

Abstract:

Keeping up appearances:

The image (re)construction process across work and nonwork domains,
its causes and effects.

Individuals are increasingly confronted with ‘diseases of modernity’, such as stress and burnout. While insights from the work-family interface have mainly pointed towards demands and resources coming from the work and nonwork domains, the proposed multi-method PhD research project aims to contribute to contemporary scholarly and societal work-life and burnout debates by presenting an alternative theoretical lens on the development of mental health complaints in today’s society, especially among the younger Millennial generation. The project comprises four studies that integrate insights from Conservation of Resources Theory, Impression Management Theory, and Boundary Theory and that incorporate notions of Social Identity Theory in order to shed light on how and why Millennial employees engage in a so-called ‘work/nonwork image (re)construction process’. More specifically, the project examines how Millennial workers’ self-perceived image discrepancies in the work and nonwork life domains can trigger a resource gain spiral (i.e., the attainment of resources, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, meaning of life, sense of purpose, status, and respect) on the one hand, and a resource loss spiral (i.e., the development of burnout complaints) on the other hand. Second, the proposed research project aims to examine to what extent this relationship is mediated by enacted impression management strategies. Third, the proposed study will investigate the moderating role of reported frequency of image switches. In Study 1, a systematic literature review will be conducted, to create a strong theoretical foundation of current evidence. In Study 2, qualitative interview methods will be used to identify the motives and strategies of Millennial employees to (re)construct their image in the work and nonwork domains. In Study 3, two scales will be developed and validated to measure self-perceived image discrepancies and impression management strategies in the work and nonwork domains. In Study 4, a dynamic within-person design will be used to examine how self-perceived image discrepancies affect resource gains and burnout complaints, respectively, by looking at impression management strategies as a mediator in this relationship and reported frequency of image switches as a possible moderator. The findings are expected to have important implications not only for preventive measures for individuals and organizations, but also for possible avenues for future studies.