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## SIG: Work Life Balance in HCI

**Anicia Peters**

Iowa State University  
Virtual Reality Applications Center  
1620 Howe Hall  
Ames, IA 50011  
anpeters@iastate.edu

**Susan Dray**

Dray and Associates  
2007 Kenwood Parkway  
Minneapolis, MN 55405  
susan.dray@dray.com

**Jofish Kaye**

Nokia Research  
200 Mathilda Ave  
Sunnyvale, CA 94086 USA  
jofish.kaye@nokia.com

**Abstract**

With the pervasiveness of technology, it has not only permeated our workspaces but it has also become invasive in our private personal spaces. Whether on the sports field, in the home, in health or spiritual spaces, technology is ever present. With this persistent presence, it keeps us constantly connected to our work, extending work beyond the normal working hours that used to be sharply demarcated by physical distance between work and play. This SIG will discuss the challenges and possible interventions to maintain work life balance for HCI researchers and practitioners.

**Author Keywords**

Work life balance; women; HCI

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H.5.2 [Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI)]: Miscellaneous – Human Factors;

**General Terms**

Work life balance; women; HCI

**Introduction**

As we play with our children, we keep an eye out for that important email or plan on how to make the toy's interface more usable. We surf the web for pleasure and before we know it, we are reading an article that will help us write the next journal paper. It is ever

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more unclear where life outside work starts – or whether that is even possible anymore.

As HCI practitioners, we design these technologies, often specifically to be ubiquitous, and examine their impact on users life. However, we neglect to look at ourselves and the impact that an unbalanced work/life situation brings. We join a growing of voices critically looking at how we maintain the work-life balance [3,4,6] as well as recent workshops on the topic at CHI [5,1].

What IS Work-life balance? It's one of those things we all know when we see it – usually in ourselves. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [7] defines three chief variables as indicators for where a country stands in terms of work-life balance: (1) The share of the labor force that works very long hours (more than 50 hours a week); (2) time spent on "leisure and personal care" (defined in contrast to paid or unpaid work as spending time with friends, going to the movies, pursuing hobbies, sleeping, eating, etc.); and (3) employment rates for women who have children" [2,7].

We also engage with a larger sense of responsibility in the CHI Community about the need to reflect and take responsibility for the larger ramifications of our work, beyond the immediate technical evaluation of the technology. What does it mean for a technology to 'work' if we have to take into account the larger context of use? Is a message delivery system that cuts delivery time down to five seconds actually better than one which refuses to deliver messages over the weekend? What would such values-led decisions look like?

In the past half-century, as women have moved into the workforce, a trend separate from yet clearly visible within the SIGCHI community, this balancing act has become ever more visible. Both men and women are struggling to find ways to stay balanced, doing the best possible work and still providing for personal time to spend with family and with self.

### **Background**

This issue has particular impact for SIGCHI since we both experience work-life balance challenges and since we research, create and evaluate the very technology that helps to make this balancing act so difficult.

At CHI 2011, we held a breakfast aimed at women, but open to all. At that meeting, we discussed topics related to women. Since then, we developed the "CHI Women" community, a Facebook Group page. There, we have been discussing this and related topics. Clearly, both women and men are affected by technology's reach into our personal life and we hope to extend the conversation beyond that on the Facebook Group page. Therefore, we are proposing this SIG to discuss and find solutions to challenges that face HCI researchers and practitioners.

### **Participation method**

We will have a facilitated discussion of selected topics that pertain to balancing work and life within the HCI community.

A brief introduction and overview of topic will be presented prior to opening the session for working group style discussions. Presenters will also share some of their experiences with respect to work life balance. Each working group will receive a particular

topic and participants can choose in which working group they wish to participate in. Working group discussions will focus on brainstorming possible ways of improving work life imbalances and how technology can help with this. All working groups will then report back on main issues and proposed interventions to the plenary session.

Initial topics for working groups include:

- Balancing family and work
- Information overload and time management
  - Saying NO.
  - Some things will just not get done!
  - To 'unplug' or 'not to unplug'
- Stress management: Getting past the guilt
- Overcoming gender stereotyping in the workplace
- Studying impacts of technology on work-life balance

### Attendees

We will invite participants by sending out emails to authors and advertising the SIG in the CHI Women Facebook Page.

The SIG is open for any researchers or practitioners who consider themselves part of the HCI community and have an interest in work life balance, whether from a personal perspective or as a research interest, although the focus will be on the former.

### Post CHI Activities

- Compile the outcomes of the SIG into an article suitable for publication.
- Create a CHI Work-Life Balance Facebook Group to encourage collaboration among group members and follow up on ideas brainstormed
- Continue to follow up on CHI Women Facebook Group

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