of view of the participant, as opposed to merely how an outside observer witnesses events. For example, Smith (1987) posits that male researchers examining women and their social issues will inevitably produce skewed results. This is because men can never be women and as such they can truly experience or understand a woman’s point of view. Therefore, any male researcher’s conclusions regarding women’s social
issues will be lacking and inchoate. One must experience the events of the research in order to develop and communicate a true representation and make the suitable corrections. In order to fully understand the experiences of a chaebol employee, a researcher must first become one.

Participant: You never really get it until you actually live it.

Since I worked for a South Korean chaebol for the better part of a year, I possess an insight and advantage that other researchers in this subject area might not have, especially as a westerner (Rudd and Descartes, 2008). My experience allowed me to ask more focused questions that are particular to the working nature of a chaebol. It also helped me understand the industry jargon that many of the participants used in their responses and helped me be able to bridge the language gap when participants did not know how to say something in proper English. Once I disclosed my work experience during the initial introductions, the participant seemed to become more relaxed and comfortable discussing the topic at length given the fact that we shared a common history of Korean work experience. This might not otherwise occur with someone with little firsthand knowledge of a chaebol, even if that researcher shares in Korean ethnicity.

Many of the Korean national and Korean Americas were surprised when they initially met me in person for the interview. For example when I met one female participant, she had a look of confusion on her face when I introduced myself. Once I confirmed that I was indeed the interviewer and the orchestrator of this study, her face became skeptical and her body posture withdrawn as she asked why I was doing this study. By I, she meant a Caucasian and not of Korean decent. Once I further explained my reasoning coupled with the fact that I used to work for a local chaebol, she then became relaxed and laughed a little. When I asked why she was laughing, she said that it is because that since she heard that I used to work at a chaebol and was
a senior level manager, she assumed I was Korean. This type of scenario happened with many of
the participants, with the females being quicker to accept my explanation than the males.

Suh (2004) stresses the importance of possessing three qualities when interviewing the
Asian immigrant population: ability, openness, and flexibility. As far as the first quality is
concerned, I relied on the qualitative experience I garnered when I obtained my advanced
counseling degree. In regards to the other two qualities, I believe I was able to conduct a focused
interview while maintaining an open and flexible atmosphere. This proved difficult at times
given the language barrier and the tendency of participants to stray off topic. If a participant
began to digress, I would let him or her finish their thought, confirm its importance, and then
return to asking questions more relevant to this study. By doing this, the participant felt
validated and some other themes developed that could be relevant for future study. I had to be
careful in not upsetting the participant by prematurely cutting off his or her answer, while at the
same time remaining cognizant of the time constraint of the interview. Furthermore, if the
interview was allowed to extend too far beyond topic, the data might have accumulated in such a
fashion that the work-life themes desired might have been more difficult to uncover given the
breadth of information divulged.

Approval

Since this research involves human subjects, approval was requested from the University
of North Texas Internal Review Board. Given that there is well-documented precedence for this
type of research method, the approval was granted with minimal to no concern to the
participants’ physical or mental safety.
I asked the participants’ permission to be interviewed at the beginning of every conversation and informed them that I would be recording it as well. I also restated the purpose of the study before we began and answered any questions that they had beforehand. All participants were presented with the consent form. Once it was confirmed that they understood the consent form and the study, they were asked to sign the form acknowledging the fact that their discussion is being recorded for purposes of research and portions of the conversation may be published with their identity being held confidential, not being released to the public. Even with this, many participants would stop in the middle of the interview and confirm their confidentiality before continuing.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were selected based upon a snowball non-probable sample of a total of thirty-two employees of a South Korean chaebol operating in Atlanta, GA. This was the preferred method because the target population of this research is specific. Atlanta, Georgia has one of the largest concentrations of Korean Americans and South Korean operations in the United States and is considered the heart of the Traditional South (Global, 2014). Given the cultural comparison desired for this study, this made the area the ideal location for this study.

Snowball sampling also allowed me to overcome the constraints of time and money in completing this study. A large random sampling method would be both expensive and time consuming. Not only would it be difficult to obtain the necessary number of participants, but it would also be almost impossible for one individual to properly interview them all in such an open-ended manner. Furthermore, there is not really a precedent for this study and this method
permitted the greatest chance of discovery on this exploratory issue (Berg, 2012). It is hoped that this effort will act as a solid base for future multicultural employment studies.

I have previous first-hand employment with a chaebol and living experience in the city. This is key as employees of a chaebol are highly unlikely to respond to an in-depth interview request by a person previously unknown to them or with little shared history. I was able to contact at least one employee from each of the three desired categories (Korean, Korean American, American) based upon my previous employment and network history with a chaebol. Most of my initial contacts were able to recommend another person who was employed by a chaebol in the area that was willing to be interviewed. The interviews continued in this fashion until the desired number of participants was reached, with a fairly equal representation among the three categories. In terms of recommendations, once an individual was identified, he or she was then contacted to schedule the interview at a time and place of his or her discretion. While the recommendation was not limited to the person’s cultural category, none offered anyone outside of their own cultural identity. For instance, Korean Americans only offered up other Korean Americans. Americans only recommended other Americans. No Korean national recommended anyone else.

I was unable to garner enough participants through this initial method. As such, I resorted to reaching out to possible subjects through the web site LinkedIn. This is an employment network site largely used by the public to display their work history. While the information posted is self-reported, many individuals have recommendations from other individuals posted on their web page that somewhat verifies their identity. That coupled with my industry knowledge, I was reasonably assured to the validity of a person’s employment history. Once I identified an individual as a possible participant, I would send him or her an email
detailing the study with an offer of $40 for his or her participation. Even with this incentive, many Korean and Korean Americans declined to participate. If a potential participant agreed to participate, I would then ask him or her some qualifying questions to validate that they indeed met the study’s requirements. Again given my industry experience, I was able to quickly ascertain the potential participants’ validity in both cultural identity and employment experience.

Each participant was informed of the purpose of the interview before it began and that they could stop the interview at any time with no consequences or repercussions towards him or her. Additionally, they were informed that the conversation is confidential and that their identity will in no way be released or made known. Respondents were told that they could contact the interviewer with questions or concerns at any time after the interview by phone or email. Each respondent was asked to read and sign the informed consent form after verbally giving his or her consent.

Participants’ Profile

There were 32 total respondents who volunteered to participate in the study. They are classified into the three cultural groups as follows: 10 Korean nationals, 11 Korean Americans, and 11 Americans. In terms of age, all of the participants range from 25 to 60 years old. The mean age is 38.2 years of age with a mode of 25 years. This is primarily due to the fact that there are 3 C-level (upper management) Korean national participants within the sample, all of whom are over the age of 55 years. Twenty-one and nine tenths percent (7) respondents are under the age of 30 years, 40.6% (13) were in the 30-40 age group, 18.8% (6) were in the 41-50 age group and 18.8% (6) were above 50 years of age. Of the 32 participants, 75% of them are male. Attempts to equal out the gender representation failed. There were two primary reasons
for this. First, it was difficult to find females that met the parameter of the study. Secondly, those identified and contacted declined to participate. I have several theories as to why there was not more female representation in the study. However without further scientific research, my theories are merely just speculation at this point.

The total participants average employed time at a chaebol is 10 years. This includes any participant’s employment by multiple chaebols throughout his or her career; not just limited to a single instance, or a single employment at a chaebol organization. Participants’ total work experience, to include employment outside of a chaebol, is 16.4 years. There is a direct positive correlation between the participants’ age and their work experience. In all cases, the older a person is, the longer he or she has been employed. This is of little surprise as it is relatively normal in an industrialized society. The only consequence worth noting for purposes of this study is that none of the participants have experienced any undue elongated absences from employment such as being laid off or being fired that would cause this correlation to be skewed. For example, there is not a 60-year-old participant with only 10 years of work experience. Conversely, there is no instance of any younger participant having any more overall employment experience than his or her elder participant cohort. Only the married females with children are known to have any significant period of absences due to childbirth. Of these participants, only one noted quitting her job for approximately one year to care for her child before returning to work. Further discussion of this phenomenon will be offered in the results section.

All of the participants are employed in what are considered white-collar jobs. A wide variety of sales and operational support jobs are represented. Most of the participants are mid-level managers within the chaebol with little to no direct subordinate reports. The participants’ specific titles are not referenced due to the ambiguity in such things therefore making a
comparison between all positions difficult. For instance even though an individual may have the
term manager in his or her title, it does not necessarily mean that this individual actually has
direct reports, or the ability to hire or fire someone. I was able to better ascertain each
participant’s responsibilities through the interview process, but not in a manner that can be
offered in an accurate quantitative manner. Given my first-hand knowledge and operational
experience in such organizations, I was able to account for any embellishment of responsibilities
an individual might give in regards to his or her occupational empowerment.

All of the participants are college educated and have at least a Bachelor’s Degree from a
university either in South Korea or the United States. Of special note, every Korean national
participant reported having an advanced degree, mostly a Masters’ in Business Administration
(MBA). Sixty-six and seven tenths percent of the respondents are married. Fifty-seven percent
of them have children. There are no single parents represented in this study.

Below are some basic descriptive statistics of the participants in order to provide a better
visual representation.

Table 1

*Frequency and Table Distribution of Chaebol Employees in the United States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean national</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>78.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age Group (in years)**

*(table continues)*
The following figures offer a visualization of some of the variables grouped by cultural association. The first figure represents the difference in age and employment of the participants in the study.

Figure 2. The age and work experience of participants.

The next figure denotes the gender break out of the participants.
Figure 3. The gender of the participants.

The last figure below visualizes the amount of authority at work that each participant possesses by cultural group. This figure is simplified by denoting the percentage in each cultural category of participants who have employees who directly report to them.

Figure 4. The percentage of participants that are managers by cultural group.
Again, there are no blue-collar employees represented in this study. The other roles consist of sales, sales support, or operations type occupations.

The following table breaks down the participants by cultural category, experience and the length of interview time.

Table 2

*Participant Experience and Length of Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Korean national</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Chaebol Work Experience</th>
<th>Total Work Experience</th>
<th>Interview Time - Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
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<td>Male Participant</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
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<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female Participant</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female Participant</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Korean national Mean  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Korean American</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Chaebol Work Experience</th>
<th>Total Work Experience</th>
<th>Interview Time - Minutes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female Participant</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Male Participant</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Male Participant</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female Participant</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>

Korean American Mean  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Chaebol Work Experience</th>
<th>Total Work Experience</th>
<th>Interview Time - Minutes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Male Participant</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male Participant</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
As stated earlier, this table is a visual account of participation by gender. In all categories, the majority of participants are male. In the case of the American category, there is not one single female participant. Several attempts were made to include females in this category, but they all met in failure. No participant of this study knew of, or could recommend an American (as classified in this study) female who was employed by a chaebol in the Atlanta area. Furthermore, a search on LinkedIn did not produce any results either. Future research is needed to explore this phenomenon as it is outside the boundaries of this study.

Ten of the participants have direct reports, with 3 of them being at the C-level of the American contingent of the chaebol. C-level refers to the specific positions of chief executive officer (CEO), chief operations officer (COO), and chief financial officer (CFO) or positions with like responsibilities. In order to help protect their identities, these C-level participants’ positions will not be referenced specifically. This is because there are a limited number of such individuals in the Atlanta, Georgia area and I do not want to risk their exposure.

It is also worth mentioning that there are no female participants who have direct reports. This is regardless of cultural group and independent of position title. For example, a female participant might hold the title and position of operational support manager, but she does not have any subordinates nor can she give express instructions as a subordinate’s direct supervisor.
One must be careful not to formulate conclusions based solely upon this rudimentary quantifiable representation of the data. That is not the intent of this study. Table 2 is graphic display that is meant to be a visual aid to the reader in comprehended the participant demographic in terms of cultural association. However, it is important to note any differences between the cultural groups in terms of participant representation. That way, the reader does not assume that all cultures are equally represented by all variables. For instance, there are no female participants for the American culture category. Additionally, Korean nationals represent the only C-Level employee participants in this study. Efforts were made to try and show an equal representation across all variables, but the deficiency of time, money, or just plain lack of participant availability prevented this from occurring. However, this should not take away from the conclusions drawn as this is purely a qualitative effort and such responsibility while desired, is not critical (Berg, 2012). This participant sample is a solid qualitative representation of people living in the Atlanta area who are employed by a South Korean company.

Informed Consent

Each participant was asked to read and sign an Informed Consent Form sanctioned by the University of North Texas Internal Review Board (IRB). The form provided a brief description of the research and a statement on confidentiality and anonymity. It also explained that the participant’s file detailing the interview will be kept in a locked safe at the researcher’s place of residence. The form further explained that participation is voluntary and that the participant can stop the interview at any time. The following statement is emboldened on the consent form: “Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law.”
Company and Participant Confidentiality

Those participants who happen to work for the same chaebol remain ignorant to one another’s participation in this study in order to protect his or her identity. While there are cases where the manager and his respective employee were both interviewed, a direct comparison of their responses will not be offered here for fear of identities being discovered. For example, a manager may offer a specific scenario to illustrate his point, and his employee might unknowingly offer up the same example during his or her interview. Upon either person reading this same specific example, both may be able to easily ascertain the identity of the other person. Complete anonymity must be ensured not only for the protection of the participant, but to also ensure the validity of any similar studies in the future.

All participants were told that several different chaebols in the area were being represented in this study and that their company was not being mentioned by name. Furthermore, this paper would make every effort to hinder the ability for anyone to be able to figure out in any example given, which company was being described and which individual was describing it. To mention or formally study any one specific chaebol by name, that company would have to formally grant permission and consent to the study to indemnify any possible legal risks to the researcher or the participants involved. However, it is highly unlikely that a chaebol will ever grant such permission to a public study. Even if it did grant permission to conduct a similar formal study, its employees would most likely be hesitant to give any true depiction of events that might be considered less than positive by the company for fear of damaging his or her career through any number of informal means at the chaebol’s disposal.
Research Approval

The University of North Texas Institutional Review Board along with the dissertation committee members listed on the title page reviewed and approved this project.

The Interview Process

This section is presented in two sections: (1) the setting and length of the interview, and (2) the interview guide. The interviews were conducted during a time that was most convenient to the participant. If conducted during a participant’s workday, the interviews took place before their workday began, during their lunch hour, or after hours. All interviews were performed in a public restaurant type setting. At some times, this proved problematic as the noise level increased during the interview. In those cases, I would stop the interviewed and move to a quieter location within the same establishment. There seemed to be no common theme as to the choice of location other than no one offered up his or her home as an option even though I offered to do so at his or her convenience.

The length of the interviews varied depending upon the depth of the information discussed and shared. All interviews with participants in the American category were conducted in less than thirty minutes. The Korean and Korean American interviews lasted an average of one hour. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participant. I took hand written notes to supplement the recordings as well.

An interview guide was employed in order to assist during the interview process and keep the conversation on track. Skinner and Pocock (2008) developed a robust qualitative questioning method from which much of this study mirrors. Based on their model, this interview guide consists of both open and close-ended questions, which in essence is a semi-structured interview.
A semi-structured interview is defined as a type of questioning that in which the interviewer begins with certain specific close-ended questions to either begin the conversation or to qualify the participant for data purposes and then follows up with more open-ended questions to allow more topics to be explored. This format gives not only gives the interviewer more flexibility, but also allows the participant to be able to answer more freely (Berg, 2012; Draper & Swift, 2011). The close-ended questions were primarily be used for identification purposes and to begin the discussion. The open-ended questions quickly followed. The participants seemed to be more comfortable with the close-ended questions at the beginning as they were able to more easily process their role as participant. In other words, they somewhat expected to be asked close-ended questions and were more readily able to respond. Most had difficulty in answering the open-ended questions in the beginning and more effort was needed by the interviewer to foster a response. As the conversation continued, most if not all participants quickly warmed up to the routine and their answers flowed more freely with less prompting from the interviewer. The guide is attached in the appendix section. A few sample questions are displayed below:

- What nationality or ethnicity do you consider yourself: Korean national, Korean American, or American?

  (This is was after the three choices for purposes of this study were explained)

- Which cultural identity do you most identify with?

- Tell me about your family? Where do they live? Do any of them live with you?

- What is your current job title and responsibilities?

- How does your firm officially define your primary duties and responsibilities in this role?

- How long have you been employed by this firm?

- In an ideal world, how many hours a day/week would you work for your company?
• How many hours a week do you actually work for your company?

These questions provided a basic identification of the participant and subsequently led into the more open-ended questions where the meat of discovery lays.

The exact wording of the open-ended questions varied, as I did not want to read them verbatim in order to keep the atmosphere casual to put the respondent at ease. However, I approached each interview with the same line of questioning in roughly the same order. The exact format and timing of the questions changed depending on the responses of the participant.

Here are some examples of the open-ended questions:

• Can you tell me what lead to your decision to work for this firm?

• Has it lived up to your professional expectations so far? How so?

• Have you seen employees treated differently whether they are Korean, Korean American, or American? How so?

• Tell me how you balance your work responsibilities with your family responsibilities? What challenges do you face? Explain.

• What happens when you have to leave work for a family or personal event (sick child or family member, or personal illness)?

• What happens when you disagree with your boss? With your Peers? Can you give me an example?

• How would you describe your relationship with your boss? With your peers?

• Have you experienced any cultural misunderstandings? Explain.

• How would you describe your family life at home? Do you feel it is affected by your work? How so?

• Do you feel as if your family life affects your work? How so?

• Do women have opportunities for advancement at your work? Please explain.

Again, the questions above may not be worded the exactly in each interview, or occur in the same sequence, but the central inquiry or meaning was the same and every attempt was made to
discuss each matter to the fullest. Additionally, some of the participant answers led to some questions being asked in a different order or format than perhaps originally planned. This was an effort to maintain a smooth and coherent conversation style. In order to better conceptualize the participant work-life balance experience, I attempted to have the participant detail an example of each work-life situation discussed.

The interview guide ensured that the topics of interest surrounding work-life balance were discussed. The guide not only allowed for consistent interviews, but allowed for flexibility in exploring situations or conversations that sometimes led to a deeper understanding of a participant’s particular work-life balance issue or situation (Weil, Eberly and Flick, 2008).

In terms of female work-life balance discovery, I would ask male participants if they perceived any differences in employee treatment based on gender, then culture and gender. For example, I would ask an American male participant if he felt females in his office were treated any differently, or if they acted any differently than their male counterparts. I would then explore in further detail any difference that was perceived. After that, I would inquire if the participant noticed any differences based upon the culture of the females involved? Did a female Korean American have a different work experience than a Korean national or American female in the office? If so, in what way did the male participant perceive that difference? What specific events led him to deduce a difference?

When questioning female participants about perceived differences, I would begin by directly asking them if they felt like they were treated differently than their male counterparts in the workplace and if so how? If they responded in the positive, I would go on to ask them to explain in further detail or give some specific examples of times or events where they felt like they were treated differently or discriminated against. If they responded in the negative, I would
probe with further questions around the subject of gender discrimination without directly
referencing the issue to ensure the matter was fully explored. One such transcript below
illustrates this line of questioning:

Researcher: Do you think you are treated any differently at work than your male
counterparts?

Participant: No.

Researcher: OK. Do you feel as if your male counterparts work as much as you do?

Participant: No. I have to work longer than they do. Many times, they go out to dinner
and I stay and work.

Researcher: Would you want to go to dinner?

Participant: Not any more. I went when I first started working and they did not talk to me
a lot. They have a bunch of conversations and just do some drinking. I don’t like
drinking that much and they talk about things without me, so why go? They just ignore
me anyway.

Researcher: Does your boss go to these dinners?

Participants: Of course! They cannot go to dinner without him. If he is at work, then
they have to stay and work.

Researcher: Does your boss ask you if you want to go to dinner?

Participant: The first couple of times he did, but he just goes ahead with them without
asking me. I think it’s OK, but sometimes it makes me mad. They go to dinner while I
am still at work. But the work has to get done so I stay and do it.

Another similar line of questioning was used to determine any gender differences at
work:

Researcher: Do you think you are treated any differently at work than your male
counterparts?

Participant: No.

Researcher: OK. Do you feel as if your male counterparts work as much as you do?

Participant: Yes. It’s about the same.
Researcher: OK, how about in terms of promotion? Do you feel like you have an equal chance of being promoted as your male counterparts?

Participant: No, I do not think so.

The line of questioning would then turn towards exploring more as to why the participant felt she did not have an equal chance at promotion.

The above examples illustrate the danger of self-reported surveys in terms of employment equality by gender. When participants were directly queried as to whether or not they felt discriminated against because of their gender, a majority responded that they did not feel like they were treated differently. This could be for any number of reasons. The participant might not understand the word discrimination due to language barriers or lack of comprehension of the word. Another reason might be that the participant does not feel that the degree to which he or she experienced differential treatment was worthy of being classified as discriminatory. Discrimination has a negative connotation and perhaps the participants did not want to assign unnecessary blame to someone, or inadvertently get someone in trouble (Van Dijk, 2000).

However, when further questioned to make specific comparisons in terms of work hours, chance of promotion, or senior female company officers, all participants gave a detailed account of a definite difference experienced compared to that of their male counterparts.

Therefore, this qualitative method led to the possible discovery of a theme of gender discrimination that might have otherwise gone unnoticed in a quantitative survey response method. Of course, there are quantitative methods that can be employed by asking the same question in a multitude of different ways as above, but it will not be able to garner the detail such as that of the above examples. Furthermore, a researcher employing such a quantitative method of cross section questioning runs the risk of omitting certain questions, thus skewing the conclusions of the statistical model implemented.
Data Analysis

As previously discussed, each interview was recorded in its entirety while hand-written notes were simultaneously taken. This allowed me to call attention to certain matters or themes in reviewing the data that developed during the conversation. Upon completion of the study, I transcribed all conversations into an electronic format along with the hand-written notes. Then, I implemented the computer software program NVIVO to help discover any other reoccurring themes in the data. Overall, there was 939 minutes of recorded conversations, or just less than 16 hours.

Once transcribed, I reviewed the data highlighted by NVIVO. I cross-referenced this information with my hand-written notes. I then listened to each interview again; making notes of anything the computer program or I might have missed. This process helped in coding and identifying emerging and recurring themes applicable to any work-life balance issues in a chaebol located within the southern United States. Again, the unit of analysis is the individual classified as a Korean, a Korean American, or a non-Korean American.

Reliability and validity are always a concern of any academic research project, but especially so in a qualitative endeavor. Repeatability is also a concern. This study followed the common guidelines laid out by many of the popular and accepted experts in the field of qualitative methods to ensure that these metrics were met. Respondents’ answers were clarified and confirmed throughout the interview in an open and free environment. Careful attention was paid to answers of a personal nature that appeared to be short or curt, as Asian respondents tend to make an effort to appear modest (Suh et al., 2009). Furthermore, the literature supports the participants’ answers, showing a clear line of sight to the road map of the discovery process. The goal being that others can repeat this process if desired and achieve similar results.
In the traditional quantitative sense, there is little question as to the importance of reliability and validity in research. However in terms of qualitative research, phenomena such as these are not as significant (Burawoy, 1998). Instead of holding to independence from the research, it is more important that the researcher becomes embedded with the topic (Burawoy, 1998 & Smith, 1987). Given the sensitive and secretive nature of the chaebol topic intertwined with my own experiences and biases, it becomes difficult and unnecessary to ensure the exact repeatability of such research. Chaebols are a living and changing organism and this research is an effort to capture their particular work-life balance in a certain point in time with the involved parties of the time. It is highly unlikely that the exact same variables of the chaebol work-life phenomenon of present will be existent in the exact same manner or in such a deterministic fashion in the future.

Reflexivity of the researcher is more crucial to this type of study than is reliability or validity (Burawoy, 1998). It allows researchers to better draw macro conclusions based upon micro situations. Without this type of reflexivity, the independent case studies would be too numerous to count and no general conclusions could be made. Burawoy (1998) counters the proponents of strict reliability and validity by demonstrating how their unyielding adherence in a qualitative endeavor can actually limit and harm research as opposed to improving it.

Once the interviews were recorded and transcribed, I used the framework approach developed by Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer in the 1980s (Firth & Smith, 2011). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) further developed and refined this method that is quite popular today in this type of qualitative research (Firth & Smith, 2011). I followed the seven stages of this method as briefed below.
Stage one is the transcription of the data. The primary goal of transcription is to write down word-for-word what was said during the interview. As such, I listened to the recorded interviews and typed in the words as I heard them. I did not include any non-verbal communication as it is cumbersome to do and makes it harder for the overall themes to emerge. The spoken dialogue was the most important data to capture in terms of this analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Often, I was able to capture what I deemed to be key nonverbal actions during my initial conversation and used these notes along with the transcribed data to form a more complete understanding of the data. Since there are three cultural categories in this study, I decided to transcribe each interview by category, beginning with the non-Korean Americans, then the Korean Americans, and then the Korean nationals. Transcription of the 32 interviews took an absorbent amount of time and was the most tedious stage of the framework process. The Korean national interviews were perhaps the most difficult to transcribe because of the language issue. English is a second language for them and the audio representation was difficult to understand at times.

This leads to Stage two of the process, which is becoming familiar with the data. Transcribing the data definitely aids in familiarization, but it is critical to continually review the data set (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As such, I listened to each recorded interview again after initial transcription while reading my hand-written notes taken during the interview.

Stage Three is coding the data. Coding requires capturing anything that is deemed important or relevant to the development of themes in the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Because there was a relatively large amount of written data, I implemented the computer program NVIVO to help code the data. Once the interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft
Word document, I uploaded the Word document into NVIVO. The computer program then scanned the documents and produced a list of coded words and phrases.

From here, I employed NVIVO to perform the majority of the next three stages as well. Stage Four is developing a working analytical framework from the coded data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This happens almost simultaneously while coding. NVIVO produced an analytical framework along with the coding information. Stage Five is applying the analytical framework from Stage Four by indexing it the codes from all of the transcripts (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Manually, this is done by developing codes and framework from early transcripts and then placing the codes found in later transcripts within this framework. This is not to say that only codes from early transcripts can be used. If different codes develop in later transcripts, then the original framework must be adjusted to incorporate them. It is a working framework until every transcript is reviewed. Since NVIVO is a computer program that processes all of the data simultaneously, it is unclear in what order it processes the transcripts. However, since the end result is the same as the manual process, it appears to be of little consequence. Stage Six is charting data into the framework matrix, which again is produced by NVIVO at the same time as the previous four stages.

This led me to the seventh and final stage, which is interpreting the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I reviewed the charted framework produced by NVIVO for accuracy deleting some codes resulting from reoccurring words or phrases that were deemed meaningless for terms of this study. For example, NVIVIO cited the phrase “You know” as a coded category thus producing a theme that is ultimately meaningless in terms of this study as it was uttered by just about every respondent without any significance. Otherwise, several interesting themes emerged that will be discussed in the following sections.
Validity

Validity, or accuracy, is a concern in any research study, but perhaps more so in a qualitative endeavor (Berg, 2012). This is because it is more difficult to ascertain how the qualitative researcher calculated his or her conclusions unlike a quantitative study were the conclusions are mathematically calculated. The accuracy of this study can be verified by following the research steps described earlier the data analysis section. Since NVIVO produces an objective coded matrix, there is little room for deviance if the same transcribed data is entered. The true test of accuracy occurs primarily in the beginning of this study.

The interview, or collection of the data, is the critical concern point for accuracy. To ensure accuracy, I asked reinforcement and follow-up questions to a participant’s response to open-ended questions. I did not ask close-ended questions on several different topics in a random fashion. Each participant was allowed to fully explain his or her answer in as much time as needed. I would then state my understanding of his or her answer and then ask for confirmation of my understanding. The participant would either accept that I correctly understood his or her position, or he or she would offer a correction. I ensured that no participant felt propelled to answer in any predetermined way. I fostered honest responses by giving and explaining in detail the consent form and answering any questions that a participant might have. I also ensured each participant that his or her answers would be held in the utmost of confidence and that it was highly unlikely that his or her identity would be made public or become known by his or her employer. In many interviews, the participant would stop in the middle of the discussion and ask if the discussion was confidential. Once I affirmed that the conversation was indeed confidential to the amount allowed by law, the participant would then go on to answer the question.
Reliability

Even though it is difficult to declare that each of the open-ended interviews in this study can be replicated in the exact same manner and in the exact same format by a different interviewer or the same interviewer if performed again, it is safe to assert that the same themes and meanings of these conversations would still result if the same style of interview were performed in the future (Berg, 2012). In other words, if a different interviewer asked the same line of questioning in the same manner of the same participants, he or she would come to the same conclusions as presented in this study.

The interview guide is one tool that helps make this possible. While it allows for flexibility in the sequence and use of questions, it does provide the researcher focus and ensures that certain topics will be discussed. Additionally, the computer program NVIVO aids in the repeatability of this study. If future transcripts are loaded into this program, then a similar coded matrix will be produced. It is hoped that this study will serve as a base for additional research to be repeated in other regions or altered adjusted for different cultural group interactions.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The immediate goal of this research is to explore if chaebol employees of distinctive cultural backgrounds negotiate their work-life balance experience any differently. The four research questions explored are centered upon that subject. Each question is answered in the following sections by offering an overview of the different work-life themes that evolved out of the interviews exampled by excerpts from conversations with the participants. Only conversation excerpts representative of each cultural group as a whole are shown. If a participant has an experience that is not representative of others’ experiences, then his or her experience is not presented here in this paper. However, if his or her specific experience is representative of his or her cultural group, then it is presented as a representation of the entire group’s work-life balance experience at a chaebol organization.

A chaebol operating within the southern United States provides a unique employment experience where two distinctive cultures collide. Several themes emerged from the data analysis of the interviews conducted with the participants of this study. Excerpts from the interviews of how participants handled each theme are presented in order to provide a representation of how the majority of each cultural group negotiated that particular work-life balance theme. If most of the participants responded in a similar fashion to a similar topic, then this indicates a recurring theme likely to represent the work-life balance experience of a chaebol in southern American. These are not limited to experiences unique to the individual, but representative of the whole sample case. These are themes that this research process shows to exist for all employees of a chaebol in southern America and possibly beyond. It is expected that
any additional research, if properly executed, in this subject matter would result in the same themes emerging, regardless of the scientific method implemented.

The open-ended questions that the participants were asked are designed around the work-life balance themes in the literature. The subjects discussed include work time, autonomy, supervisory status, supervisory support, income, organizational support, tenure, and job value and meaningfulness (An, Yom, & Ruggerio, 2010; Bloom, Kretschmer & Van Reenen, 2006; Bonebright et al., 2000; Choi & Kim, 2012; Devi & Kumari, 2012; Ford & Collinson, 2011; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997; Maruyama, Hopkinson & James, 2009; Munn, 2013; Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne, & McCarthy, 2013). A definition of each subject is presented, followed by each cultural group’s negotiation tactics and/or experiences in that regard.

Each cultural group’s experience with each work-life balance theme is discussed below in order to show a comparison among the three groups. For example in the section on work time, there is a discussion on how the Korean nationals tend to negotiate an extended workday at the company, followed by how Korean Americans do so, and then the same for non-Korean Americans (referred to as American for the sake of brevity and clarity).

One section is also devoted to each cultural group’s experience with female discrimination within a chaebol organization. Each participant was asked a series of open-ended questions about whether or not he or she posits that females are treated any differently or victimized in any way in his or her workplace. If the participant is female, she was asked about her own personal experiences at the company and encouraged to give specific examples of any discrimination faced. If the participant is male, he was asked if he posits that women in his workplace are discriminated against in any way. If so, he was asked to give a specific example he experienced or witnessed to substantiate his claim. Every participant was also asked to detail
female career and leadership opportunities within the organization. Female discrimination in the workplace is also another strong indicator of employee work-life balance, especially if the employee is female (Mäkelä, Suutari, & Mayerhofer, 2011).

The results of this study are presented in the following sections that are synonymous with the themes that comprise the overall work-life balance experience: (1) Work Time, (2) Autonomy, Supervisory Status and Supervisory Support, (3) Income, (4) Organizational Support, (5) Tenure, (6) Job Value and Meaningfulness, and (7) Female Discrimination. Each section details the experiences of each cultural group in the same order: (1) Korean national, (2) Korean American, then (3) American.

**Work Time**

This section not only refers to the amount of time each participant works for his or her respective chaebol during the workday, but also details how each participant tends to negotiate time off from work as well. Additionally, it demonstrates the expectations that each cultural group had prior to their employment at their chaebols and the realization of those expectations post hire. Participants were asked about the average number of work hours they performed per day and week and then asked to elaborate on the specific number of hours cited. They were also asked to describe how they usually ask off of work to take care of personal responsibilities, such as a doctor’s appointment or a sick child. Each participant was asked to give a specific example of how he or she requests time off of work from the company and what are the results of those actions, or inactions. Work hours and the ability to leave work when needed to take care of familial or personal responsibilities are strong indicators of an employee’s work-life balance.
(Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne, & McCarthy, 2013; Munn, 2013; Maruyama, Hopkinson & James, 2009; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997).

Older Koreans answered the question of work hours differently than the younger Korean participants. When asked about specific work hour expectations or experiences, the older participants did not answer quantitatively. Instead, they offered reasoning as to why Koreans tend to work as long as they do, answering the question indirectly. Younger Korean workers gave more of a quantitative response for both expectations and reality. On average, all respondents work at least 12 hours per day, usually more. All of them give examples of coming to work at 7:30AM or 8:00AM and working until 10PM to midnight several times a week. Even though the official workday starts at 9AM and ends at 6PM, none of the participants leave at that hour. If they do leave at 6PM, it is only on rare occasion accompanied by an elaborate excuse to their manager.

Researcher: How does your wife feel about the long work hours?

Participant: [chuckles] She knows. That is the general rule. It is accepted.

One manager remembered his chaebol in the past trying to change the culture of late night work hours in South Korea without success. The company instituted a policy that required all workers to officially come in to work at 7:30 AM and to go home at 4:00 PM. It did not work. Employees would pretend to go home at 4PM, but then come back and continue to work until the late evening hours. There was peer pressure and pressure from employees’ direct managers to stay and do work no matter what the formal policy was. This was due to the extremely competitive environment to succeed. The company wound up reneging the policy and no longer tries to force employees to leave at the end of the official workday.
Offices are set up in a hierarchical format so an employee has to pass every supervisors’ office on his or her way out. Offices consist of an open set up comprised mostly of low-rise cubicles so that all employees can be seen even if they are sitting down. The actual offices are reserved for the Korean high-level managers and walled primarily by glass to allow for a view of the overall office area. A participant cannot leave before his or her immediate boss leaves. If a participant tries to leave, his or her supervisor sees the attempt and intervenes. A participant’s boss does not leave until his boss leaves. This produces a domino effect on employees leaving the office with those being the most subordinate leaving last.

Several participants have tried to come in early so that they will not have to stay late at work. However, if they do come in early, they still have to stay late. Their early morning tactic does not work. Therefore, none feel pressure to arrive much earlier than 9AM.

One C-level manager gave the following justification for the long workdays at a chaebol:

Participant: You have to learn about Korean people and culture. Korean people work very hard. Korea has had much success in the last 50 years. It is very important to understand. Korean people had to sacrifice to grow the business. They had to work very hard. That is the difference between Korean and American.

The participant was referencing the fact that only a short time ago Korea was one of the world’s poorest nations and that the Korean people of his generation and their parents had to work hard and make many sacrifices to help the nation develop out of poverty (Chang, 2008; Chung, 2007; Gray, 2008; Janelli, 1993; Jeong, 2004).

Participant: Only a couple of times of year did they [older Koreans when growing up] get meat [holidays].

The number of work hours a day was inconsequential compared to the quality of life they were trying to achieve for future generations. As a result of this, older Koreans tend not to think of work in terms of time, but in terms of sacrifice. The longer you work, the more you sacrifice.
The more you sacrifice, the more you help the country. The length of time per day you work in the office is a sign of your loyalty. This speaks to the collective nature of the Korean people ameliorated by the Confucian religion. Other Korean participants regardless of age also referenced the older generation’s sacrifices in their answers as well.

The difference between Americans and Koreans’ work-life balance can also be illustrated in this C-level Korean national’s description of a peer who was a fellow officer in the American business unit.

Participant: They [older generation] had to work very hard to survive. They had no choice. You have to respect that.

Americans are used to how to manage your leisure time. Older generation Koreans no time to learn how to manage the family. No time to learn how to manage his time… No time to care for family. They put a lot resource to develop the country, to develop the business. Everybody work very, very hard for the country and for the family.

The participant continues his defense of his peer in the following conversation:

Participant: Older Koreans do not know how to have a work-life balance. They only know how to work. They do not know what to do with time off. They do not understand leisure time. You have to understand the history of the country.

Calling Koreans workaholic shows a lack of understanding of the Korean history. The younger generation is more personal driven type of mindset. The older generation has more of a team mindset; working very hard.

In requesting time off work (sick days), he offers the following:

Participant: You [Americans] learn to follow the policy. Korean people did not learn to do that. We learn to sacrifice, you know…working hard.

[In a passionate tone] He did not know! He did not learn, how to take off. He did not learn, how to take care of family. He did not know, how to develop himself. All he know[s] is how to work. He just work, work, work…

In reference to his own lack of work-life balance:

Participant: I have no ideas how many days off I have. Sometimes my wife tell me today is off! I did not know. I did not know to check. I did not know it was a holiday. So sad. It’s sad [laughing]! That’s a fact [he said smiling].
Korean nationals never leave work early, or before their Korean manager leaves the office. This stems from the participants’ previous experience working in South Korea. Each participant gave a similar description of his or her past experience when leaving work when he or she was employed in South Korea. Many cited examples of sleeping in the office overnight to ensure that their boss knew that they were working hard and putting forth the necessary effort to be successful at the company. The trend continues in the United States. Here is a revealing conversation with a younger Korean national:

Participant: Working hours depends on your ambition. If you want to go home at eight hours, because you don’t really care [about work] to be honest, then….uh…uh…

Researcher: So are you saying that if you want to be ambitious and do good in the company, you will stay longer and work more?

Participant: Right. Right.

Researcher: If I wanted to be ambitious and do well at the company, how long would I have to work? What would I have to do?

Participant: A lot of the managers stay [late], so I mean people who are under the supervision of the manager do not get to go home until [late]. You know what I mean. Unless you have something to do…You don’t leave because it looks kind of bad… I am actually working until 1AM, 2AM, 12 o’clock. But I actually like the people there so it is not as hard as it is supposed to be.

Below is an excerpt of one C-Level manager’s view of employees requesting time from work:

 Participant: Korean workers are a little bit scared to ask for off work. They do not want to take away from the team.

This theory is justified by the responses of the Korean national and Korean American participants. One Korean national participant’s response to taking vacation or sick days:

Participant: I wasn’t comfortable taking sick days or vacation.

One exchange with a Korean national manager:

Researcher: What about when they [employees] have a personal issue that they have to take care of?
Participant: It is your own problem. You handle. Don’t bring your personal matters to work.

A similar response from a different participant:

Participant: I have to explain why I want off work. It has to deal with my immediate family it is OK. If something else, then I have to give a detailed reason why. We have to think about the group… People really care about other people. Other people’s feelings, and people care about how other people react.

Another Korean manager stated that he also recognizes a difference between American workers and Korean workers in terms of requesting time from work.

Participant: You [Americans] learn to follow the policy. Korean people did not learn to do that. We learn to sacrifice, you know…working hard. You must work for the glory of the company and thus glory of the country.

There were only a few examples where Korean nationals ask off work and it was usually in regard to a family need and only after he or she works at least a 9 to 10 hour day. Many express an extreme sense of stress and apprehension in having to request time off and only do so in the most extreme of circumstances. It seems as if the participant has to work up the courage in order to approach his or her boss to ask permission for the needed time off. Furthermore, the participants give great detail as to the personal circumstances surrounding their request in an effort to justify the absence. Their request takes on much the form of a defendant explaining himself or herself before a judge in a defense case. When a participant does requests time, he or she does so in an apologetic manner and he or she almost always offers to work extra hours on another day or on a weekend (to include Sundays) as an offer of amends. He or she does so voluntarily and in a preemptive manner in hopes of attaining the necessary time off. Every example given of a participant requesting time from work consists of a lengthy discussion with his or her manager. There are no examples given of a simple time off work request with no caveats.
Many participants gave examples of how they request permission to miss work for illness. They do so in person and in a submissive and polite tone. Their Korean national manager asks why the participant needs to take leave on that particular day because he or she knows it is a busy day for the company and his or her absence will hurt the team. The participants then make up a reason such as that day being the only day that the doctor is available, etc. The manager still insists that the participant uses the sick time on another day. Whether or not the participant leaves depends on the severity of the case; even if he or she is truly sick.

The following is another example a participants’ request to miss work to take care of familial responsibilities. A mid-level Korean national manager in his early 30s had recently moved to Atlanta with his Korean company. Once he transferred to Atlanta, he reported to the president of the American division who was also a Korean national and had been in the United States for 2 years but with the company for over 30. The mid level manager was experiencing marital problems with his wife due his long work hours with the company when he was in Korea. His wife continually expressed her displeasure with his 6-day workweek and long hours. Sundays were his only day off work. His typical work day in Korea consisted of the following: taking the 5AM train to Seoul to be at work by 7AM, working until 9PM with a 20 minute lunch break, and then taking the train home returning at 11PM. He had heard from his peers that the work hours in America with the same Korean company would be less than he was working in Korea. As such, he put in for a transfer to the American division in hopes of being able to work fewer hours to mend his marriage. Even though his wife was hesitant about moving to the United States, she agreed based on the understanding that she would be able to see her husband more.
Once in Atlanta, the mid-level manager experienced the same type of workday and felt even more pressure to work longer. His only reprieve seemed to be that he no longer had to take the long train ride to work every day. However, this was quickly replaced with the expectation that he would work longer hours at the company in Atlanta. His typical workday in Atlanta consisted of: arriving to work at 7AM, a working lunch unless it was with the manager off site, and finishing anywhere from 9PM to midnight to typically include a half day on Saturdays. His wife was now more upset because she complained of being in a foreign country with little to no social support from her husband and not being able to speak the English language comfortably. She threatened to leave her husband should he not do something to remedy the situation. He agreed to marital counseling with Saturday sessions. However, he quickly experienced a conflict in the schedule due to his work obligations and had to ask his manager for permission off of work.

He expressed a strong feeling of stress and apprehension before asking his manager for the necessary time off work to attend the marital counseling session. During his verbal request, he gave his manager a very detailed account as to why he needed the time off and offered to work that Saturday night and that Sunday. After hearing the request, he manager replied, “Simply, you are here to work. Maybe you should not have brought your wife with you [meaning to America].”

The Korean national participants who are not managers are very familiar with examples such as this. As a result, many have begun to offer slight fabrications to their boss in order to get time from work. Playing upon South Korea’s extreme reverence for the elderly, one participant offered:

Participant: I will say I have an appointment with a very old friend or family member [insinuating the person is about to die].
Another illustration:

Participant: Now that I have more experiences, so if I want to take some day off, to be honest, sometimes I lie to get off. Sometimes. I learn from the people [the fellow employees]. They say you gotta have to lie to get off.

Researcher: What cultural group did you learn that from?

Participant: My friends. The Koreans [laughs]. It’s not just the Koreans though. Koreans, Americans, it doesn’t matter; they both lie… I believe that honest is the best policy all the time, but sometimes, you know, white lie [laughs admittedly].

Another participant offers the following example of how he tries to cover for his colleagues when they leave before their boss does at the end of the day:

Participant: Sometimes I lie to my boss when he asks, “Where is this guy? [in an angry accusatory tone].” I say he just left [meaning just prior to the boss approaching]. Then I call my team leader [the colleague] and tell him [that his boss was looking for him at the end of the day].

The participant says how this conflict between trying to help his friend and lying to his boss causes him great stress.

All of the Korean participants state that their expectation in coming to America was to work less and have more time for their families. However, none of the participants conceive that they work any less in America than they did in South Korea. Although they do not have to work as much during the weekends, their overall hours have not changed much because they have to stay late during the weekdays. This is so they can communicate with headquarters in Korea, whose time zone is 14 hours ahead of the Eastern Time zone. Many Koreans report having conference calls with Korea at midnight or 2AM, which is the equivalent of the next day’s afternoon in South Korea. These types of calls happen 2 to 3 times a week. One participant spoke of having to attend these calls even when the participant is sick. The managers say that it is an emergency situation and that the participant must attend. Having experienced this for some time, the participant offered this:
Participant: Their [Korean headquarters] emergency situation is not [a real emergency]…They quite often have emergency situations.

A younger Korean participant said that while he expected to work long hours at the chaebol before being hired, he did not expect the 17 or 19 hour workdays that has become the reality. He could recall at least eight times that he has slept in the office since being in America.

Company dinners are a normal occurrence throughout the workweek. Since chaebols are large with deep financial pockets, they have more money for these types of after hours events than smaller Korean companies. Therefore, working for a chaebol typically involves attending more company dinners. These dinners are typically not planned in advance and usually are instigated by the Korean national manager. Typically around 7PM, the manger will go to all of his employees and offer them an invite to attend dinner. The dinner is always at a Korean restaurant and always includes alcohol. There are many toasts throughout the night as the atmosphere is meant to be casual. All of the participants reported consuming and watching others consume copious amounts of alcohol resulting in many of the employees, including themselves becoming inebriated. The Korean national participants explain that it is a test of manliness to see who can stay out the latest, drink the most, and show up to work the earliest the next day. The dinners last anywhere from 2 to 3 hours, with karaoke sometimes to follow. Karaoke is more of a rare event and only happens if there is no more work to do back in the office. Karaoke is usually in a different location in a private room furnished with more alcohol and snacks. There are all the normal amenities of a traditional karaoke room to include long leather couches, microphones, and a disco ball. Several of the club’s party girls who are of Korean decent then enter the room and help facilitate the party atmosphere. There is one girl per company employee, who is always male at this point. Female employees do not attend the karaoke after dinner. There appears to be no illegal activity, just more of an atmosphere akin to a
college type of party with the feeling of being chaperoned. The girls drink, dance, and sing, but
do not cross into any sexual activity. Participants speak of rumors of being able to pursue this
type of activity with the girls afterwards, but none have first-hand knowledge of this in America.
Some participants do admit to this type of activity frequently happening back at the clubs in
South Korea however.

If the manager still feels that there is work to be done, the participants return to the office
after dinner. This happens more times than not given the frequency with which the American
office has to communicate with the Korean Headquarters. All participants detail the importance
and frequency of such dinners. The older Koreans want to attend the dinners more so than the
younger Koreans do.

Younger participant: I will tell my boss I cannot go to dinner. Then he will say, “Oh…,
Why not? Come on…[in a friendly tone].” Then I will tell him why I cannot go and then
he will say, “OK, you can go [home] [in a quick and dismissive tone communicating
disapproval].”

The dinner invite is more of a directive than a request. If a participant declines the initial
dinner invitation, the Korean national manager asks again with slightly more enthusiasm. If the
participant still refuses a second time, the manager then becomes visibly agitated and dismissive
of the participant. Those Korean national participants who give examples of declining dinner
reported feeling a strong sense of guilt. The participants also experience informal reprisal from
their boss the next day in terms of close supervision and criticism of the participant’s work. As a
result, Korean national participants tend to always attend the company dinners for fear of reprisal
from their management.

One participant detailed how he cannot consume alcohol because of the illness it causes
his stomach. For a lot of people in America in general, this would not be an issue for their
workplace as many publically traded companies have specific policies regarding the
consumption of alcohol, even at company events that are after hours. However given the nature of the Korean business dinner, it is a significant issue for the Korean national participant. When asked how he handles the situation, he said that he tries not to dink too much and just pretends to drink. He hides the fact that he has health issues associated with alcohol. He has not told his manager or his peers because he does not want to appear special or be treated any differently. His wife worries about his health when he stays out at company dinners. This causes the participant a great deal of stress.

Many of the participants speak of the animosity they have towards their American counterparts in terms of their work hours.

Researcher: Tell me more about the cultural difference in working hours?

Participant: In Korea, people typically always work more than 8 hours. Here, when the clock strikes 5 [PM], the Americans just leave. But if there is a meeting or something after 5, then they have to stay.

Researcher: Do the Americans understand they have to stay, or do the Korean managers tell them they have to stay?

Participant: I mean, I think they know they have to stay, you know, for company’s welfare.

The Korean nationals (non-managers) express both envy and resentment towards the American employees for leaving work on time or early. The Korean national managers express more anger and frustration at this phenomenon. They posit that the Americans are lazy and do not care about their work or fellow employees.

The average workday reported by the Korean Americans is between 10 to 12 hours. Some noted as many as 14 and 17-hour workdays at times. Many Korean Americans are expected to work on weekends. In essence, they work just as much, if not more than their Korean national counterparts. Since all of the participants are salaried employees, there is no
incremental income for extra work performed outside of the official 9AM to 6PM working day hours. The Korean national managers also make several demands outside of the Korean American participants’ legitimate work functions, such as pick up the manager from the airport, or helping the manager return a rental car.

Participant: They just want me to be there every [explicative] single day basically.
Participant: In Korean culture, there is no personal privacy. If I cannot come in I have to tell why. They interrogate me basically, [asking] “Why?”

Although aggravated by the extra time, Korean Americans seem to better understand the long hours expected by Korean firms and tend to remain at work after an 8-hour day.

Participant: My 8 hours never turned into 8 hours.

The participants verbally tell their Korean manager that he or she is leaving work in an effort to check and see if it is satisfactory to do so. Whether or not the participants are allowed to leave depends on the time of day and the manager’s perception of the number of hours the participants have already worked. Although all expressed the ability to be able to leave freely if they want to, most all of the Korean Americans feel pressure to stay and therefore remain at work. Much like the Korean national participants, the Korean Americans participants voice their concern for co-workers having to make up for the participants’ absence should they decide to leave work. The Korean American participants have a strong sense of concern and commitment to their fellow co-workers and do not wish to add difficulties. More often than not, Korean Americans will choose to remain at work in order to prevent any extra work for their peers. Also, the participants do not want the overall quality of the company product to suffer due to their absence. Only in extreme cases of long workdays (12-16 hour workday) do the participants actually get into an argument with their Korean manager on whether or not they should be allowed to leave work with no sense of regret.
Participant: I cannot leave until the manager leaves.

Several participants express their difficulty in being able to leave work, even if they have pre-approval from their manager. The participants are often asked to cancel personal plans or family obligations and come to work instead. Many succumb to these requests.

Participant: The next day after company dinners, several managers [Korean national] were sleeping at their desk. They brought spare clothes to the office. Pants the same. Jackets the same.

In terms of Korean Americans, the difference in how they request for time off work depends upon their generation. Korean Americans who were born and raised in Korea follow the negotiation tactics closer to that of Korean nationals. If the participants were raised in America as children, then they tend to ask off of work more often. Yet, these participants still show signs of hesitancy in doing so for fear of reprisal from either their boss or their peers; just not to the degree that older Korean Americans do.

The Korean American participants are acutely aware that they are under constant supervision at work and that work hours are highly scrutinized by the Korean nationals.

Participant: I know one time they were monitoring what time people were coming in using a camera or something like that.

One Korean American participant details how a Korean national peer challenged his initially leaving work on time.

Participant: He said, “Be careful, because you are leaving on time and that is not good for big boss. I said, “What’s the problem?”...[Korean national] “Everybody’s here, why are you leaving?”...After 2 or 3 months, I just stayed there... There is no life at all.

In the beginning of their employment, the Korean Americans described working whenever they were told to do so, regardless of the day or time.
Participant: When it comes to month end, when they want to capture the revenue for that month, I have to go in after my shift, go home, take care of my child, go back to the office and I am there until 5AM in the morning.

Researcher: What time do you go back to work on the days you stay until 5AM?

Participant: Probably about 10AM. I go home, take a snooze, take a shower…

However as the participants’ time of employment progressed, their tolerance for extra work deteriorated. They became less accepting and now tend to ignore their manager’s demands for extended hours at work. For instance, if a participant’s manager calls his or her home on the weekends, the participant will now not answer the call. This is a continuous effort as the Korean national managers call numerous times during off hours in an effort to get the participants to return to work. When asked if the participant is worried about losing his or her job over this type of tactic, all respond in the negative. They are too exhausted to care anymore and accept the possibility of job loss.

Participant: Later on, it was expected [to work at midnight during certain times]. I was told I had to come in.

Researcher: Did that cause stress with your family?

Participant: Oh yeah…My husband was upset because I was doing this when I was 7, 8 months pregnant. He wanted me to quit.

The Korean American participants also notice the difference in their work hours compared to their American counterparts. The participants both resent and respect the fact that Americans either leave early or at the end of the official workday.

Researcher: Do you see a difference in Americans and Korean Americans at work?

Participant: Oh yeah, absolutely. Americans always think they are right. They always take advantage of what they can enjoy at the workplace. At 4:50PM they start to pack up to go home. I really respect that.
Most participants (American) had anticipated longer work hours at the Korean company based on second-hand information from friends or colleges. None had any first-hand knowledge or were able to gain any actual accounts of what the typical workday would be like. The general expectation was 8-10 hours per day depending on the situation. However, all American participants described their initial shock at the long workday that the chaebols expected once they became employees.

Participant: Koreans work night and day.

Many expected to work these longer days (10-14 hours) only during the beginning of their time at the company and that their hours would eventually subside into what the American participants consider a normal 8 hour average workday.

The reality is anywhere from 10-16 hour workdays, if not more.

Participant: You are working literally 20 hours a day.

Some higher-level participants report as much as 70 to 80 hour workweeks, to include the weekend. Eight-hour workdays are the exception, not the norm.

Researcher: Did the long work hours cause any stress with your family?

Participant: My wife was definitely not real pleased by it. I tried to be more open-minded and explain it her that it was a cultural difference but of course she didn’t see it that way. [Wife said] “You are in America, not Korea.”

Unlike their Korean counterparts, no American participants voice having to perform any unusual personal business tasks for their Korean national managers.

Americans tend to express their work hours in terms of task accomplishment. They had expected their work efforts to be measured in this manner as opposed to the actual number of hours worked. Americans posit that the Korean nationals are more concerned with the actual number of hours worked as opposed to any specific task accomplishment. Americans are
pressed to stay and work long hours even if their assigned task is accomplished. When Americans attempt to leave work at the end of the official workday (6PM), the Korean nationals ask the participants about other possible work tasks that the participants could perform. For instance, a Korean national manager might ask, “Have you gotten that Purchase Order from Customer X yet?” Or, “Did you complete that product bulletin yet?” According to the Korean national manager, there is always something else that the participant can do.

Participant: [Korean national manager] said I disappointed him by leaving early. These are not mission critical tasks for the day, but more akin to the type of examples that would lead one to believe that there is always something else to do and that one’s work is never really finished. Other attempts to leave early are met with outright objection from the Korean nationals.

Participant: I left at 4:40PM…I got email that night asking why I left early saying I didn’t ask permission…the Korean guy was telling me I was stealing from the company cause I left early.

Participant: They called me during my Christmas dinner at home. My wife said, “If you answer that, I’m going to kill you!”

Another participant tells of the response he received when he had to explain that what his Korean national boss was requesting required the participant to work on Christmas day. The Korean Manager said in a dismissive tone, “Yes, I have heard of Christmas,” as if to ask why the participant was even bringing the matter up in the first place. All of the American participants give an example of this type of exchange with their respective Korean national manager at some point, and all participants express anger over it.

As such, typically Americans give short answers to the Koreans’ query and leave the office anyway. As stated earlier, many of the American participants initially tried to
accommodate their Korean national manager’s request to work longer and felt guilty when they left at the end of the day.

Participant:  Wow, I’ve never worked anywhere before where I felt guilty leaving at 7PM!

As the American participants’ time at the chaebol progressed, many made an effort to quickly leave at the end of the day when they knew their Korean manager was not looking, or they would take a quick exit route that allowed them to bypass their Korean manager forgoing any interaction with him. All participants still come in early to work, averaging a start time of about 8AM. However, they now simply get up and leave when they feel they have put in a normal workday, usually around 5PM or 6PM.

Participant:  I’m going to leave by 6PM every night, that’s going to be the rule. You gotta give me 3 days notice if you want me to work after 6.

Participant:  If you want to fire me, then fire me but I am going home.

Participant:  When I leave, there are a ton of people still there. Company dinners are a challenge for American participants.

Participants: They also do a lot of socializing after hours and so that still puts a pretty big strain on the family. Cause we go out drinking almost every night while my wife is sitting home alone with a newborn.

One source of the extended workday stems from the headquarters being located in South Korea. All of the participants give examples of how they are often required to stay late in order to communicate with South Korea. This often has the participants in the office until midnight or 1AM. Many have begun to either push back against this with their Korean national manager, or simply try to avoid the manager altogether at the end of the workday.

Participant:  I get there around 7AM. I tend to leave around 6:30 or 7:00PM. If you don’t leave [at that time], then Korea would wake up and you are there for another couple of hours.
Americans typically ignore the indirect pressure from their manager at the end of the day and leave work anyway.

One participant expressed his surprise at the business culture of extended work that he witnessed when he visited the headquarters in South Korea for a business trip.

Participant: Workers get 20 minutes for lunch. They can choose to go to the cafeteria to eat, or they can take a nap at their desk, or work station. Many pull out pillows that they brought to work and nap sitting up with their head on the pillow on the desk. No one talks in the cafeteria. People only have 15 minutes to eat. The employees can pick one of three lines that are color designated. The color denotes the type of food. The three choices are traditional Korean, contemporary Korean, or an attempt at hamburger type deal. Most eat either the traditional or the contemporary food. When they go through the line, they get a limited choice of food they put on a tray and then go to a table to eat. They do not get a drink with the meal. Once they finish the meal, the employees take their tray and place it in the wash area. They then get a small glass of water and drink it before they go back to work. No one gets up during a meal and gets a drink. When I got up to get one, everybody stopped eating and looked at me! One guy told me that everyone waits until after the meal to drink the water... If you nap, you don’t eat.

Of course, this type of work environment is totally alien from any that the American participants have previously experienced.

Autonomy, Supervisory Status and Supervisory Support

Another top indicator of an employee’s sense of job satisfaction stems from his or her sense of autonomy (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). Paramount to an employee’s happiness is the degree that he or she is in control and is empowered to make decisions and take necessary actions without having to seek out direct approval from management. In terms of job satisfaction, autonomy is cited as being more important than income (Munn, 2013 and Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne, & McCarthy, 2013). In other words, even though a person may get paid very well for his or her job, if he or she does not have a sense of control and independence, then he or she will not be happy with the position. A high salary does not matter in terms of overall
satisfaction. Since autonomy is directly related to job satisfaction, and job satisfaction is related to happiness at home, it is a key factor in the work-life balance equation.

Supervisory status and support are closely related to autonomy. An employee’s autonomy is directly affected by how closely he or she is managed by his or her supervisor (An, Yom, & Ruggerio, 2010). The more a manager scrutinizes an employee, the less autonomy that employee has. Additionally, for an employee to enjoy autonomy, he or she must have the support of his or her manager to do so. Managers support autonomy by supporting decisions made by the employee to the overall company. If an employee knows that he or she will be supported by the manager, then that employee is likely to take more initiative and actions without necessarily notifying his or her immediate manager. They will not have a fear of reprisal as they know there is allowance for minor mistakes. Given the close proximity and the intertwining nature of autonomy, supervisor status, and supervisor support, each participant’s experience in his or her respective chaebol is reviewed in this same section. Again, the experiences are divided by group cultural representation.

Chaebol operations in America are primarily managed by Korean nationals. No participant (all three groups) had knowledge of any other nationality or culture besides Korean nationals in charge of operations in the United States. This is not to say there were no American managers; just none at the top levels. Based upon the participants’ responses in this study, it is estimated that 30% of the employees in the American chaebol facilities are Korean national and that they primarily fill the management and direct management assistant roles.

When asked why he pays such close attention to his subordinates’ activities and time schedules, one Korean national C-level manager responded:

Participant: You have to think about the lazy, the laziness.
Another manager spoke of the expectations of Korean national subordinates in South Korea. These employees expect to be managed directly. If the manager does not constantly pay attention to his subordinates’ work, then the subordinates do not feel like the manager cares or is concerned. Subordinates will start to complain to upper management that the manager does not care. As a result, it is hard for a Korean national to simply delegate tasks with little supervision and empower subordinates. Therefore, they officially check up on their employees constantly as this is what they are used to doing back home in South Korea.

Several Korean national participants detail their Korean national manager’s tactic of calling last minute meetings in order to get the participants to stay past official working hours. The Korean national managers speak of the importance the meeting has for the team and that it would be selfish for the participants to leave early; even though the meeting is after official work hours and with little relevance to the overall business.

One Korean national participant remarks about the strong sense of obligation to coworkers and the chaebol that lead to extra effort:

*Participant:* Making the team. Complete the synergy. Sometimes an individual may be a good performer, but may not be good for the team.

The team and its relationships are the most important thing. The individual and his or her personal achievements should be second to that of the team’s. It is a manager’s job to ensure this constant sense of team environment.

Participants comment on how chaebols only allow managers to fire employees under the most extreme of circumstances, such as steeling. Managers cannot fire poor performing individuals unless that person commits a crime. If a Korean national manager has to fire someone, then that will work against him and show that he is not a good manager. The belief is
that as a manager, one has to find a way to successfully manage employees, even poor performing ones.

The Korean national manager participants also detail how they prefer to hire Korean employees as opposed to American ones because the managers know the Korean employees will do more work than the American employees will. In terms of considering Korean Americans for employment, the Korean national manager participants posit that those born and raised in USA will not be excepting of Korean company work environment. However, Korean Americans born in South Korea will be more excepting of longer work hours.

Korean national participants who are managers express an extreme sense of loyalty to the company, exampled by these statements revealed during the interviews:

Participant: As a senior manager, I will stay loyal to the company.

Participant: Company take[s] care of everything.

Participant: I will sacrifice myself for company.

The non-managing Korean national participants openly acknowledged a difference between Korean and American managers.

Researcher: Do you see a difference between your American manager and your Korean manager?

Participant: Oh, of course. [laughs]. The Korean person [manager], they ask more of a Korean person [employee].

Participants stated that American managers delegate tasks much more and pay little attention to actual time at work than Korean managers do. American managers allow for autonomy whereas Korean national managers do not.

Participant: I think a Korean manager’s expectations are more. Since we are Korean, we are able to get more information because we can read English and Korean emails. I think we work better than Americans. It is not about the ability it is about the information.
Because we are able to get more information because we speak Korean. We had Korean trainers who spoke mostly Korean so they were able to train us better…

Korean managers can speak English, but they are more comfortable speaking Korean. They do not have the patience to speak English. Because normally a higher position Korean manager, they normally speak better Korean. Because they come stay in American for 3 or 4 years, but they do not stay so they don’t speak it [English] very well.

According to the Korean national participants, Korean national managers project a sense that there is always more work to do and that a participant’s work is never truly finished. A participant is made to feel guilty if he or she leaves work if the Korean national manager and the participant’s colleagues are still there. If the Korean national participant wants to be successful, then he or she will work late.

Korean nationals are also aware of a difference between themselves and Korean Americans. This difference can be a source of stress in the workplace. This is best illustrated by the below discussion:

Participant: [Korean American’s name] came to America when she was very young, when she was seven. She can speak Korean very well. So some people think that she was born and raised in Korea. Or that they think she is the perfect Korean. But, actually her mind, it’s not Korean. It is American. So when she argues with the Korean managers, her mind is American so, Korean person, Korean manager think that they are ignored by [name] because she’s so rude, so she lots of complaints, lots of fights.

Age is another difference among managers of the different cultural groups. In the Korean culture, promotion is primarily based upon time employed as opposed to task accomplishment as it is in America. As such, the level of management in a chaebol is closely correlated to a person’s age. The older a person is, the higher the position he or she likely possesses. The reverse tends to be true as well. There are no relatively young Korean national senior managers in a chaebol. According to the participants, it is very rare to have a senior manager that is younger than his subordinates. It is worth noting that there are no known senior female executives in any chaebols. While experience is a valuable consideration for promotion in
American companies, it is not paramount to other factors such as task accomplishment and social network.

One Korean national participant details how having an older Korean national subordinate here in America caused the participant stress. Due to the person’s age, the subordinate expected to be treated with respect and authority even though the participant was the subordinate’s manager. This caused a lot of stress for the participant because culturally he or she is obligated to respect the older person as an elder and seek the elder’s direction on all matters. However in terms of the business, the participant was much more experienced and as manager responsible for the subordinate’s actions. Many times, the subordinate refused to do as directed by the younger participant and gave the participant attitude. The participant had to politely ask the subordinate to perform the assigned work tasks. The subordinate would often reply to these requests by dressing down the participant. This conflict in roles caused a great sense of stress and discomfort for the participant.

In terms of feedback, Korean national participants cannot directly question their managers, or openly disagree with him. The word him is implemented here because again, none of the participants have a female manager. To do so would be to cause the manager to lose face. The only time that it is acceptable to question the manager is during the company dinners when alcohol is involved. Otherwise, the Korean national participants tend to do exactly as they are told, when they are told to do it.

One participant describes the anxiety and stress he feels before requesting off of work. It takes approximately 20 minutes to work up the courage to go see his Korean national manager to ask permission to miss work, whatever the reason. Even though his immediate supervisor is
American and approves his request without much hassle, the participant still has to ask his manager’s boss who is Korean national for permission to leave.

Participant: The American manager I have no issues telling him I have to take off to take care of my family. Now with a Korean manager, I struggle, a lot. I didn’t know how to put it… With the American manager I can just send an email. The Korean manager, I have to speak to him. I wind up telling him the truth, but it is a lot more difficult to tell him.

Another respondent:

Participant: I feel those that work under the Americans have a lot better experience.

All of the participants describe their internal conflict and sense of stress when they witness their Korean national boss doing something wrong or incorrectly, or gives the participants the wrong directions that they are expected to strictly follow. Several Korean American participants explain how many times the Korean national manager asks them to alter reports to Korean headquarters in order to make the American chaebol contingent look better in terms of productivity. This scenario places the Korean American participants in direct conflict with their cultural norms; obeying your seniors no matter what and performing your work to the best of your ability for the good of the group. This ethical dilemma causes a great amount of stress for the participants. If they obey their boss, then the group will suffer. Yet if they don’t, then they are being disobedient. Korean American participants are further confused and conflicted when they witness their American counterparts directly confront their boss and openly refuse to adjust reports as desired. The Korean American participants express a stronger sense of loyalty to management and their coworkers than their American counterparts do in this research.

Participant: Even though I see my boss is doing wrong, I cannot say anything.

Another example:
Participant: If you cannot do it, you have to...I have to try. I have to show him that I try. Even though his [the Korean manager] decision is not correct way, sometimes I have to finish that way.

A third example:

Participant: If I have to leave, then someone else have to pick up that job. I feel bad for them....Of course that causes really more stress especially my wife...because all of the parents are there [at child’s school event] except me is kind of comment I heard many times...So, you know, not good. But I have to make decision [to stay at work].

This has obvious implications not only for the participant’s family, but also for the company’s productivity. It also causes further challenges and stress for the participants later on.

A common tactic to negotiate this conflict is claiming ignorance. If the Korean American participants are told to do something by a Korean national manager with which they do not agree, they pretend not to understand the Korean language. This language is complicated due to the Chinese and Japanese influence and all Korean and Korean Americans seem to understand its complexity and the various abilities of individuals to speak it. Participants say that it is uncommon for a Korean American to have complete mastery and understanding of the Korean language. Because of this, it is easy for them to pretend not to understand the Korean nationals’ instructions when the participants disagree with them.

Participant: I actually try to make it like I don’t really understand their Korean as much as I really do. Cause I can actually understand Korean really well...I pretend that I don’t understand.

Unfortunately, this tactic does not always work. Many of the Korean nationals implement the same tactic in unpleasant situations with American employees. Since they themselves do it, Korean nationals are aware of the fact that Korean Americans do it as well.

Participant: When I say I don’t understand, they think I am playing dumb.
This can cause conflict in cases where Korean Americans truly do not understand directions. Many Korean American participants voice their frustration with Korean management in not believing them when they voice their genuine lack of understanding.

The Korean American participants are also united in their experience with added work and circumvented American managers. Often, the Korean national managers give the participants tasks without going through the chain of command so-to-speak. This is especially the case if the participants directly report to American managers that in turn report to Korean nationals. The Korean nationals tend to instruct the Korean Americans in the Korean language so that other people (Americans) will not know the subject of conversation. The American managers are not notified first by the Korean national manager of the direction given to their subordinates that are usually counter to the American manager’s instructions. The participants tell their American managers after the fact, and only if the American manager asks them why the original task is not being completed. If the participant tells the Korean national manager that his American manager has given him a different task, the Korean national manager says that the participant has to perform the tasks the Korean national manager gives him and that the American manager’s tasks will have to wait.

Participant: There were definitely a lot of instances where I kind of felt like they were expecting like more from me. There were times I didn’t come in, but the next time I came in they kind of seem like they were asking me...indirect questions specifically trying to figure out why I didn’t come in...I felt like they were interrogating me...they will ask me in Korean.

Another Korean American participant at a different chaebol echoed this same type of experience:

Researcher: Do you feel you are treated differently because you are Korean American?

Participant: Oh yeah, yeah! There is no doubt about that.

Researcher: Can you tell me more about that?
Participant: They would give it to me [extra work] or to [fellow Korean American colleague] because they knew that I couldn’t go against it… They need to know how the US culture works…This is not Korea, it is America, the rules are not going to be the same.

Excerpts from other Korean American participants:

Participant: I may look Korean and speak Korean, but at the end of the day I am American, you know?

Participant: Because they [Korean Americans] look like Korean, there is assumption that they already know the Korean stuff…So they are expecting them to work like Koreans.

According to the Korean American participants of this study, Korean national managers need help understanding the English language and the American culture. The Korean American participants detail how they are often tasked to help the Korean national managers with this matter. It results in a lot of extra work that may or may not be related to the participant’s official duties.

The Korean American participants detailed the common practice of nonverbal forms of communication by the Korean nationals to signify disappointment or concern with the participants’ actions at work.

Participant: [Visibly frustrated in her response] When he [Korean national manager] came up to me he said, “You not working enough hours.” He used that word, hours. I told him I was working 10 hours every day for three months. I almost raised my voice at him [older Korean national male manager]…I was really upset by that.

He keeps pushing me…Sometimes I just say, “I gotta go” and I leave. I can see his face and it’s a frowny face.

Another Participant: I get the general sense that they don’t like it [missing work]…You kind out tell it from their tone.

Additionally, the Korean American participants express frustration that the Korean national managers will not argue with American employees to a certain degree. They posit that this is because the Korean nationals do not understand the English language and therefore cannot confront the Americans to the degree that they can the Korean American employees. As a result,
the Korean nationals only push the American employees so far before they give up, tasking the Korean Americans with the work instead.

Participant: When I was taking a sick day, I was interrogated. But when it was [an American taking a sick day], nobody [Korean national managers] talk to him because they don’t speak English.

All of the American participants detail a work history prior to chaebol employment that allowed for autonomy in the performance of their job. As such, they expected to have some similar degree of autonomy at their respective chaebol. Many acknowledge that they were aware of the possibility of slightly less autonomy, but none expected the reality realized. That reality is very little to no autonomy at the chaebols.

Participant: [I have] no decision making power at all.

Most of the American participants are mid to high-level managers who are used to reporting to C-level officers in their previous employment at American companies where they were allowed a significant amount of autonomy. All of the American participants complain about being micromanaged and highly scrutinized by the Korean national managers.

American participants who are managers complain that the Korean nationals often times circumvent their authority with the Americans’ direct reports. This adds to the American participants’ work hours because they have to then make up for the lack of work assigned to their subordinates. This is a constant source of familial stress because of missed time at home.

Many American participants express a sense of distrust and anxiety over their lack of autonomy at their chaebol. Many have to ask a Korean American co-worker to ask the Korean national manager in the Korean language for equipment necessary to do their job. This along with constantly having to ask for permission for everything is especially frustrating. All desire to
work for an American, or western company again. One participant turned down additional responsibilities because he did not want to have to report to a Korean national manager.

Participant: I wanted to make it clear that I did not want to work for a Korean manager. The Americans are frustrated by the unquestioning obedience that is required of them. One respondent posits that his sense of frustration in managerial scrutiny lies in the cultural difference between South Koreans and Americans and that there is little that can be done.

Participant: It’s not logical to us [Americans] but it’s logical to them [Korean nationals] so that’s the way it’s going to be.

Participant: I want to make sure I have more control over what I am doing versus what I am doing at [chaebol name].

Income

For purposes of this study, income represents not only an employee’s salary, but also any other financial obligations or company transactions that affect an employee’s overall income. Employees may incur company expenses for travel, customer visits and entertainment, trade shows, and other similar activities. How a company handles, or processes these transactions directly affects an employee’s income and thus his or her overall work-life balance (Devi & Kumari, 2012). Does the employee have a company credit card, or is he or she expected to pay for company business activities on a personal credit account and then be reimbursed? What is involved in the reimbursement process and how long before the employee receives the money? An employee’s income is directly affected depending on how his or her company processes the reimbursement expense.

Specific salary amounts were not discussed with the participants. Salary is a sensitive subject and I did not want to make the participants feel defensive by querying them about the specific dollar amount they are paid. Furthermore, this study is not a quantitative measure of the
salaries of chaebol employees. It merely examines salary in overall terms of the participant’s income as it relates to his or her work-life balance. Most participants were reluctant to discuss specific salary points at length other than to reveal whether or not they felt as if the salary was a fair compensation for the job title. None disclosed their specific salary.

Notice that job title is implemented here as opposed to the work performed. This is an important distinction. Participants were queried as to how well paid they posit they are in relation to their stated job title and listed responsibilities. This can be different in relating one’s salary with the amount of work actually performed. For example, a first level engineer who is paid about $60,000 might say that he is really well paid compared to his peers. Conversely, if that same person had to perform the duties of the Vice President of Engineering while maintaining the same pay grade and title, then he would most likely respond that he is drastically underpaid. Discussion of income usually progressed in the conversations to the point of how fairly compensated the participant is in relation to the actual work he or she performed. In discussing salary, most participants compared their salaries and compensated efforts with those of their peer group internal and external to the chaebol, and both personal and professional in nature. Since all participants of this study are white-collar employees, they are all salaried employees that do not get paid by the hour.

Most of the Korean national participants posit that they are well compensated for their job. They also state that working for a chaebol pays better than working for a small company in South Korea. None express any concern about medical benefits here in America as the company covers 100% of the costs for them and their families. While none disclose the details of their salary in this study, they all express that they are paid better in America than they would be in South Korea. One C-level participant noted how his pay structure in the chaebol allows him to
make almost twice as much as he could make in South Korea. As such, there is fierce competition in South Korea for management positions in America.

Participant: $60,000 in Korea equals over $100,000 automatically. They are paying for your house, they are paying for your car, they are paying for your children’s education. Even if you have your wife and your wife want to study like some language assistance or whatever, monthly, couple hundred dollars to cover it…There are lots of extra benefit stuff that you can really enjoy.

Researcher: Do they pay for your children’s college too?

Participant: Yes. Even college. Not full, but some assistance…by doing that, HQ have some freedom to utilize them to the maximum level…they are expecting you to put all in.

One participant speaks of the fierce competition for jobs in South Korea:

Participant: The city of Seoul was hiring the janitor…maybe 100. They are hiring like one hundred people but there were like 10,000 people apply for it. Out of 10,000, about half of them were Bachelor’s or Master’s…that speaks a lot.

Given this example, all Korean national managers are under extreme pressure to show hard work and commitment to their chaebol. Once they are in the United States, these Korean national managers feel even more pressure to perform so as not to loose their position.

For Korean national managers, the company pays for the entire move. It is unclear to what degree the company sponsors the lower tiered participants’ move from South Korea to the United States. If Korean national managers get fired from the company in the USA, then they have no place to go. None are citizens of the United States and being let go from a chaebol stunts any opportunities with other companies in South Korea. Therefore, they feel an extreme sense of pressure to succeed and work long hours to demonstrate their abilities. These Korean nationals are worried about how their performance in America will affect their reputation with their respective chaebols back in South Korea.

A person can retire at the age of 60 years old. There is no company pension, only a national pension. It is similar to Social Security system in USA. Upon retirement, the company
gives the employee severance pay and that’s it. It is a lump sum payment based on how many years the person was employed; the average salary earned over the entire time employed.

The more money a Korean national participant makes and the better the health care, the better off his or her family will be regardless of the participant’s physical presence at family events. For example, when asked about attending meetings such as Parent Teacher’s Attendance (PTA), none can remember attending. Many of the Korean national males cite that as being the sole responsibility of their wife. When asked if this was a source of stress in the spousal relationship, the participants state that it was stressful during their initial tenure in the United States, but after awhile the wife finally seemed to accept the Korean national participants’ absence from the family. The Korean national wives do so because they understand that the husband must sacrifice these types of family responsibilities in order to fulfill his responsibilities at work and to be successful. As such, a Korean national’s success at work ultimately means success for his or her family.

Salary amount does not appear to be a major determining factor when initially contemplating employment at a chaebol. Only one of the participants negotiated his or her salary prior to being hired. Additionally, most knew of the robust benefit package and did not discuss it during the interview process. All posit that the medical benefit is better than any other American company which makes it a strong indicator of the participants’ choice to continue working for the firm.

Participant: The benefits are better than any American company…health benefits. The health benefits are better than any other company in America… They pay 100% medical, dental, vision, and for the entire family. Most of the Korean American participants, especially the females, perceive that they are underpaid; both in terms of title and in amount of work performed.
Participant: They don’t pay Korean Americans as much as they pay Americans. Korean Americans who speak more English, they pay them more money… Who speaks more English, they pay more.

Several rely on internal personal networks to gain a sense of job value and to determine where his or her salary ranks among peers. Many participants also have friends who work at other chaebols who somehow have access to pay scales. Added to this, many have American peers with similar jobs at other companies who share their pay information. Whether the information from these sources is accurate or not is impossible to determine without access to chaebol human resource files. It is highly unlikely that this will ever occur. Regardless of whether or not the Korean American participants are underpaid, they think that they are thus affecting their work-life balance.

There seems to be a trend of chaebols employing a good many of younger Korean Americans as interns or part-time workers. The chaebols recruit from local universities and Korean American social networks. Mostly though, it seems as if the Korean American chaebol employees recruit from their own social network and recommend their friends for any vacant positions. As a result, most of the part time labor is Korean American. This interview process revealed that chaebols tend to overwork and underpay these workers. Since this is not a quantitative study, the details of the wage gap cannot be ascertained. However when asked about part-time labor, participants from all three cultural groups involved in this study acknowledged a similar scenario and did have a general idea of part-time salary. Part-time pay response seems to be consistent at $10 per hour regardless of the role or responsibilities. In some cases, this is low compared to other part-time workers in similar type companies. For instance in Atlanta, an engineering intern receives $20 an hour at an American firm while only receiving $10 at a chaebol.
The expectation for chaebol part-time workers is also more intense than it is for their counterparts at other companies. Most of the participants detail work hours well past 40 hours a week for the part-time employees with which they worked. The participants also spoke of the difficulties that interns and part-time workers face in terms of trying to collect the proper amount of salary.

Participant: They [Korean managers] almost fired her [part-time employee] because they did not want to pay her for the work that she had done. She was part time but she worked 50 hours a week…When she brought it [the USA law about part time labor] up to [the senior manager], they got into a very heated discussion. My understanding is that [both Korean national managers] wanted to fire her because of that.

Part-time workers not only continue to endure such a hostile environment, they continue to recruit others as well. Korean American participants posit that the part-time workers want to work for the chaebols to make themselves more marketable in the overall job pool. Working at a chaebol looks good on their resume. No Korean American participant could give examples of part-time work leading to full time employment within the chaebol itself.

All of the participants state that their job at the chaebol is the best paying opportunity in the Atlanta region. Many speak of subsidized meals at work as well. The chaebols subsidize the meals in an effort to get the employees to remain at work longer. A C-level Korean national manager confirmed this during his interview. Participants also affirm that their chaebol medical benefit package is better than any other American company of which they are aware. The medical benefit package is the same for the Americans as it is for the Korean Americans and the Korean nationals; 100% of all non-cosmetic medical expenses for the participants and their families.

Yet even with this medical insurance, all American participants express difficulty in obtaining time off from work to address any personal or familial medical issues. One example of
this is when a participant caught the flu and called in sick for work that morning. His Korean national boss became angry with him for not asking permission several days ahead of time. Of course, this frustrated and angered the participant.

Participant: [In a tone of disbelief and astonishment to his manager] I asked, “What do mean? I didn’t ask permission to be sick?”

Another gives the example of how he was only allowed 3 days off of work when his first child was born. He asked for more time, but was denied. Not only was he denied any more than three days, but he was pressured to come back to work sooner than that as well.

Participant: I was pretty much pressured to only taking three days off. They really pushed me not to take off any more time than that…My wife was not happy and I still have a lot of regrets about that.

The Korean national manager told one American participant that he could get into trouble if he took off more time than three days for the birth of his child.

Another participant discusses a similar scenario:

Researcher: [Wife having trouble at home] Does your boss know about your situation fully, about your wife?

Participant: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. His typical response is, “I have a wife too.” Even though he chooses not to see his wife because she is in Korea.

Initially, the American participants acquiesced to the Korean national managers’ request not to take off work for any reason. The American participants often faced similar difficulties in requesting basic vacation time even with sufficient notification. They surmised that the Korean national managers would pretend not to speak or understand English when the Americans would request for time off work. Many felt the Koreans did this in effort not to have to address the issue. Eventually, the Americans became, and continue to be frustrated and disappointed in this experience. Most are now defiant and leave work on there own terms without obtaining permission from the Korean national managers.
Participant: If you want a vacation, you never know if they are going to approve it or not. You just have to finally say, “Look, you haven’t approved it, I’m going!”

Another factor affecting participant income is the trend that Americans and Korean Americans are expected to use their personal credit cards for company expenses and then submit for reimbursement from the company. Many experienced significant delays of anywhere from 2 weeks to 1 month before they were reimbursed once their requests were submitted.

Participant: [I] Have to ask to travel. And wonder if you are going to get approved or not.

This caused a significant amount of stress in the household. One reason being that the participant continually had to carry a large balance of his or her personal credit limit exposing them to interest rates on the credit card balance that the company would not reimburse. This is even if the interest rate due on the participant’s credit card was caused by the delayed reimbursement of the company.

One participant describes a time when his Korean national manager made him put $18,000 on his personal credit card for business purposes. He was not timely reimbursed and had to go physically ask his Korean national manager for his money back. Even though he did not end up having to pay interest charges, it did give him a great deal of cause for concern and stress.

Participant: I was pretty pissed about it.

Another participant had to give $500 cash to his Korean national manager with no explanation and took 3 weeks to get reimbursed the money. With several examples such as this, many of the participants’ spouses do not understand the delays in reimbursement and complain about the credit card balances that affect their personal finances.
Meanwhile, Korean nationals have a company credit card that does not require personal reimbursement. Therefore, they are never absent of any personal funds nor do they experience any delays in obtaining personal reimbursements. This lack of timely reimbursement causes many American participants to avoid work tasks that require expenses, such as customer meals and travel. It also causes resentment and mistrust towards the Korean nationals.

Organizational Support

This section explores each cultural groups’ feeling of being supported by their chaebol company as a whole, or throughout the organization. Studies show that if a person perceives that the company supports both their personal and professional aspirations, then that person tends to report a healthy work-life balance (An, Yom, & Ruggerio, 2010; Bloom, Kretschmer & Van Reenen, 2006; Choi & Kim, 2012; Devi & Kumari, 2012; Ford & Collinson, 2011; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997; Maruyama, Hopkinson & James, 2009; Munn, 2013; Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne, & McCarthy, 2013). If the employee perceives that the company does not care about him or her and that he or she is just a cog in the wheel, then that person tends to report more stress resulting in a less healthy work-life balance.

Participants in this study were asked about their organizational support through a number of open-ended questions. These questions were posed in a conversational manner in order to formulate a more complete understanding of how each participant senses his or her company’s support.

According to the participants, each one’s respective chaebol provides for their personal needs and they feel a strong sense of loyalty to the company. Furthermore, their chaebol is a representation of South Korea and its success. The participants feel that it is their duty to work
hard for the company and by doing so they are helping their country. This fosters a strong sense of obligation to the company.

Yet even though the participants feel a strong sense of national pride and loyalty to the company, they all state that they like living in America. Most indicated that their family loves living in the United States and does not want to return to Korea. They like all the amenities that America has to offer compared to South Korea: lower cost of living, more educational opportunities, better medical care, more career choices for the children. Participants with younger children depict the stress this can cause. He or she is scheduled to move back to South Korea soon and spoke of how his family is sad that they will have to live in a smaller house. He or she also feared that his or her children will have difficulty fitting into the South Korean society and schools because of their lack of understanding of the Korean language.

One Korean national participant spoke of his desire to pursue his advanced degree while employed by the chaebol. Unlike American companies who make allowances to work and go to school at the same time, he felt uneasy studying, or leaving work at night to go home and study. He felt pressure from his boss and his work colleagues not to spend time studying, but to work instead. The chaebol will officially support his advanced degree efforts and allow him time off work to pursue the degree, but only if he signs a 5 to 10 year employee contract with the company. He will not do that because of his desire to one day pursue a career outside of the chaebol. As a result, he has to make a decision on whether or not to quit work to pursue his education here in America. His risk in doing so is especially significant given the fact he is a foreign national.

A majority of the participants state that they only return to Korea once every two to three years to see family. While the cost of travel is the primary restriction, they also speak of the lack
of support from the chaebol. Even though most have three weeks vacation, they are only allowed to take one week at a time. This does not leave much time to return to Korea making travel to the country limited. Some spoke of having to ask special permission to receive 10 days off in order to go home. To do so, the participants have to tell their managers that they wanted to go home to Korea to see family. This is slightly different for the managers. They are able to work family visits around their business trips back to Korea, so the time and costs of travel are not as restrictive. While their frequency of visits or more than that of lower tiered employees, the length of time they can stay abroad is limited to only 2 or 3 days due to the business nature of their trip.

Chaebol organizations are very cognizant of the Korean language and who speaks it. Korean national managers speak of their frustration that Americans expect to speak their native language all the time. This is not the case in South Korea. There, children learn foreign languages at a very early age. Some participants ask why Americans expect employees of American companies to speak English, but they themselves do not consider having to speak the native tongue of the foreign company of their employment. In other words, shouldn’t Americans feel some sense of obligation to speak Korean if they work for a chaebol, even if it is in America?

Researcher: Is it important in terms of career success to learn Korean?

Participant: Definitely, it is very, very important. It is a big commitment. It is kind of a big advantage to get a better position… It is more loyalty to the company…Korean people study very hard to learn foreign languages. Not just for study, but for business.

Out of all the participants in all three cultural groups, only one had knowledge of an American employee learning and speaking Korean at work. The degree to which this person mastered the Korean language however, was unable to be discovered through this interview process.
Surprisingly, the Korean national participants also spoke of the Korean Americans’ lack of understanding of the Korean language. Because of its complexity, it is difficult to understand the true meaning of the Korean words. Korean Americans can speak the language, but they may not fully understand it.

Participant: Yellow face but mind is American. We call it the banana… The Korean business way. He or she does not have any time or understanding the Korean business culture. Sometimes this causes misunderstandings.

One participant manager sates that in the hiring process during the face-to-face interview with a job candidate, it is easy to ask questions to figure out if the Korean American understands the true Korean business culture or not.

The sense of teamwork and team consideration within the organization was also a common theme among the Korean national participants.

Participant: You learn teamwork in the army. Even in grade school you learn. You learn how to work together. You learn how to build up the team…It is slightly different in America.

Several Korean Americans detail how they struggle to fit into their respective chaebol organizations. They do not know how to handle certain situations and often find themselves confused culturally. This is exampled by the following exchange:

Participant: 1.5 [generation] usually has more identity crisis than second generation.

Researcher: Does that struggle carry over at work?

Participant: At times, yes… When I see a Korean co-worker, I am not sure if I should speak English to him, or Korean…I usually end up speaking Korean because I do not want to offend the person…I want to make them feel more comfortable…just being kind of I guess polite, you know?

Here is another example with a different Korean American participant about when he first hired on with the chaebol:
Participant: I felt like I was looked down upon because I was not able to speak Korean... If you’re Korean, and you have Korean features and everything and you don’t speak Korean... you are kind of a disgrace... I was intimidated.

All of the participants describe the daily struggle with the Korean language and how it is implemented at work by the Korean nationals. This struggle appears to begin right from the start of the participants’ employment as all describe a similar experience to the one quoted below:

Participant: What was really weird was that my interview was all in Korean... They [Korean nationals] are more comfortable in Korean than in English.

Many of the participants feel as if the interview is really a test of their ability to not only understand the Korean language, but the Korean culture and business acumen as well. This feeling is justified when Korean national confirmed that he is able to judge a Korean American’s capacity and understanding of chaebol employment through a variety of questions during the interview process.

Korean national Participant Manager: You can tell through the questions during the interview. You know, by the answers. I can tell.

The degree of cultural confusion seems to be related to the migration generation to which the participant belongs. While those born and raised in the United States seem to agree that they possess a better understanding of the American culture than their first generation counterparts, they still report much the same amount of cultural conflict and stress. This is because second generation Korean Americans are more confused about the Korean culture than those who were born and raised in Korea.

Participant: You spend more time with the company more than your own family. The Korean culture treats your company like your family... You just feel that way naturally.

Korean Americans struggle with the chaebol norm of cultural dinners as the next conversation demonstrates.

Researcher: What about company dinners after work?
Participant: I actually don’t drink. But I was kind of forced to drink. I gave them a warning up ahead, “I’m not good at it.” I told them I had a low tolerance. I was with a couple of managers and a director at the bar. After 3 beers, I told them I can’t drink any more. They said, “You are just [low level position], we understand.”

Another Korean American participant notices that American employees do not usually attend these dinners.

Participant: When we have a company dinner, I don’t think they [Americans] know we have a dinner…It only ends up being Koreans.

The American participants experience very little support from the chaebol organization. One primary complaint is the frequent use of the Korean language in the American participants’ presence by the Korean nationals and Korean Americans. They all example how the Korean nationals will start speaking in the Korean language during office meetings. Americans posit that the Korean nationals do so in an effort to keep information from them. This makes Americans feel as if the Korean nationals do not trust them. Therefore, it makes the Americans distrust the Korean nationals in return and even the Korean Americans for their participation in these Korean conversations.

Participant: My biggest complaint is that they talk Korean in the office all of the time.

Participant: The Koreans go to dinner but they never invite me to go. In a way I am glad, but in a way I feel left out I guess too.

Participant: There are two teams. Korean and American. It is very obvious.

Participant: Either they see you as American or Korean.

Participant: The Koreans view anybody who is not Korean as a necessary evil.

The term unethical shows up consistently in the American participants’ responses. This is mostly in reference to the overall perception of each one’s chaebol organization and its
respective operations. The participants voice concern and speak to the ethical dilemmas they often face at work.

Participant: [Korean national] maybe not telling the whole truth.

Participant: Everybody [Korean nationals] is willing to lie to you to get what they want.

The frequent use of the Korean language in their presence is a source of aggravation, anger and anxiety for the American participants. Many assume that the Korean culture groups are trying to hide information from them when they speak Korean.

Participant: They tend to speak just Korean at dinners. That is a bit uncomfortable.

Participant: A couple of times I was talked to in Korean. I don’t know where they got that impression. It’s not even really a cultural thing. I don’t know Korean.

Several also discuss being made to feel inferior by their Korean and Korean American managers and co-workers.

Participant: You can pick up the undercurrent that Koreans are proud of the fact that they study…and that they think that Americans are lazy and that we didn’t not study enough therefore we are not as smart.

Tenure

Tenure of employment is another factor that contributes to a person’s work-life balance. People who are employed for a great number of years within the same organization tend to report a healthy work-life balance (Munn, 2013 and Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne, & McCarthy, 2013). Those without a healthy work-life balance tend to leave their organization of employment as an effort to rectify this imbalance.

Korean national participants do not speak of any other employment opportunities outside of their current chaebol. Most expect to work for their current chaebol as long as he or she is of working age. All of the Korean national participants speak to the extreme sense of pressure to
perform or face expulsion. This is ironic given the earlier account of a C-level manager stating how hard it is to terminate an employee. There is a strong sense of loyalty and that it will be rewarded in due time.

Researcher: Did you have a choice to come to America?

Participant: [Laughs heartedly] There is no choice. That is kind of company decision.

Older Korean workers advise younger Korean workers not to look at opportunities of employment outside of the chaebol. It is not good for the team and is a sign of disloyalty. It will hurt and limit the younger Korean’s career overall.

Participant: It is not easy here [in America]. We have a promotion schedule in Korea. You know everything. I call HR and ask do you have maybe some promotion schedule or something. Here, I never get a response [frustrated tone of voice].

As a whole, Korean American participants do not see their employment with their current chaebol as being long term. Only two participants have significant tenure with one chaebol in the United States. However, they too speak about the uncertainty of their future with their current company. One common theme that emerged is that the Korean American participants do not feel the same sense of community with the Korean national managers as their Korean nationals counterpart participants do. The Korean Americans do not want to spend time outside of the normal work hours at events such as company dinners and often decline these events. Many used the terminology kiss butt to describe what one must do to get ahead in the company. They posit that this is the strategy for many of their Korean national counterparts in order to get ahead.

Participant: Korean nationals would not speak up to the Americans. They would just have the Korean staff do their tasks as well.
Since no Korean American participant expresses a desire to perform this action, none feel as if they have the same chance of promotion as their Korean nationals co-workers who appear to do this action.

The Korean American participants did not speak about any possible promotions. They state that they have less of a chance of being promoted than Korean nationals because of their cultural heritage. Even with this perceived career limitation, none of the Korean American participants are actively seeking new opportunities.

None of the American participants posit that their employment will be long-term at their respective chaebols. None perceive that there is any chance for promotion and none wish to remain in his current position for very long.

Participant: It is kind of an unwritten rule that it is only the Korean national ones that are going to get promoted.

Participant: From my experience, no American will ever be a Vice President at [chaebol name].

Participant: There was one guy [American] that made Vice President… and he got it because he went to jail for them for a year for price fixing. He kept his mouth shut so they rewarded him by giving him a promotion [laughing].

Participant: We’ll see if they decide to get rid of me before I decide to get rid of them.

The American participants do not feel as if they have any chance of promotion due to their nationality, or more specifically, their lack of being Korean national. When asked about their promotional outlook, the common response is, “Because I am not Korean.” Others feel that their career paths are resolute because they refuse to work continuous late night hours.

Participant: I would have grown more if I decided to work their hours.
Job Value and Meaningfulness

A person who feels as if his or her employment makes a difference tends to report a healthier work-life balance than a person who does not (Munn, 2013 and Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne, & McCarthy, 2013).

For the Korean national participants, they find value and meaning in the fact that they work for a chaebol. None referenced their particular position or spoke about the personal sense of value they get specifically from their individual efforts. The majority of the Korean national participants’ motivation is the success of the chaebol, thus bringing success to South Korea as a whole. However, the younger Korean national participants tend to state how they want a job whose specific function they feel was valuable to them personally. As of the time of this study, they do not get a lot of intrinsic personal value or satisfaction from their current role.

Korean national managers are under intense pressure to outperform their peers so that they can be promoted, or remain within the organization. The key measurement to performance in a chaebol is the amount of time the manager’s business unit works. While the specific metric used is not clear through the participants’ responses, the consensus is that work time is highly scrutinized by management. As a result, many of the Korean national participants feel as if their managers often make them do busy work just to show the upper management that his team is working hard. This type of work has no meaning and is not an efficient use of the participants’ time. There is a sense of despair and hopelessness voiced in the Korean national participants’ responses to the value and meaning of their work.

Participant: I never have seen people really enjoy their work. That’s too bad, too bad…

Depression seems to be a strong undertone with the Korean national participants. While only one actually admitted to having the illness, the other participants indicated signs of
depression in their responses referencing long work hours and meaningless work (Loughlin & Murray, 2013). The participant with self-diagnosed depression said he suffered for 5 years from the illness while in South Korea. He did not report to a therapist because to do so is unusual. Korean people feel as if one should be able to work out the problem on his or her own. If a person goes to a therapist, Koreans think that person has a serious problem. When I assured the participant that depression is a serious problem, he stated that it is not considered so in South Korea and that therapy is likened to that of needing to be institutionalized. If he went to therapy, it would end his career and ostracize him from his community.

Participant: I have to hide…

I was too tired to pay attention to my children. I was so tired. My wife was also very lonely… we have less sex and less sex, you know. The other guys on my team suffered from the same thing. I tried to solve on my own…I work hard to take of my family, but I don’t get to see them.

Many Korean national participants state how they and other Korean workers accept this type of employment as a common way of life. There is even a popular informal motto in South Korea embodying one particular chaebol and its lifestyle that is recognized nationally whether a person works there or not.

Participant: Work till Death [laughs]!

Another participant spoke of the work-life conflict he had when his job required him to go back to South Korea. His family had moved with him to the United States. His daughter who was in High School decided she wanted to stay, so his family stayed in the USA and he went back to Korea in order to remain employed with his chaebol. He came home once every two months for a couple of days at a time, fashioned around a business trip.

Researcher: So you left the decision up to your daughter? What about your wife? What did she have to say?
Participant: [In a very matter of fact and authoritarian tone] She had to take care of daughter, so it didn’t matter what she have to say. She did not have any choice [then chuckles]. I did not have a choice either. I left it up to daughter.

Researcher: How do you feel about your decision?

Participant: I missed my daughter growing up. My wife complained a lot. She had no choice. She had to put up with that [him being in Korea]. It’s a personal matter [effort to change the topic].

Male Participants say that Korean wives expect, understand, and accept the long work hours and the sacrifice the husband has to make for the family’s success. There are no family discussions about the length of time spent at work. However, participants do say that their wives are becoming cognizant of their American counterpart’s husbands not working as long as their Korean national husbands do, and it is starting to cause some familial stress.

All of the Korean American participants spoke of the rather intensive academic training they underwent as children whether growing up in Korea or in the United States. The amount of schooling increased as the participant grew older. The culmination seems to be during the high school years as a teenager when the Korean American participants had to increase their study efforts in order to pass the college admissions exam. For those who were in America during this time, their entrance exam and standards were the same as their American counterparts. They either took the ACT or SAT, or both as a normal American teenager would do. If the participant grew up and attended secondary school in Korea, then he or she had only one chance to take and do well on the national college entrance exam. There is a tremendous amount of pressure to perform well on this exam.

Participant: I hear in America, you can take the SAT few times, right? In Korea, we can take just one time… We have only one chance.

Every Korean teenager of age in the country took the exam on the same day. Participants detailed how the cities in Korea would shut down for the most part in order to facilitate all of the
children taking the exam on the same day. For instance, the government orders businesses to
open late so that the morning work traffic will not interfere with a student’s efforts to get to the
test site on time. All of the participants state the importance of this test and how its results affect
the rest of their life. There is extreme stress detected when the participants speak about this experience.

Because of the importance of this test, all of the Korean American participants (and
Korean nationals) felt pressure to perform well on it. The pressure seems to be institutionalized as it stems from parents, schools, potential employers, and other societal organizations in the participants’ lives. The participants born and raised in South Korea spoke of the familial pressure to succeed academically he or she experienced growing up as a child.

Participant: Every parents dream is for children to come and get educated in America.

All of the Korean American participants revealed long academic school sessions and study hours
during the years leading up to college entrance exams. A typical day for the participants when they were students resembled this time line:

- 6:30AM - Wake up
- 7:30AM - Go to School
- 5:00PM - Attend another school
- 10:00PM - Go to Korean academy
- 1:00AM - In home private tutor
- 3:00AM - Go to bed

Every Korean American participant did not have a tutor; only those whose parents could afford one. Otherwise, the rest of the timeline shown above is indicative of a participant’s normal school day.

Researcher: Yes, that is a pretty hectic day. What about sleep? When did you sleep?

Participant: I slept at school. During the breaks.

For participants growing up in America, they had to attend a special Korean school that focused on teaching them the Korean language, culture, and other societal norms they were expected to know. As one participant put it, “It helps you be more Korean.” Those participants who are now parents themselves continue this tradition by sending their children to this type of Korean culture school in Atlanta.

This intensive type of education gives the participants a strong desire to find meaning in their work. They all speak of how they want their past efforts and sacrifices as children to now mean something. Instead, all of the participants voice their frustration and disappointment at having to do copious amounts of menial tasks; what many term busy-work.

Participant: There is a lot of stuff I do that is really stupid.

None of the American participants posit that their work at the chaebol has any meaning or value. Initially, they all had high hopes in the purpose of their new job and looked forward to the opportunity given the fact that these chaebols are well-known global organizations. However, all express the eventual realization that their purpose and meaning are minimal at best.

Participant: Totally irrelevant, whatever they wanted to know anyway.

Participant: [Tired of] having to communicate the same thing over and over again… They have already decided what they are going to do anyway.

Participant: You are going to keep working your butt off and nobody is going to care.

One participant spoke of his failing efforts to properly balance his work and his life efforts because he sees no meaning in his work and yet he is still having to sacrifice time with his
family. His health ended up suffering because he could not justify all of his extra efforts at work at the expense of his family. When asked in general terms, many Americans felt that they balanced their work and personal life fairly well. However when they were asked to give specific examples of how they felt they achieved this balance, none could give any specifics. Furthermore, all gave examples that would offer contrary evidence to a balanced work and family life as known in the American culture.

Participant: I felt like I balanced it fairly well, but it did take its toll on me long term…I had a panic attack. I had to check myself into the ER…Emotionally you get to a breaking point…It's a culmination of all the stress and the pressure.

Married American participants voice the difficulty in trying to explain the meaning behind their long workdays and the pressure they feel from their spouses to take ownership of the situation and correct it. Of course, the participants’ stress comes as a result of the total lack of control or ability for the participant to be able to take any sort of corrective action at work without reprisal from management.

Participant: My wife was very adamant about leaving me to go back to her family in Michigan if I could not control my work-life balance…It wasn’t fair to her with kids and being pregnant.

The American participants state that the Korean national managers are not concerned about the participants’ family or personal goals. The American participants posit that they are expendable to the chaebol and that their talents and knowledge are simply being exploited for the short-term goals of the chaebol in America. None see a greater good being served by their efforts.

Participant: Their [Korean nationals] priorities are more money, position…

Participant: They are willing to give their life away for the respect of a company like [chaebol name].
Female Discrimination

The interview process of this study discovered both overt and covert forms of discriminatory actions against women at a chaebol operating in America. Since no American women volunteered to be interviewed for this research, it is difficult to ascertain the validity or severity of any discrimination towards them specifically as an independent cultural group without first-hand accounts. American female experiences are revealed through the responses of other participants and are therefore secondary in nature.

As previously noted, none of the Korean national female participant’s answered in the affirmative when directly asked if they felt discriminated against because of their gender. Ironically, the Korean national female participants also posit that they do not have an equal chance of promotion compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, none know of any C-Level female executives in America or South Korea.

One example of an overt act of discrimination within a chaebol is that Korean women are actively expected to serve tea and refreshments at company meeting and events regardless of her position or title. Both of the female Korean national participants in this study readily acknowledge this practice as commonplace in Korean businesses and do not think of it as discriminatory towards women. Neither expressed outrage, as both seem to accept this practice as just a reality of life at work that they must accept.

Not surprisingly, all of the male Korean national participants state that they do not feel that women are discriminated against in the chaebol. When a C-level manager participant was asked about female discrimination, he responded:

Participant: [chuckles] You have to think about a couple of things. The female could not have opportunity to study because of older generation. The family put a lot of the money, the resources, to the son the student. The female the sacrifice. They [daughters] work in
factories to help their parents to pay for the son’s education. So there are not a lot of well-educated older females. Today is totally different.

The ladies have to marry and take care of the kids. They have to take care of the family...Eventually, you see female CEOs in the Korean culture.

One female participant remarked:

Participant: Many people think that when the female worker get married, they gonna quit.

The consensus among the Korean national participants is that the expectation among Koreans is that females will work only about 5 to 6 years, get married, have children, and then quit their job.

Female Participant: When we go drinking, everybody [Korean male workers and managers] say that to me.

One Korean national manager participant acknowledges that females typically do not have the same amount of responsibility as their male counterparts because of the expectation that the female employees will eventually quit their job at the chaebol to take care of their family.

Another female participant remarked:

Female Participant: I couldn’t get along with males all the time because they went out to smoke. I don’t smoke. Or they want to stay late...diner time for drinking. I had less chance to get along with them socially out of work.

One participant spoke of a female colleague who went through a divorce while employed at the chaebol. The Korean men in her office made an issue of it informally; speaking behind her back, making her feel as if she failed her marriage, etc. Her friend struggled with this causing the friend to be depressed and withdrawn at work. The friend tried to keep the divorce secret from her boss at work, but to no avail. She felt that her divorce would leave a bad impression with her manager. Ultimately, the participant’s friend wound up quitting her job at the chaebol.

One female participant offered an example of this type of caregiving role assigned to the females in Korean culture. She and her husband both are employed by a chaebol in the United States and have recently had a child. But because she is the mother, she cannot attend the
company dinners because she has to stay home and take care of the baby. However, the husband still attends the dinners. Many of the female participants spoke of how they were able to receive help caring for their children from their parents when they lived in Korea. However, now the participants no longer benefit from this since their parents do not live in the United States.

The Korean national female participants all have 10+ years of experience, but none of them are managers. All reference assistant type duties that would not normally appear along with their formal roles in an American company. For example, one participant has an engineering degree, but her primary role is operational support for the American unit. She has nothing to do with engineering. All of the participants feel as if they work harder and longer than their male counterparts.

All of the participants voiced their stress at having to stay late and help managers with reports due to headquarters in South Korea. When asked why do they feel the Korean national manager has them stay and perform these extra duties, they say it is because they are the only employees at work that understand both languages (Korean and English). They also bear the brunt of their manager’s aggravation with fellow American employees as the Korean national female participants are often asked to explain the Americans’ actions. The Korean national (and often the Korean American) female participant is the go between for the manager and the American employees. This causes the participant stress because she cannot tell the Americans what to do and yet the boss still seems to hold her responsible for their actions. It reminds one of the popular saying, “Kill the messenger!”

Participant: I am trying to change in my ways; just like Americans. But when I have to do, I just do it [her assigned work task]. Not too much. But it is hard for me to control… I try to help the people. That’s why I work so hard. And then after two years, I regret it now. It is too much stressful.
Another Korean national female participant gave a detailed account of the physically demanding and intense training she had to endure as a chaebol new hire in South Korea. She described a boot camp army-type of environment with events such as extremely long hikes and obstacle courses. All new hires had to attend this training at some point during their first year of employment. The training lasted approximately one week. During that time, the trainees were only allowed a total of 5 hours of sleep. The female participant got really sick and could not finish the training. Finding 5 hours of sleep for an entire week hard to believe, I asked the participant again if she meant per day, or per week. Again, she indicated that time was the total sleep time allowed for the week. Still, I pressed a third time for confirmation, eliciting this response:

Participant: That’s what I say! Can you believe it? One manager [camp trainer] say, “The last training, they only slept 3 hours [indicating the participant’s group’s performance was subpar].” Can you believe it?

The participant’s chaebol started this training program in response to its largest Korean competitor who initiated it first. Her company wanted to be just as competitive.

One participant posited that a female one day could be the CEO, but only if she was Korean and only if she is related to the chaebol ownership family. Other participants theorize the same.

Korean American participants describe the same type of female discriminatory practices that the Korean national participants do.

Researcher: Do you feel that women are treated any differently at work?

Participant: It is hard to say. It is a cultural thing...I did see them [mid-level female workers] a lot serving tea…Say we go out to company dinners, male managers are expected to stay out later than the ladies, the ladies. They are free to go whenever they want, but the guys, they have to stay…That’s one of the Korean things.
Another Korean American participant tells how she could not even take one day off of work to attend her father-in-law’s funeral. Officially, she is allowed 2 days of bereavement leave, but her Korean national boss would not let her go.

The participant further explains that when she countered her boss by showing him the company’s official bereavement policy that allows her 2 days from work for such an occasion, he became even angrier that she did not tell him about the policy to begin with. She is confused and frustrated at the fact that her boss is ignorant of the policy. She questions whether it is because he is truly unaware, or is it because he wishes to remain unaware?

Participant: Boss said, “You just think of yourself. You need to put yourself in my shoes and think about me. Whose going to do your work while you are gone? You have to do it.” I cried. He made me sad...He tortured me.

One female Korean American participant details the events that unfolded with her manager after she got hurt at work while performing her duties. She had injured her foot and needed to go to the Emergency Room (ER). Even though the injury required crutches, the participant felt as if she had to go back to work after she left the ER. She decided to do so on her own so as not to get in trouble with her Korean national manager. Her husband, who is American, was upset at her decision to return to work and urged her to seek legal counsel against the chaebol for proper treatment at work. He called lawyers on her behalf. She was upset at her husband for doing so because she did not want any further conflict at work. This continues to be a huge source of stress between the participant and her husband.

The participant attempted to file workman’s compensation for her injury, but her Korean national boss became upset at her request. He was afraid that her request would negatively reflect upon him. He told her, “If you really think about me, you shouldn’t do that…Don’t file workman’s comp.” To add even more pressure, the participant’s boss even had one of her
Korean national male co-workers ask her not to file the workman’s compensation as well. In essence, her boss tried to block all of her efforts to file for the compensation. As a result, she did not get paid the amount due to her for several weeks. It was not until after she had to explain the situation to the company’s auditor that she got compensated properly. In the end, her Korean national manager brought her into his office to warn her about any possible future conflicts like the one that just happened.

Participant: My boss does not like the fact that I have an American husband.

Researcher: What makes you think that?

Participant: He told me! He told me so…He called me to his office and I sat on the sofa. He closed the office door. I hate that [the boss closing the office door just leaving the two of them in the room alone]…Don’t listen to your husband.

Here is another interview exchange with a relatively young male Korean American participant who described becoming exposed to gender discrimination for the first time while working for a chaebol.

Participant: I see the difficulties of a woman working in a Korean company… In the Korean culture, the woman is slightly looked down upon…especially if it’s in a corporate setting where the man is in a very high position.

Researcher: What type of difficulties?

Participant: I could sense the frustration from her…I felt awkward in a sense. I remember one time she was crying in the back room. I do remember that significantly. It was the first time I experienced that [someone crying at work].

None of the female participants feel as if they will be promoted any time soon. This directly affects their motivation to continue to work for the chaebol.

Participant: [In a resigned tone] I already heard that my next promotion is going to be in 6 years.

Participant: They [Korean companies] set that invisible line on where, how much a female can promote to…If you look at any of the Korean companies, you don’t see any female executives.
None of the Korean American participants see their employment continuing beyond the point of the next few years.

Researcher: Do you feel like you would get ahead if you kissed-ass? Do you feel like you have an equal chance [as males] in doing that?

Participant: Different ways…Meaning you are not gonna be going out drinking with them, but you just gotta be very, I guess obedient so to say. Whatever they ask you just have to say, “Yes Sir”…because you are a female.

When asked about the possibility of any future employment with another chaebol firm, none express any desire to do so.

Participant: I don’t want to deal with Koreans.

The expectation to serve tea also applied to Korean American females. However, if there is a Korean national female in the office, that type of task falls to her first. Whereas the Korean national females tend to submissively accept this duty, Korean American women express more outrage and disdain for the expectation.

Participant: They [Korean national men] think women are just to do laundry, cleaning…

Participant: Koreans think that the tea is served by a woman. I don’t even question it because it’s not worth it. If I cry about it then they just gonna hate me and I’m just gonna get upset…They just expect me to do it so I don’t argue about that…I just ignore that…Of course I am not happy about that but what can I do? I just have to take it.

Male Korean American Participant: It is hard to find an old Korean female working in the office…The Korean female job is secretarial no matter what job you have…That’s part of your job.

The Korean females (both Korean national and Korean American) notice a difference in the way Korean national managers treat American women and the difference in how American women execute their work. They explain that the American women leave work at the end of the official workday without asking permission. Unlike Korean national and Korean American women, the American women have to justify very little to their Korean national managers.
American women also tend to talk back to the Korean national managers when there is a disagreement. The Korean American participants posit that the difference in treatment lies in the Korean national managers’ lack of understanding of the English language and the American labor laws. The Korean national managers do not want to get into legal trouble unknowingly.

Participant: They don’t know the labor laws. And they are very aware of that. Therefore, the Korean national managers tend not to push the American women for too much extra work. They also tend not to deny American women’s request to miss work for vacation or sick days. The Korean women feel like they are pressured to work more because of this.

Although they have a sense of resentment towards American women, the Korean women also express a sense of respect for American women as well for their ability to stand up for their employment rights.

Participant: Americans just leave at scheduled time… I wish I could do that.

Another conversation with a different participant yielded:

Researcher: Do feel that you are treated any differently because you are female?

Participant: Because I am Korean.

Additional excerpt:

Researcher: Do you see any difference between Korean (including Korean American) females and American females?

Participant: Yes. Because Korean females do not usually speak up. They will just absorb. They learn to accept what is expected and what they are told…[American females] They stand up, of course…They learn to accept it…When a Korean female speaks up, they won’t accept it…They will make it look like it is her fault…That happens almost every day.

Many of the female Korean participants posit that the Korean community is structured so that the female is supportive of the male. The Korean national females are more accepting of this state of being than are the Korean American females.
Female Participant: Female’s job is to support the male. If you have your own company, you can be your own boss.

There are no American female participants for this study. All of the following data comes from the secondary source of American male participants. None have worked with any American females outside of internship roles. The American participants are further removed from female workplace discrimination because none are female themselves. Furthermore, they have limited direct exposure or day-to-day interactions with Korean national and Korean American female employees. However, all of the participants can cite an example of the mistreatment of a Korean national or Korean American female. None recall any overt mistreatment of an American female co-worker or employee.

As a group, the American participants acknowledged a work environment that is discriminatory towards women. Some accounts can even be considered hostile. One participant tells how his female Korean national counterpart often complains to him about the harassment she endures at work.

Participant: There is also this level of sexual harassment… They comment on what she [Korean national co-worker] wears…One example is, “Oh, I like how those jeans are tight on you.” She never felt like she could complain. She was like, “This is just the way it is.”

Researcher: Do you ever hear this?

Participant: [No] It is in Korean. They never speak to one another in English.

None of the American participants know of any female executives or senior managers. Some could only posit that there are some female mid level managers somewhere with the organization, but none can articulate any details.

Researcher: Do you feel females have an equal chance of success at your company?

Participant: No way in hell.
The common viewpoint is that female employees are mostly comprised of Korean and Korean Americans and that they only hold subservient roles to male Korean national managers. Furthermore, the Korean or Korean American female’s tasks always seem to be random in nature with little or nothing to do with her official responsibilities. For example, if a Korean female is a purchasing assistant, she often has to take notes in meetings about sales, or perform specification translations for engineers.

Participant: [Korean national Co-worker] She does a bunch of special projects for the Korean management. She is always randomly working on random projects. Participant: I know the secretary, or whatever, was way over qualified for what she was doing.

Many times, this causes extra work for the female’s counterparts. They have to make up for the work she has to suspend in order to fulfill the last minute tasks she is assigned by the Korean national manager.

Participant: It is a culture of the man comes first. You never see any older Korean females.

Participant: The male officers speak down to the females…They are expected just to listen.

The participants have only worked with Korean and Korean American females primarily under the age of 40 years old.

In terms of company dinners, the American participants hardly ever see females attend. If female co-workers do attend, it is not for a very long period of time; two hours maximum. The females seem to be visibly uncomfortable at these events.

Many give examples of Korean national and Korean American females crying in the office. The interviews from the American participants show a trend of recognized female abuse in the workplace not experienced by men. In reference to one Korean national female:
Participant: She ended up working Thanksgiving and Christmas because the Koreans told her she had to.

Out of all three cultural groups, none of the participants could recall any time when an American female served tea.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This section answers the research questions posed in the Introduction piece of this study and are based upon the evidence presented in the earlier Results section. That evidence is a robust representation of first-hand accounts by participants from all three cultural groups (Korean national, Korean American, and American) who are employed by Korean chaebols in the Atlanta, Georgia region. In this section, each one of the four research questions will be presented and answered in turn. As an overall conclusion, this research demonstrates sufficient evidence to support the theory that the employees of a chaebol operating within the southern Unites States tend to negotiate their work-life balance depending upon the cultural group with which they most identify. Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and Americans approach the same workplace environment and work-life scenarios in different ways. Furthermore, not only does this research demonstrate a clear difference of work-life balance expectations and negotiations among the three different cultural employee groups, but it also demonstrates a distinct difference in a chaebol’s expectations and requirements of those employees as compared to those of an American company’s. Even though chaebols have facilities within the United States’ and are cognizant of the cultural difference, the South Korean culture and work regimen remain a strong influence throughout these chaebol American operations. The South Korean and chaebol corporate culture clearly permeate and dominate their American business units thus affecting employee work-life balance.
Research Question 1

How do Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and non-Korean American employees negotiate the daily work life balance issues that arise at the same chaebol? Why do employees perform the actions that they do? Are employees conscious of their decisions and on what factors do they base these decisions?

Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and Americans all tend to negotiate similar work-life balances issues differently. Each cultural group has specific motivations for their actions and actively negotiates work-life balance issues based upon their own cultural values. While Korean nationals and Americans take distinctive actions from one another, Korean Americans seem to blend the two cultures. However, it is clear that the South Korean culture still dominates their actions in the workplace as well.

Korean nationals perform similar to the manner they did when they were employed in South Korea. They do not request time from work even under the most extreme of situations. These employees have an extreme sense of loyalty and obligation to the chaebol and to their fellow employees. If there is a conflict between work and personal life, work wins every time. Korean nationals feel a sense of guilt and shame if they do not work many hours and succumb to their manager’s requests, regardless of the sacrifice.

Korean nationals are aware that there are American cultural differences in terms of work time and requests for time off. Yet, they continue to ignore these differences and operate as if they were still in South Korea. This is especially the case for Korean national managers. High salary pay and good benefits drive them to work long hours and forgo any time away from work. While salary and medical benefits are motivation factors for non-managing Korean nationals,
their chief concerns are fulfilling their sense of obligation to their elder managers and maintaining harmony with their co-workers.

If a personal issue does conflict with work, then a Korean national employee will institute a couple of different tactics. First, he or she will offer an elaborate explanation to the Korean national manager as to why the time away from work is needed. This usually results in an elongated back-and-forth discussion that lasts 20 minutes or longer. If this tactic does not work, then the Korean national employee will fabricate a scenario that forces the Korean national manager to yield the time away from work. This scenario has to be able to trump any additional work requirement with which the Korean national manager may counter. These fabrications usually include an obligation strongly supported by a South Korean cultural norm such as having to take care of an ailing parent or an extremely sick child. No matter which tactic the Korean national employee implements, he or she always offers to work extra time for the Korean national manager to make up for the pending absence at work. It is extremely rare for a Korean national employee to take time away from work for a personal illness. He or she will work even while being severely sick. Therefore, Korean national employees do not fabricate a personal illness to get permission to miss work.

Korean nationals are not likely to quit their job regardless of the circumstance or the personal sacrifice required. Since quitting is unlikely, the Korean national employee does not implement the threat of doing so as a work-life balance tactic. The extreme pressure to succeed along with a strong sense of obligation to the people South Korea propels the Korean national employees to forgo any personal family responsibilities or motivations. This is where the Korean national employee finds his or her value.
As a group, Korean Americans tend to negotiate work-life balance issues in a similar fashion. The only apparent difference appears to be generational. Not surprisingly, those whose lineage is more recent to South Korea, tend to act more similar to the Korean national employees than they do the American ones. So a first generation Korean American tends to negotiate work-life balance issues much the same as a Korean national does. Meanwhile, a second or third generation Korean American employee tends to negotiate work-life balance issues closer towards the manner in which an American employee does, with certain limitations. For example, an American might threaten to quit his or her job if his or her work-life balance requests or met, while a Korean American will not.

Korean Americans work similar hours during the week as their Korean national counterparts. As a result, they too often have many work-life balance conflicts. They negotiate these differences in much the same way as Korean nationals do, but not to the same extremes. For example, the Korean Americans also offer a detailed excuse for missing work, but not as elaborate. Also, they do not voluntarily offer to work extra hours to make up for time missed. If a back-and-forth discussion with their Korean national manager does ensue, the Korean Americans do not as readily back down or acquiesce in a submissive manner. Once a Korean American employee has experienced the same difficulties when requesting time from work at different times, he or she quickly shifts to the tactic of fabrication the next time he or she requests off work.

The most drastic difference between the negotiation tactics of Korean Americans and the other two groups is the Korean Americans’ use of the Korean language. Americans are completely ignorant of the Korean language. Korean Americans not only understand both the Korean and English language, they for the most part understand the intrinsic meaning behind the
words as well. More importantly, Korean American employees are very cognizant that their Korean national managers do not fully comprehend the English language or its meaning. Korean Americans are able to take advantage of this by pretending not to understand the Korean national managers when it is to the Korean Americans’ advantage. If the Korean national manager tries to give the Korean American employee more work to perform or counters the Korean American’s request for time off, the Korean American pretends not to fully understand the Korean language in the hopes that the Korean national manager simply gives up trying to make the Korean American employee remain at work.

Out of the three groups, Americans have the most difficulty negotiating the work-life balance at a chaebol in America. Americans do not feel a need to fully explain any request for time from work and resent the expectation to do so. In the beginning of their employment, they will offer some explanation as to their request for time off from work, such as an illness or to take care of a loved one. However, they will not offer a detailed explanation and become angry when a Korean national requests more information after having heard some detail. For example, an American male employee may ask time off of work and say that he needs to take care of his wife. The expectation being that this is more than sufficient detail for the Korean national manager and that the American employee should be allowed to miss work in order to accommodate his ailing wife. The American employee becomes angry when the Korean national manager asks for complete detail behind his wife’s illness as the American considers this a very private and personal matter. With examples such as this, Americans tend to posit that Korean nationals do not trust them and thus the Americans become insulted.

Americans tend to argue with their Korean national managers for time off of work if their initial request is met with any resistance. Americans tend to attempt to fully explain why they
need to take time from work during the very beginning of their employment with a chaebol. The American employees posit that because of the cultural differences that Korean nationals simply just do not fully comprehend the Americans’ requests and as such the Americans must try to do a better job of explanation. This negotiation tactic quickly subsides as the Americans realize that it is not a matter of the Korean nationals misunderstanding the Americans’ words in asking for time, but questioning the Americans’ need to take time from work.

After this realization, Americans no longer offer any further explanation as to any time off of work requests. This is true for any request from work, to include vacations. Americans will formally request time from work in whatever official matter is required, and then take the time from work whether it has been formally approved by his or her Korean national manager or not. Since Americans do not feel any sense of long-term employment at the chaebols, they only expect to be there for a short time or until they can find another job with another company. As a result, many do not care if the chaebol terminates them for leaving work if they have already put in what they feel as the necessary notice.

Research Question 2

How does the management of a chaebol operating within the South treat the different cultures employed by the company? Are all employees treated the same, or can a difference be ascertained in the treatment Korean nationals, Korean Americans, and American nationals? What are these differences and how do they come about?

As evidenced by the conservations provided in the Results section, the management of chaebols in the United States conclusively treats its employees differently based upon the employee’s cultural distinction. While there is certainly an expectation for all cultural groups to
work at least 12-hour days or more on average regardless of the employee’s title or position, there are subtle differences in treatment.

By far, the harshest treatment is reserved for Korean national employees. They are under a constant pressure to perform and work more hours than the other groups. Subordinates are dressed down in conversations and interactions. Korean national employees are never allowed to question their boss under any circumstance and must perform all requested tasks whether the Korean national employee agrees with the task or not.

Korean nationals are hardly ever allowed to take vacation and usually get to take one week off of work per year. Of the three cultural groups, Korean nationals work the most hours during the week to include nights, weekends, and major American holidays. This loyalty is rewarded in terms of promotion and tenure within the company. This study revealed that out of the three cultural groups in American operations, Korean nationals are the only employees to be promoted.

Chaebol management does give Korean Americans the same amount of respect that they give Korean national employees. Much like their Korean national counterparts, Korean Americans are dressed down by management as well. However where Korean nationals are included in most aspects of business activities to include company dinners, Korean Americans are not. They are often tasked with extra work while Korean nationals attend extracurricular activities. For instance, Korean Americans will remain at work while Korean nationals go to dinner.

Korean national management often gives Korean Americans extra work because of the Korean Americans’ language abilities. They are asked to provide Korean translations and provide explanations for American business events or employee actions. This results in a
significant amount of extra work that is usually not within the official job duties of the Korean American employee. Even though, they seem to be cognizant of their treatment as second-class citizens, Korean American employees still strive to do a good and proper job.

Chaebol management is conscious of the cultural difference with Americans and gives some minor effort to placate American employees. Management employs the same tactics of micromanagement and guilt as they do with the other cultures in order to get American employees to perform as desired, but not to the same degree. Korean nationals will push Americans, but not past the point of a prolonged argument. They tend to employ the same tactic as Korean Americans do when they wish to avoid confrontation; they pretend not to understand English. In most cases, Korean national managers either pretend not to understand the requests of American employees, or they simply ignore them altogether.

Korean national managers expect Americans to work much longer than the standard 40-50 hour workweek and pressured them to do so accordingly. There is no sense of autonomy and Americans must seek approval for every work action. Any request to leave or miss work is met with rebuttal and some retribution. American employees are expected to finance business travel and living expenses with reimbursements being slow to follow and rarely without question. This research also uncovered no chaebol promotion of Americans or any plan to do so.

Research Question 3

How does a chaebol operating within the United States adjust its human relation policies? Are local cultural traditions and practices taken into account? If so, how and to what degree? Which traditional Korean employee work-life practices transfer over to the United States facility?
Perhaps the best summation of the chaebol organizational sentiment can be offered through the comments of the Global Vice President of Human Resources of one of the chaebols, “Americans are a necessary evil.” The VP stated this in an address to 60 some odd Director level or above managers that included Americans while at the South Korean headquarters’ location. Chaebols make only minimal adjustments and efforts in allowance for the traditional employment culture of the United States.

Officially, chaebols recognize American work practices and traditions as demonstrated by official employee handbooks and managerial acknowledgement. Unofficially, Korean national managerial actions and chaebol C-level pressure circumvent any official policy. In South Korea, there is little to no history of work-life balance being a universal goal. There is evidence that this trend is changing within the country itself, but it has not yet transferred to or emerged in operations within the United States. Even still, this emerging trend is nowhere near the same balance experienced or expected by American employees within the United States and has only recently come to being.

Since the Korean national managers in America are older males, they tend not to recognize any need for a change in or implementation of any work-life balance policies. They believe that their job is to push employees as hard and as far as possible for the benefit of the company and the country. Given their tenure and amount of time in the United States, these managers are likely ignorant of any new work-life policies initiated back in South Korea. Even if they are aware, they have no idea of how to implement such policies properly since they have never seen an example first-hand. This results in the ironic likelihood that chaebol employees located in South Korea may obtain more of a healthy work-life balance faster than their American counterparts will.
Research Question 4

Based upon gender, what, if any, differences in policy (formal or informal sanctions) can be seen? Do females of all cultures have equal opportunity to advance within the company? Are females treated the same or differently? How does treatment compare to their male counterparts?

Regardless of cultural denomination, female chaebol employees suffer from discriminatory workplace practices. This conclusion can be clearly drawn from the copious amounts of evidence presented in the results section under all three cultural categories. Women are not treated equally to men and do not have the same promotional or career opportunities. The fact that there are no known high-level female senior officers within all of the chaebols regardless of location speaks volumes. Moreover, there are no examples of any mid level female managers within the United States.

Female employees are expected to perform secretarial support functions along with their official responsibilities and duties. Chaebol management clearly treats them as subservient employees. Their careers are openly limited by chaebol management with the expectation that they will succumb to familial responsibilities instead of work ones. As such, they are never given any responsibilities that will generate career growth.

There is however some distinction in how the women in the different cultural groups are treated. Women in the Korean cultural groups tend to suffer more open discrimination than their American counterparts do. Also, they are less aware of the totality of both the overt and covert discrimination they face at work. Even though this study produced no American female participants, that in itself is evidence of discrimination. Chaebols seem to actively avoid hiring American females in efforts to avoid any conflicts or confrontations. Korean national managers
fear that if they hire American women, then they will have to change their management style and way of doing things.

Korean national women seem to suffer from institutionalized discrimination to the point of acceptance. As exampled earlier, these women do not feel as if their treatment is discriminatory even though they vividly depict differential treatment based upon gender. They posit that this is simply their lot in life and it is not subject to change. Korean national women do not rebel against their treatment from fear of job loss, but from fear of societal isolation. As such, Korean national women tend to remain employed far longer at a chaebol than the other two cultural groups do.

Korean American women tend to suffer much the same discrimination at work as their Korean national counterparts do. The main difference is that they tend not to accept this discrimination. They fight back in such a way that is more directly confrontational with their Korean national manager. Unfortunately, their efforts produce little abatement, as there is no organization support for their efforts. Korean national Managers are not reprimanded for their actions and this research discovered no termination of a manager for discriminatory acts against a female employee. Unlike Korean national females, Korean American females have more local communal support and do not voice the same sense of hopelessness in regard to their future opportunities outside of the chaebol. As a result, Korean American women tend to quit their chaebol job, or make plans to do so within the very near future.

Implications

The implications of this study are numerous as it covers a wide variety of work-life balance topics while at the same time considering three different cultural entities and their
interactions. The primary implication is that Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory appears to hold true given this scenario of a South Korean conglomerate company operating within the southeastern United States. Since the Korean and American cultures are polar opposites in most of Hofstede’s cultural dimension categories, their successful merger is highly unlikely. The traditional South Korean culture is very much dominant throughout chaebol organizations even though they have global experience. This is certainly true in business units operating within the United States since the Korean nationals continue to be in charge.

Hofstede’s power distance seems to hold true as each cultural group in this study accepted authority to varying degrees. Koreans nationals rarely, if ever question the authority of their managers, even if they do not believe that their manager’s directions are correct. Conversely, American employees continually question their manager once they posit that their manager is not fully capable of his duties. Korean Americans tend to fall in the middle of these two cultural groups in terms of their acceptance of authority. While American employees tend not to openly rebel against their manager, they do take a more passive aggressive stance against any ill-conceived directives.

The three cultural groups echo Hofstede’s individualism as well. Korean national employees think and act in terms of the group, company, and country of South Korea. While cognizant of their peers, American employees tend to take actions that are ultimately best for them, expecting others to do the same. Again, Korean American employees tend to struggle somewhere in the middle. They seem to experience a greater amount of stress if the group needs conflict with their personal aspirations.

Korean nationals avoidance of individual conflict speaks to South Korea’s low score on Hofstede’s scale of masculinity. American employees tend to expect and encourage conflict as a
means to advance the organization. They expect to debate competing ideas in order to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding. Again, Korean Americans tend to fall somewhere in-between, leaning more towards conflict avoidance.

In terms of Hofstede’s uncertainty avoidance, Korean national employees in this study demonstrate their desire to hold to the traditional manner of doing things. Korean national managers posit that it is their duty to ensure that employees work in the traditional chaebol manner and do not seek out or accept bottom-up ideas. This is exampled by Korean national managers’ unwillingness to accept employee requests for time off work for fear how the work will get done during the employee’s absence. American employees are less concerned with this as they are accustomed to change and adaptation.

This leads right into Hofstede’s pragmatism given that American employees in this study feel little to no loyalty to their respective chaebol. Their employment is seen as short term and a means to an end. Inversely, Korean nationals view their employment as long-term and give very little consideration to employment outside of their present circumstance. In this regard, Korean American employees hold a position closer to that of the American employees. While they feel a sense of loyalty to their Korean counterparts and heritage, they also express a strong desire to continue their career paths outside of the chaebol organizations.

Finally, Hofstede’s indulgence also seems to hold true for the polar opposite Korean national and American cultures. Korean nationals in this study offered example after example of personal sacrifice and delayed indulgence. They posit that their delayed gratification will mean greater security and success for their family members later on in life. American employees are continually frustrated by having to perform tasks that are viewed as unnecessary or meaningless.
They see little future benefit in any current sacrificed work-life balance. Here again, Korean Americans tend to follow the sentiment of the American employees.

This means that American employees who expect a similar work environment and work-life balance that they are familiar with through American companies will be sorely disappointed with employment in a chaebol. Their sense of disappointment will lead to stress and then eventually give way to anger and defiance. Americans will definitely quit their jobs prematurely in efforts to alleviate their situation. While they might not quit outright without having another job, American employees will seek any alternative employment opportunity even if it is subpar to their original expectations or career goals. While this may not always be the case, it is certainly plausible as evidenced by the discussions with the participants of this study. In other words, there is a strong possibility that accepting chaebol employment will ultimately hurt an American’s career, thus affecting his overall work-life balance.

This conclusion of a dominant Korean culture also means that Korean nationals who expect a difference in work-life balance by transferring to an American chaebol operation will also be sorely disappointed. Moreover in leaving South Korea, they will be giving up what little communal work-life balance support that they may have. The chaebol job in America will produce more stress and more work-life imbalance than the Korean national has in his or her South Korean chaebol job. This holds true for Korean national managers as well even though they experience a large increase in salary and benefits by coming to the United States.

Korean Americans will suffer stress and anxiety because they will experience a constant conflict between the American and South Korean cultures. They will quickly become disappointed in their Korean national counterparts and seek to further differentiate themselves
from them and that corporate culture. They will most likely remain employed by the chaebol for only a relatively short amount of time.

For the chaebol organization, this conclusion results in high employee turnover in its American operations. Korean American and American employees will perceive a work-life imbalance and eventually quit as a means of rectification. Even the Korean nationals who remain loyal to the company have to rotate back to South Korea after just a few years. Since there is no evidence of American or Korean American employee longevity, chaebol operations will suffer in terms of productivity and conductivity. Strategic operational plans within the United States will be difficult to implement. The strong Korean national management presence results in high incidences of conflict with employees of all cultural groups.

Limitations and Future Research

Albeit a major aim of this research is to overcome the limitations of previous quantitative studies on work-life balance, it has certain restrictions of its own. The most obvious of which is the sample size of the population. Compared to quantitative studies, it stands relatively small at 32 participants. However, when compared to other qualitative studies that implement the same interview method, this sample size is rather substantial (Berg, 2012).

The researcher’s lack of Asian heritage is another limitation of this study. It required a substantial amount of effort and attention to detail to be able to ascertain the subtle differences in the responses of the Asian participants. Also, the interviews were conducted in English, which is a second language to the Korean nationals and seemed to be the case for many of the Korean Americans interviewed as well.
This research is also limited to only one region of the United States. Again, this research is conducted in what is considered the heart of the traditional Deep South, which is Atlanta, GA. This is necessary in order to limit the scope of the study to a manageable size. It also allows for a direct comparison to be made between two distinctly different cultures, which aids in the purpose of this research.

The sample method employed presents another limitation, as it might not be representative of the entire population of employees who work for a South Korean chaebol in the southern United States. Yet due to the secretive and closed off nature of these South Korean companies, it is nearly impossible to create and draw from a purely random sample size where all employees have an equal chance of being selected for participation. Such company databases are just simply not made available to the public. Furthermore, any employee that exposes such data would be subjected to losing his or her job and to legal actions being taken against him or her by the chaebol. As such, the referral and volunteer process seems to be the only way to garner willing participants safely.

As pointed out earlier, there are no female American chaebol employee participants in this study. All attempts to find and recruit such candidates failed. Based upon the responses of those subjects who did participate in this study, there are few candidates that fit this description. Even though that may be the case, further research that incorporates first-hand information from American female employees is needed to draw more accurate conclusions in regards to their treatment.

While total comprehension is always the goal, this lofty ideal can hardly ever be achieved. This study is no different. It merely seeks to fill a gap in the literature by offering a qualitative supplement to the study of work-life balance negotiations in the rise of Korean
conglomerates operating within America by focusing on cross-cultural comparisons. The goal of this study is to foster a deeper and more complete understanding of how different cultures negotiate similar work-life issues in a South Korean company operating within the southern United States.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Beginning Questions / Identification

- Explain how this study defines the three cultures (Korean, Korean American, Non-Korean American).
- What nationality or ethnicity do you consider yourself: Korean national, Korean American, or American?
- Which cultural identity do you most identify with?
- Tell me about your family? Where do they live? Do any of them live with you?
- What is the company of your employment?
- What is your current job title and responsibilities?
- Can you tell me what lead to your decision to work for this firm?
- What was the cultural make-up of your component? How many Koreans, Korean Americans, and Americans were employed?

Work Hours

- In an ideal world, how many hours a day/week would you work for your company?
- How many hours a week do you actually work for your company?
- Tell me how you balance your work responsibilities with your family responsibilities?
  What challenges do you face? Explain.
- What happens when you have to leave work for a family or personal event (sick child or family member, or personal illness)?
- How did your work hours affect your family?
- Did you notice a difference in work hours among the cultural groups?

Autonomy, Supervisory Status and Supervisory Support

- How would you describe your relationship with your boss? With your peers?
- What happens when you disagree with your boss? With your Peers? Can you give me an example?
- Did you see a difference between an American manager and a Korean manager? Explain.

Income

- How did you get that job? Formally applied? Referred by a friend?
- Tell me more about your pay, or salary at the chaebol. How do you feel about it? Is it fair, unfair; Why or why not?
- What are the benefits (medical, etc.) at your company?
- Are there any financial advantages to working for a chaebol?

Organizational Support

- How does your firm officially define your primary duties and responsibilities in this role?
- Has it lived up to your professional expectations so far? How so?
- Have you seen employees treated differently whether they are Korean, Korean American, or American? How so?
- Have you experienced any cultural misunderstandings? Explain.
- Did you see any cultural differences in the workplace between the different groups?
- How would you describe your family life at home? Do you feel it is affected by your work? How so?
- Do you feel as if your family life affects your work? How so?
- Overall, do you enjoy job at the chaebol?

Tenure

- How long have you been employed by this firm?
• Can you tell me about office turnover? Do people tend to stay or quit? Can you tell me more about that?
• What does it take to get promoted at your company?

Job Value and Meaningfulness
• Do you enjoy what you do? Can you elaborate?
• What motivates you at your job? Why do you do it?
• How does your family support your career?

Female Discrimination
• [To male participants] Are there any females in your office? What cultural group do you think they are?
• [To male participants] What was the job title and responsibilities of the females in the office?
• [To female participant] Do you feel like women are treated any differently than males at your company?
• [To female participant] Have you experienced any discrimination because of your gender with working here? Can you give me an example?
• Do women have opportunities for advancement at your work? Please explain.
• Did you notice any different treatment of the females in the office compared to males? Tell me more about that. Can you give me an example?
• Did you notice any difference by cultural group in how the women were treated? For example, was a Korean American female treated any differently than a Korean national female? Can you give me an example of what you saw?
APPENDIX B

IRB PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
March 5, 2014

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Gabriel Ignatow
Student Investigator: Wheeler Pulliam
Department of Sociology
University of North Texas

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB)
RE: Human Subject Application #13611

Dear Dr. Ignatow,

The UNT IRB has received your request to modify the study titled “Negotiating Work Life Balance within the Operational Culture of a Chaebol.” As required by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects, the UNT IRB has examined the request to add a business-card sized advertisement to this study. The modifications to this study are hereby approved for the use of human subjects. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, January 15, 2014 to January 14, 2015.

The IRB must review this project prior to any other modifications.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst, at (940) 565-2018 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK/ab
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Negotiating Work Life Balance within the Operational Culture of a Chaebol in the Southeastern United States

Student Investigator: Wheeler Pulliam, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Sociology. Supervising Investigator: Dr. Gabe Ignatow.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves understanding the way in which employees of a large Korean company operating in America balance their work with their home life. It is trying to find out if cultural differences play a part in how employees act and how they are treated. It seeks to find out if there are any differences between Korean citizens, Korean Americans, and non-Korean Americans. It also examines how females are treated in the company.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview conducted by the Student Investigator. It will last approximately thirty (30) minutes and will focus on questions about your daily routines and interactions at work and at home. Questions about your personal life will only be in relation to how it is affected by your work. This conversation will be recorded.

Foreseeable Risks: The potential risk involved in this study is that your employer could find out about our conversation. All steps are being taken to ensure that this will not happen and this chance is minimal. However, given the nature of the topic discussed, your employer could take action against you if they so choose, resulting in the possible loss of your job.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to learn more about employee satisfaction in a Korean firm operating in America. This may benefit others as employers learn more about the reality of work life balance in foreign firms.

Compensation for Participants: Up to $40 in a gift card (Ex. Amazon, Wal-Mart, or the like)

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your real name will never be electronically saved. Your identity will be coded for purposes of the study. All transcripts will be electronically saved on a password protected computer located at my home. At no time will your identity be revealed and confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 1 of 2
Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Wheeler Pulliam at [redacted] or by email at [redacted] or Dr. Gabe Ignatow at [redacted].

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Wheeler Pulliam has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

________________________

Signature of Participant __________________________ Date

For the Student Investigator: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

________________________

Signature of Student Investigator __________________________ Date

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
REFERENCES


