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Abstract

Using data from a 2007 U.S. survey of workers, this article examines the implications of schedule control for work–family role blurring and work–family conflict. Four main findings indicate that (a) schedule control is associated with more frequent working at home and work–family multitasking activities; (b) the positive association between schedule control and multitasking suppresses the negative association between schedule control and work–family conflict; (c) the positive association between working at home and multitasking is weaker among individuals with greater schedule control; and (d) the positive association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict is weaker among individuals with greater schedule control. Our findings reveal previously undocumented mediating, suppression, and moderating patterns in the ways that schedule control contributes to work–family role blurring and work–family conflict. The authors discuss the implications of these findings for views of schedule control as a “resource” and theories about the borders in the work–family interface.

Keywords

schedule control, work–family conflict, role blurring, job demands

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The ways that individuals navigate the work–family interface is of increasing interest in sociological research (Blair-Loy, 2003; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). One important dimension of the work–family interface involves multitasking—or the frequency that individuals try to engage in work- and home-related activities simultaneously when they are at home (Voydanoff, 2005a). Work–family multitasking represents a consequential form of role blurring because it increases the likelihood of distractions and interruptions between work and family domains. Drawing from boundary theory, Desrochers, Hilton, and Larwood (2005) define work–family blurring as “a subjective, cognitive phenomenon involving perceived integration of work life and home life that is situated in a highly interdependent work–family context such as the simultaneous work and family demands that can be present when people bring their paid work into the home” (p. 449).

Although there has been much discussion about the potentially negative implications of role blurring, few studies (if any) have addressed the ways that boundary-spanning resources influence role blurring and its consequences for work–family conflict. Boundary-spanning resources involve “structural or psychosocial assets that may be used to facilitate performance, reduce demands, or generate additional resources, for example flexibility regarding when and where work activities are performed” (Voydanoff, 2005a, p. 491; also see Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Voydanoff’s (2004, 2005a) demands–resources model provides a framework for analyzing the effects of boundary-spanning resources. Although it has parallels to other well-known models, such as Karasek’s (1979) demand-control model and Hobfoll and Shirom’s (2001) conservation of resource theory, the demands–resources model focuses greater attention on the interaction of demands and resources across work and family domains. For reasons described below, we focus on one particular boundary-spanning resource—schedule control. Integrating Voydanoff’s ideas about demands and resources and insights from border/boundary theories (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), three questions are addressed: (1) Is schedule control associated with two forms of work–family role blurring—working at home and work–family multitasking? (2) Do those associations influence the total association between schedule control and work–family conflict? (3) Does schedule control modify the associations between (a) working at home and work–family multitasking and (b) work–family multitasking and work–family conflict?

Theoretical Framework

Schedule Control as a Boundary-Spanning Resource and Role-Blurring Catalyst

Schedule control entails the degree to which workers have control of the start and/or finish times of work (Golden, 2008). Although schedule control shares some conceptual and empirical terrain with broader constructs like job autonomy and decision-making latitude—which tend to involve freedom from supervision and control over the nature, pace, and direction of work—schedule control is more specifically related to individuals' capacity to determine the temporal parameters of their own work (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Many scholars have identified schedule control as a resource that helps people navigate the boundary between work and family and minimize conflict between those domains (Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Christensen & Staines, 1990; Clark, 2001; Golden, 2008; Voydanoff, 2005a). Employers may offer schedule control as an incentive to workers juggling competing work and family expectations (Rau & Hyland, 2002). From this standpoint, schedule control should be associated with lower levels of work–family conflict. We seek to elaborate on this proposition, however, by examining a different view: There may be something about schedule control that actually masks or suppresses its resource benefits for lower work–family conflict. Specifically, schedule control may increase work–family role blurring by offering workers the flexibility to take work home and spend more time engaged in paid work at home. In turn, Voydanoff (2005a) has shown that these conditions may generate more frequent work–family multitasking activities that are associated with higher levels of work–family conflict. We examine this paradox in greater detail: If schedule control is associated with more work–family role blurring, the consequences for the work–family interface may challenge the resource view of schedule control for reduced exposure to work–family conflict. We explore the possibility that these forms of role blurring suppress or counterbalance the resource elements of schedule control that theoretically should reduce work–family conflict. Simply put, the boundary-spanning resource function of schedule control may be offset if it increases role blurring. In addition, the resource view predicts that schedule control may buffer the association between role blurring and work–family conflict. In the sections that follow, we organize our review of the literature and ideas about the focal associations with three core hypotheses: (a) the role-blurring hypothesis, (b) the suppressed-resource hypothesis, and (c) the buffering-resource hypothesis. As Figure 1 illustrates, these hypotheses articulate the potential intervening

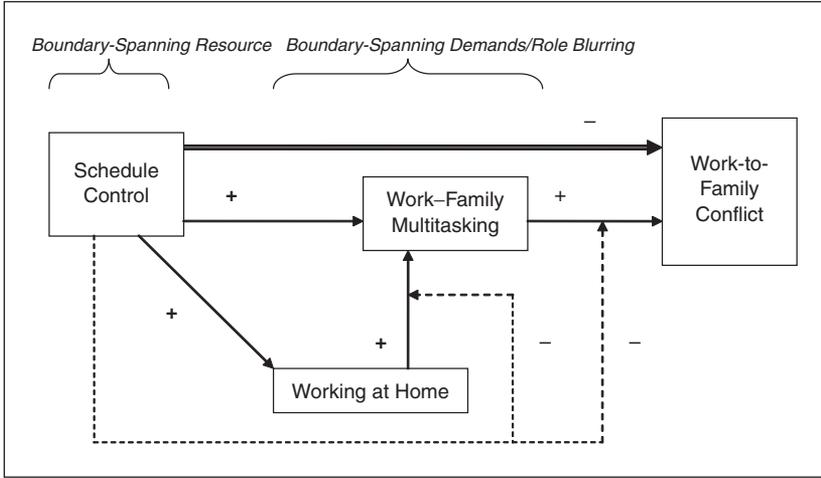


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the influence of boundary-spanning resources and demands on work–family conflict
Note: Double line indicates a suppression effect; dashed line indicates a moderating effect.

and moderating processes that link schedule control to role blurring and work–family conflict.

The Role-Blurring Hypothesis

The role-blurring hypothesis predicts that schedule control is associated with greater role blurring in (a) the amount of time spent doing paid work at home and (b) the frequency of work–family multitasking. In developing this hypothesis, we draw on the ideas of boundary and border theories—especially the concepts of segmentation–integration, flexibility, and permeability (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). The boundaries between work and family are viewed as a continuum of segmentation versus integration. High segmentation means that the boundary between employees’ work and family roles is impermeable, rendering work and family into separate and distinct spheres. By contrast, high integration is when “no distinction exists between what belongs to the ‘home’ or ‘work’ and where they are engaged” (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 567). An individual who performs work at home or engages in work–family multitasking is embedded in a high-integration context; this elevates the likelihood that individuals switch between work and family roles when necessary (Desrochers et al., 2005). The potential

downside of this role-blurring activity entails more interference or interruptions of role-related responsibilities (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

What factors increase integration and role blurring? The extent of integration is influenced by flexibility and permeability. According to Ashforth and colleagues (2000, p. 474), flexibility “is the degree to which the spatial and temporal boundaries are pliable” (also see Hall & Richter, 1988). By contrast, permeability involves “the degree to which a role allows one to be physically located in the role’s domain but psychologically and/or behaviorally involved in another role” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474). Although greater flexibility and permeability can ease the transitions between roles, potentially reducing the risk of interrole conflict, it is also possible that the looseness of the work–family boundary can contribute to greater role blurring between work and family domains and generate conflict (Hill, Hawkins, & Miller, 1996). For example, Voydanoff (2005a, p. 498) finds that individuals who have more work schedule flexibility are more likely to work at home, bring work home, and receive work-related contact at home—each is indicative of “operating in both domains at the same time” and predicts more frequent work–family multitasking activities (p. 492; also see Ahrentzen, 1990; Desrochers et al., 2005). However, it is important to underscore that we are not suggesting that role blurring necessarily equals multitasking.

Collectively, the interrelationships described above provide a rationale for the role-blurring hypothesis: Schedule control should increase time spent working at home, which in turn likely increases the frequency of work–family multitasking (Voydanoff, 2005a). Thus, the role-blurring hypothesis also predicts that working at home should partly explain why people with greater schedule control report more work–family multitasking. Figure 1 illustrates these hypothesized links.

The Suppressed-Resource Hypothesis

As we have articulated in the preceding sections, schedule control is a boundary-spanning resource related to flexibility that purportedly allows workers to create more permeable boundaries between work and family life. Although flexibility and permeability tend to ease the transition between work and home domains, the blurring of boundaries also likely increases (Ashforth et al., 2005; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). We contend that this role blurring represents a potential downside of schedule control. To the extent that schedule control is associated with the performance of paid work at home and the frequency of work–family multitasking, its resource benefits

may become obscure—especially given the well-documented link between these forms of role blurring and work–family conflict (Voydanoff, 2005a). Stated more formally in analytical terms as the suppressed-resource hypothesis, the consequences of these interrelationships for work–family conflict may be evident in the following ways: (a) Overall, schedule control should be associated with lower levels of work–family conflict. (b) However, that negative association should become stronger after we account for the increased work–family role blurring that is associated with schedule control. Taken together, these patterns represent the indirect costs of schedule control and the ways that role blurring seemingly detracts from its potency as a boundary-spanning resource. In our conceptual framework shown in Figure 1, we represent this suppressed-resource hypothesis with a negative sign above the double-line arrow that links schedule control to work–family conflict.

The Buffering-Resource Hypothesis

In addition to the potential indirect effects of schedule control, it is plausible that the resource benefits of schedule control function in two specific ways: Schedule control moderates the associations between (a) working at home and work–family multitasking and (b) work–family multitasking and work–family conflict. Schedule control may provide a context in which working at home leads to less frequent work–family multitasking. Similarly, multitasking may be less strongly associated with work–family conflict among individuals with greater schedule control. We refer to these two predictions as components of the buffering-resource hypothesis.

The possession of greater schedule control may enhance what Nippert-Eng (1996) refers to as boundary work: “the strategies, principles, and practices [people] use to create, maintain, and modify cultural boundaries” (p. 7). Boundary work can help workers sustain a clearer sense of the work–family border—one that is more adaptive to their own personal needs (and that of others in work and family domains). This may be especially true in highly integrated work–family circumstances (Desrochers et al., 2005). We apply these ideas to inform the buffering-resource hypothesis in two ways. First, although individuals who perform work at home are more likely to engage in work–family multitasking (Voydanoff, 2005a), the possession of greater schedule control—a key form of flexibility—may facilitate a more manageable and efficacious disengagement from work-related tasks if or when family demands arise. In turn, the greater flexibility afforded by schedule control may minimize the need to multitask. That is, the resource benefits of schedule control foster a greater degree of latitude in individuals’ capacity to switch

between roles without having to engage simultaneously in both roles. Applying Nippert-Eng's ideas here, we posit that schedule control may enable more effective, resourceful boundary work—especially among different forms of work–family role-blurring processes. In sum then, the first component of the buffering-resource hypothesis predicts that any observed positive association between working at home and work–family multitasking should be weaker for workers who have greater schedule control.

The second way we apply Nippert-Eng's (1996) ideas about boundary work involves schedule control as a buffer in the association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict. Work–family multitasking represents a highly integrated form of role blurring. Theoretically, it should be associated with more work–family conflict—and evidence suggests that it is (Voydanoff, 2005a). However, we hypothesize that work–family multitasking that occurs in the context of greater schedule control may be more characteristic of individuals' efforts to maintain the integrity of borders. We contend that one way to interpret these ideas is a “controlled permeability” in which the individual has more control with respect to the temporal and psychological parameters of work. Under conditions of greater schedule control, a weak or null association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict may reflect a more efficacious, instrumental enactment of multitasking behavior. Some evidence supports this idea by showing that the most optimal arrangement for lower work–family conflict is high flexibility (i.e., full schedule control) and low permeability (i.e., infrequent multitasking) (Clark, 2001). In sum, then, the second component of the buffering-resource hypothesis predicts that any observed positive association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict should be weaker for workers who have greater schedule control. In Figure 1, the two components of the buffering-resource hypothesis are represented with the dashed lines (and negative signs) from schedule control to the arrows that link working at home with multitasking and multitasking with work–family conflict.

Ruling Out Potential Antecedent and/or Confounding Conditions

To more accurately specify the associations among schedule control, role blurring, and work–family conflict, our analyses seek to rule out potential antecedent and/or confounding conditions that may influence the hypothesized focal associations. For example, prior evidence indicates potential variations across core sociodemographic characteristics like gender, race, age, marital status, and parental status (Blair-Loy, 2003; Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2005; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Voydanoff,

2004, 2005a; Williams, 2000; Winslow, 2005). Likewise, work–family interface research has also underscored the relevance of education; occupation; income; partner and spouse work status; and job characteristics, such as hours, authority, and job pressures (Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswevaran, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005a, 2005b). In our analyses, we statistically control for all of these statuses and conditions to rule out their potential influence on our focal hypothesized associations.

Method

Sample

The data derive from telephone interviews with working adults in the United States; the first wave of interviews of 1,800 adults occurred from February through August 2005. Eligible participants had to be 18 years of age or older and participating in the paid labor force. Interviews were conducted in English, so participants had to be sufficiently fluent to complete the interview. At Wave 1, we successfully interviewed 71% of individuals who were identified as eligible. Approximately 18 to 20 months after the initial interview, we were able to successfully reinterview 1,286 of the original participants. In the present analyses, we examine data from the second interview because the focal measures of interest were asked only at that time. The age range of the initial sample is 18 to 94, with a mean of 43.51 ($SD = 13.21$). The sample characteristics are similar to those of working adults in other national data sets, such as the 2002 National Survey of the Changing Workforce (NSCW). We exclude participants with missing values on focal and control measures, yielding a sample of 1,100 cases for the present analyses.

Measures

Work–family conflict. An index of four items was used to assess work–family conflict, including “How often have you not had enough time for your family or other important people in your life because of your job?” “How often have you not had the energy to do things with your family or other important people in your life because of your job?” “How often has work kept you from doing as good a job at home as you could?” and “How often has your job kept you from concentrating on important things in your family and personal life?” Response choices include (1) *never*, (2) *rarely*, (3) *sometimes*, and (4) *frequently*. Items averaged to create the index; higher scores represent greater work–family conflict ($\alpha = .85$). This index is similar to

those in other studies (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Voydanoff, 2005c, 2007).

Work–family multitasking. Information on work–family multitasking was gathered by asking respondents “How often do you try to work on job tasks and home tasks at the same time while you are at home?” Responses include (1) *never*, (2) *rarely*, (3) *sometimes*, and (4) *frequently*. Although we acknowledge that multiple-item measures are ideal, it should be noted that the researchers involved in the 2002 NSCW specifically designed this single item to assess the frequency of multitasking. Moreover, analyses that have used this single-item measure have appeared in recently published research on the work–family interface (Voydanoff, 2005a, 2007).

Working at home. Hours of work at home was calculated as a percentage of the total number of hours respondents worked in a typical week at their main job.

Schedule control. One question asks about schedule control: “Who usually decides when you start and finish work each day at your main job? Is it someone else, or can you decide within certain limits, or are you entirely free to decide when you start and finish work?” Response choices are: *no schedule control* (0), *limited control* (1), and *full control* (2). In regression analyses, individuals with no schedule control are the omitted or contrast category. Again, although multiple-item measures are typically desired, in this instance a single item adequately captures the conceptualization of schedule control, as offered by Golden (2001, 2008): Schedule control entails the degree to which workers have control of the start and/or finish times of work. Moreover, analyses of similar single-item measures have appeared in other recently published research (e.g., Jacobs & Gerson, 2004) and multiple waves of the General Social Survey.

Gender. We use dummy codes for *men* (0) and *women* (1).

Age. Age is coded in years.

Race. For participants’ race, we contrast *White* (1) versus all *other* categories (0).

Marital status. We use married (includes common-law) as the omitted reference category and contrast against never married and previously married in regression analyses.

Spouse or partner work status. One item assesses whether participants have a spouse or partner who is currently working *full-time* (1) versus those who do not have a working spouse (0). In additional analyses (not shown), we assessed the influence of having a spouse or partner who works part-time. None of those effects were statistically significant, so we present results with the *full-time* versus *other* contrast.

Number of children in household. We included a measure of the total number of children under the age of 18 residing in the household. Additional analyses (not shown) that consider age of children, especially the presence of children under 6 years of age, yielded results similar to those associated with the number of children under age 18 in the household.

Education. Education is coded as (1) *some high school but did not graduate*, (2) *high school graduate or GED*, (3) *specialized vocational training or some college*, (4) *Associate's Degree (2-year program)*, (5) *college graduate (BA or BS)*, and (6) *postgraduate—advanced degree (MA, PhD)*. These codes are standard across the literature.

Occupation. To assess occupation, we asked participants about the job title of the “main job at which you worked last week.” This question refers to their main place of employment, that is, the one in which participants spend the most time. We also asked about some of the main duties in order to more accurately code responses. Using the open-ended information provided, we coded responses into five main categories in accordance with the Bureau of Labor Statistics codes. These include *professional* (managerial and professional specialty occupations), *administrative* (technical, sales, and administrative support occupations), *service* (service occupations), *craft* (precision production, craft, and repair occupations), and *labor* (operators or laborers). In regression analyses, we use *professional* as the omitted reference category.

Work hours. Work hours are coded as the number of hours respondents worked in a typical week at their main job.

Supervisor. One item asks participants, “Do you supervise or manage anyone as part of your job?” We coded *yes* responses as 1 (supervisor) and *no* responses as 0.

Personal income. Income is assessed with the question “For the complete year of 2004, what was your total personal income, including income from all of your paid jobs, before taxes?”

Job pressure. To assess exposure to job pressure, we ask, “How often do the demands of your job exceed those doable in an 8-hour workday?” Response choices are *never* (0), *rarely* (1), *sometimes* (2), and *frequently* (3).

Table 1 provides summary statistics for all variables used in these analyses. Zero-order correlations between all variables are presented in Appendix A.

Plan of Analyses

The analyses were conducted using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques. All analyses adjust for a broad array of demographic, marital and

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables in the Study (*N* = 1,100)^a

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Focal measures			
Work–family conflict	2.33	0.78	1–4
Work at home	0.12	0.22	0–1
Work–family multitasking	2.04	1.02	1–4
No schedule control	0.43	0.50	0–1
Some schedule control	0.38	0.48	0–1
Full schedule control	0.20	0.40	0–1
Control measures			
Women	0.59	0.49	0–1
White	0.79	0.41	0–1
Age	45.00	12.30	18–88
Married	0.63	0.48	0–1
Previously married	0.28	0.41	0–1
Never married	0.15	0.36	0–1
Children in the household	0.82	1.09	0–5
Spouse or partner works	0.44	0.50	0–1
Education	3.78	1.52	1–6
Administrative occupations	0.38	0.49	0–1
Service occupations	0.14	0.35	0–1
Craft occupations	0.07	0.25	0–1
Laborer occupations	0.08	0.27	0–1
Professional occupations	0.33	0.47	0–1
Hours	41.67	14.07	2–110
Excessive job demands	2.86	1.00	1–4
Supervisor	0.63	0.48	0–1
Personal income	\$50,752.73	\$85,431.64	\$0–\$2,500,000

a. Means for categorical variables represent the percentage of respondents in each category.

household, and work-related conditions. In the first part of our analyses shown in Table 2, we examine time spent performing paid work at home and work–family multitasking as the dependent variables. Model 1 provides evidence about the association between schedule control and working at home. Model 2 regresses multitasking on schedule control. Model 3 includes working at home without schedule control. In Model 4, we include schedule control and working at home simultaneously. These three steps allow for a clearer representation of the independent effects of schedule control and working at home on multitasking, as well as an assessment of potential mediating links. We also test for an interaction between schedule control and working at home in Model 5.

Table 2. Regression of Work at Home and Work–Family Multitasking on Focal Measures and Controls

	Work–family multitasking				
	Work				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
at home					
Focal associations					
Some schedule control ^a	.05*** (.02)	.30*** (.07)	–	.23*** (.06)	.15* (.07)
Full schedule control ^a	.17*** (.02)	.74*** (.08)	–	.48*** (.08)	.41*** (.08)
Work at home	–	–	1.72*** (.13)	1.50*** (.13)	2.17*** (.28)
Some Schedule Control x Work at Home	–	–	–	–	–0.49 (0.35)
Full Schedule Control x Work at Home	–	–	–	–	–1.14 (0.34)
Control measures					
Women	–0.1 (.01)	.06 (.06)	.02 (.06)	.07 (.06)	.06 (.06)
White	.01 (.01)	–0.08 (.07)	–0.10 (.07)	–0.10 (.07)	–0.08 (.07)
Age	.19** (.06)	.04 (.27)	–0.15 (.25)	–0.23 (.26)	–0.24 (.25)
Previously married ^b	.01 (.02)	.16 (.08)	.13 (.08)	.15 (.08)	.15 (.08)
Never married ^b	.03 (.03)	.12 (.10)	.09 (.09)	.08 (.09)	.09 (.09)
Children in the household	–0.1 (.01)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)
Spouse or partner works	–0.1 (.02)	.02 (.07)	.04 (.07)	.02 (.06)	.02 (.07)
Education	–0.1 (.01)	.06* (.02)	.07*** (.02)	.07*** (.02)	.06** (.02)
Administrative ^c	–0.7*** (.02)	–0.27*** (.07)	–0.20*** (.07)	–0.19*** (.07)	–0.19*** (.07)
Service ^c	–0.7*** (.02)	–0.19 (.10)	–0.14 (.10)	–0.09 (.09)	–0.10 (.09)
Craft ^c	–0.6* (.03)	–0.15 (.13)	–0.07 (.13)	–0.06 (.12)	–0.06 (.12)
Laborsers ^c	–0.10*** (.03)	–0.44*** (.12)	–0.36*** (.12)	–0.30*** (.12)	–0.30*** (.12)
Hours	–0.01*** (.01)	.01*** (.02)	.01*** (.02)	.01*** (.02)	.01*** (.02)

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Work-family multitasking				
	Work at home	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Excessive job demands	.01 (.01)	.13 ^{***} (.03)	.13 ^{***} (.03)	.12 ^{***} (.03)	.11 ^{***} (.03)
Supervisor	.03* (.13)	.05 (.06)	-.04 (.06)	.01 (.06)	.01 (.06)
Personal income	.25 ^{***} (.78)	.20 (.35)	-.09 (.34)	-.18 (.33)	.10 (.33)
Constant	-.15 ^{**}	-1.16 ^{***}	-.73 ^{**}	-.93 ^{***}	-.80 ^{***}
R ²	.15	.19	.25	.28	.29

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are shown, with standard errors in parentheses.

a. Compared to no. schedule control.

b. Compared to married.

c. Compared to professional occupations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test).

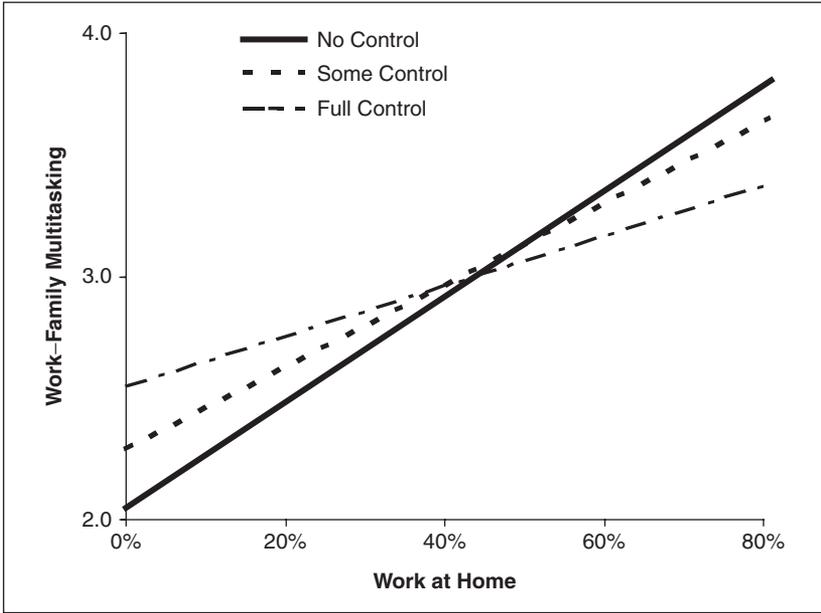


Figure 2. The association between work–family multitasking and working at home at different levels of schedule control

Note: Predicted values are derived from Model 5 in Table 2. We solved the equation for modal responses to categorical variables and mean values for continuous variables.

Table 3 reports results for regression analyses, with work–family conflict as the focal dependent variable. Model 1 regresses work–family conflict on schedule control. Model 2 includes working at home but excludes schedule control. Model 3 includes schedule control and working at home simultaneously. Again, these steps allow for a clear presentation of the unique effects of schedule control and working at home on work–family conflict. In Model 4, we include work–family multitasking to assess its potential influence on the effects of schedule control and working at home. In more formal analytical terms, support for the suppressed-resource hypothesis will be evident if the size of the coefficients observed in Model 3 increase in size (away from zero in either direction); explanatory and mediating effects will be evident if those same coefficients decrease in size. Model 5 reports a test for the buffering-resource hypothesis with an interaction between schedule control and multitasking. To illustrate the more complex interaction patterns, we provide figures for the interactions between schedule control and working at

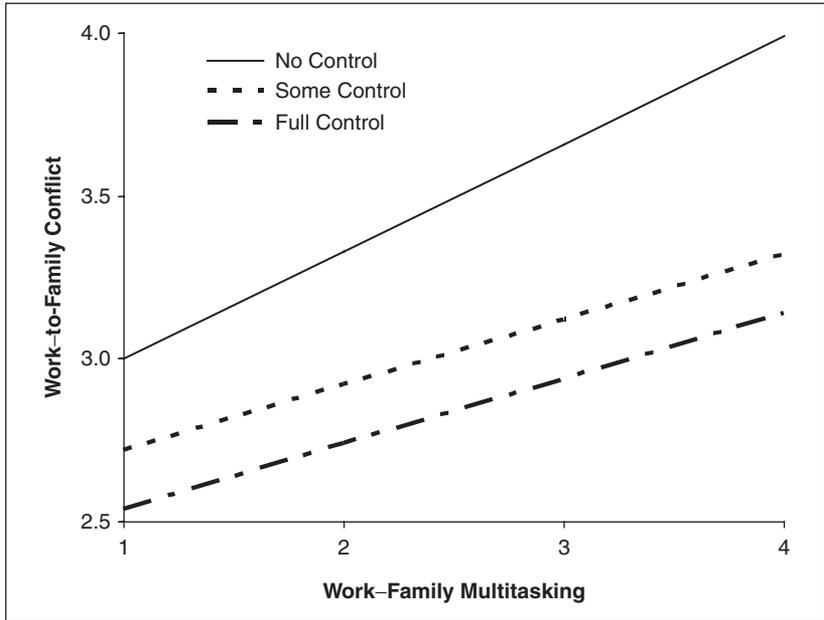


Figure 3. The association between schedule control and work–family conflict across different levels of work–family multitasking

Note: Predicted values are derived from Model 5 in Table 3. We solved the equation for modal responses to categorical variables and mean values for continuous variables. Work–family multitasking is centered in all analyses.

home on work–family multitasking (Figure 2) and schedule control and multitasking on work–family conflict (Figure 3).

Results

Role Blurring: Working at Home and Work–Family Multitasking

Model 1 in Table 2 indicates that individuals with some or full schedule control report a significantly higher percentage of hours working at home. These patterns provide preliminary evidence to support the role-blurring hypothesis. All else being equal, those with some schedule control perform, on average, approximately 7% of their total work hours at home. Individuals with full schedule control perform roughly 20% of their work hours at home.

Model 1 of Table 2 shows that individuals who report some or full schedule control report higher levels of work–family multitasking compared to those

Table 3. Regression of Work–Family Conflict on Focal Measures and Controls

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Focal associations					
Some schedule control ^a	-.06 (.05)	–	-.07 (.05)	-.13** (.05)	-.15*** (.05)
Full schedule control ^a	-.15* (.06)	–	-.20** (.06)	-.32*** (.06)	-.33*** (.06)
Work at home	–	.21* (.10)	.30** (.10)	-.08 (.10)	-.07 (.10)
Multitasking	–	–	–	.25*** (.02)	.33*** (.04)
Some Schedule Control × Multitasking	–	–	–	–	-.13** (.05)
Full Schedule Control × Multitasking	–	–	–	–	-.13* (.05)
Basic control measures					
Women	.14** (.05)	.16*** (.05)	.14** (.05)	.13** (.05)	.13** (.05)
White	.03 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.06 (.05)
Age	-.19 (.20)	-.29 (.20)	-.24 (.20)	-.19 (.19)	-.19 (.19)
Previously married ^b	-.08 (.07)	-.07 (.06)	-.08 (.06)	-.12 (.06)	-.13* (.06)
Never married ^b	-.06 (.07)	-.07 (.07)	-.06 (.07)	-.09 (.07)	-.09 (.06)
Children in the household	.05* (.02)	.05* (.02)	.05* (.02)	.05* (.02)	.04* (.02)
Spouse or partner works	-.14** (.05)	-.14** (.05)	-.14* (.05)	-.14** (.05)	-.14** (.05)
Education	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Administrative ^c	-.09 (.06)	-.06 (.06)	-.06 (.05)	-.01 (.05)	-.01 (.05)
Service ^c	.07 (.08)	.11 (.08)	.09 (.08)	.11 (.07)	.12 (.07)
Craft ^c	-.07 (.10)	-.05 (.11)	-.05 (.10)	-.04 (.09)	-.03 (.09)
Laborers ^c	.05 (.09)	.10 (.09)	.08 (.09)	.15 (.09)	.16 (.09)
Hours	.01*** (.01)	.01*** (.01)	.01*** (.02)	.01*** (.02)	.01*** (.01)
Excessive job demands	.22*** (.02)	.22*** (.02)	.22*** (.02)	.19*** (.04)	.18*** (.02)
Supervisor	-.10* (.05)	-.09* (.05)	-.11* (.05)	-.11** (.04)	-.11* (.04)
Personal income	.20 (.27)	.08 (.26)	.13 (.27)	.17 (.25)	.19 (.25)
Constant	1.34***	1.31***	1.39***	1.62***	1.66***
R ²	.20	.21	.22	.29	.30

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are shown, with standard errors in parentheses.

a. Compared to no schedule control.

b. Compared to married.

c. Compared to professional occupations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test).

with no schedule control. As shown in Model 3, the percentage of work hours performed at home is associated with more frequent multitasking. In Model 4, the simultaneous inclusion of schedule control and working at home indicates that part of the influence of schedule control on work–family multitasking occurs indirectly via working at home. Collectively, these patterns lend further support to the role-blurring hypothesis. Independent of each other, schedule control and working at home increase exposure to work–family multitasking—and, more importantly, working at home explains part of the positive association between schedule control and work–family multitasking.

In addition, we observed a significant Schedule Control \times Working at Home interaction effect, indicating that the positive association between working at home and work–family multitasking varies across levels of schedule control ($F = 6.91, p < .05$). As Figure 2 illustrates, the positive association between working at home and work–family multitasking is weaker among individuals who report full schedule control. This interaction effect provides support for the buffering-resource hypothesis.

Finally, although peripheral to our focal associations, several patterns among the control measures deserve brief mention. First, we observe that age, professional occupation and income are associated positively with working at home. Second, the well educated, professionals, and those with longer hours and more job pressures report more frequent work–family multitasking.

Work–Family Conflict

As shown in Model 1 of Table 3, workers with full schedule control report less work–family conflict than those with no schedule control. By contrast, at least initially it appears that workers with some schedule control report similar work–family conflict as those with no schedule control. In Model 2, we observe that working at home is associated with more work–family conflict. The simultaneous inclusion of schedule control and working at home has little effect on their respective coefficients, suggesting that each has independent associations with work–family conflict (see Model 3).

In Model 4, we observe that work–family multitasking is associated with higher levels of work–family conflict. More importantly, the inclusion of multitasking reveals important suppressor effects on the association between schedule control and work–family conflict. Specifically, the coefficient associated with some schedule control changes from $-.07$ (Model 3) to $-.13$ (Model 4), and the effect becomes statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level. Likewise, the negative coefficient associated with full schedule control

changes from $-.20$ (Model 3) to $-.32$ (Model 4), with the effect becoming significant at the $p < .001$ level. Taken together, these patterns indicate that the positive association between schedule control and work–family multitasking conceals part of schedule control’s benefits for reducing work–home conflict. These patterns support the suppressed-resource hypothesis: Were it not for the greater role blurring among those with schedule control, workers with greater schedule control would report even lower levels of work–family conflict.

In Model 4, after we statistically control for work–family multitasking, we observe that working at home is no longer significantly associated with work–family conflict. As hypothesized above and illustrated in Figure 1, working at home is associated with more frequent multitasking activities; both increase work–family conflict. Taken together, these patterns support the role-blurring hypothesis: More frequent multitasking among people who perform work at home explains why working at home is associated with elevated work–family conflict.

We also find more evidence to support the buffering-resource hypothesis. As shown in Model 5, the association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict varies across levels of schedule control; the inclusion of this interaction significantly improves the model ($F = 8.66, p < .05$). Thus, the positive association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict is significantly stronger among individuals with no schedule control. By contrast, that positive association is attenuated for workers with some and full schedule control. Figure 3 illustrates this interaction effect.¹

Discussion

The present study documents complex associations among schedule control, work–family role blurring (working at home and work–family multitasking), and work–family conflict. Several observations contribute to knowledge about the work–family interface: (a) Schedule control is associated with higher levels of work–family role blurring; (b) the positive association between schedule control and role blurring suppresses the negative association between schedule control and work–family conflict; and (c) schedule control has a moderating role in two relationships: the association between working at home and work–family multitasking and the association between multitasking and work–family conflict. Taken together, these findings reveal previously undiscovered mediating, suppression, and moderating patterns in the ways that schedule control influences work–family role blurring and their subsequent association with work–family conflict.

Is there a downside to schedule control for the work–family interface? We contribute to the work–family interface literature by documenting the ways schedule control—a boundary-spanning resource—has consequences that are seemingly inconsistent with this “resource” characterization. Prior theory and empirical evidence identifies schedule control as a condition that increases flexibility and the degree of permeability between work and family boundaries (Voydanoff, 2005c). However, the apparent cost of this increased flexibility and permeability is work–family role blurring, which manifests as working at home and work–family multitasking; these observations support the role-blurring hypothesis. Thus, if there is a downside to schedule control, it appears to be embedded in the ways that schedule control increases exposure to work–family role blurring. These patterns are important given the well-established association between work–family role blurring and work–family conflict described above.

Although these processes represent a potential downside of schedule control, we also find evidence that supports the resource view of schedule control. First, the interrelationships that characterize the role-blurring hypothesis have implications for the overall association between schedule control and work–family conflict. That is, the resource benefits of schedule control associated with reduced work–family conflict are masked by the fact that many people with schedule control tend to more frequently engage in work–family multitasking activities. Moreover, multitasking is associated with more work–family conflict. By extension, these patterns generate a previously undocumented suppression effect: Were it not for their more frequent work–family multitasking activities, people with greater schedule control would experience lower levels of work–family conflict than those without schedule control. These patterns support the suppressed-resource hypothesis.

The resource benefits of schedule control are also observed in the ways that it moderates several relationships. As predicted by the buffering-resource hypothesis, two patterns are weakened by the possession of greater schedule control: (a) the positive association between working at home and work–family multitasking and (b) the positive association between work–family multitasking and work–family conflict. Taken together, these modifying effects reinforce and extend Voydanoff’s (2005a, 2007) account of schedule control as a boundary-spanning resource. Despite the fact that schedule control increases exposure to consequential forms of role blurring, it also functions to buffer the potentially deleterious effects of those forms of role blurring for other components of the work–family interface.

Collectively, applying Voydanoff’s conceptual language about resources and demands as well as insights from border and boundary theories, our

observations underscore the importance of paying closer attention to the interrelationships among boundary-spanning resources and boundary-spanning demands. Our findings reinforce other scholars' concerns about role blurring associated with multitasking and the ways that these can generate interrole conflict. As we noted above, Nippert-Eng (1996) and others have identified the potential implications of greater integration of work and family domains. Working at home and engaging in work–family multitasking typify high integration contexts; this elevates the likelihood of interruptions of role-related responsibilities (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Desrochers et al., 2005). Our observations unpack the links between boundary-spanning resources and demands and demonstrate (via the suppressed-resource hypothesis) their relevance for work–family conflict.

With respect to the practical implications of these findings, the main contribution may be to simply raise consciousness about several concepts and processes. For example, workers may desire greater schedule control—but our analyses indicate that this may have unexpected or unintended consequences for work–family integration and role blurring. Knowledge about the ways that schedule control blurs the boundaries and potentially yields more multitasking, for example, may help inform workers about ways to utilize temporal or spatial control over work while minimizing role blurring. Likewise, employers might be especially interested in ways that schedule control and its link to flexibility generate greater work–family multitasking that occurs at work. Although our data do not contain such measures, it does seem plausible that schedule control is also relevant for permeability and integration that fosters more work–family multitasking that occurs when individuals are functioning within the physical or spatial parameters of the workplace.

Several other limitations of our study also deserve brief mention. The cross-sectional design constrains our capacity to conclusively describe causal ordering—thus, other interpretations of the observed patterns are plausible. Future research might seek to determine the extent that one condition leads to or fosters the other (i.e., workers use their schedule control to more effectively and productively engage in multitasking activities). In addition, selection effects are worth considering. It is plausible, for example, that individuals with higher levels of work–family conflict modify their position in the paid workforce and/or the nature of the arrangements in the workplace (Rau & Hyland, 2002). They may select jobs with more flexibility or modify the ways that they engage in role-blurring activities. These possibilities have implications for our estimates and interpretations about specific patterns of association.

Finally, although others have used many of these same survey items in recently published research (e.g., Voydanoff, 2005a), some readers may be concerned with the use of single items to measure several of the focal conditions. We agree that more items are typically ideal. However, these are also straightforward and clear indicators of control over the start and finish times of work, the percentage of time spent performing work at home, and the frequency of work–family multitasking. For example, similar (single-item) measures of schedule control have appeared in numerous General Social Surveys as well as the 2002 NSCW (e.g., Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Voydanoff, 2005a). Nonetheless, future research should investigate ways that the measurement of these constructs might be improved with multiple items. In some ways, our analyses provide a framework in which to push the conceptualization of processes like schedule control and work–family multitasking a bit further. For example, further analysis might focus more attention on the types, forms, and appraisals of multitasking that are relevant for increasing or reducing work–family conflict. Likewise, future inquiry could seek to specify the different aspects of schedule control and their meanings and implications for flexibility, permeability, and work–family integration. We suspect that having control over the start and finish times of work may be quite different from having the flexibility to deal with family demands as they arise; the latter may minimize role blurring.

Conclusion

Voydanoff (2007) observes that most studies on this topic have found a weak or no effect of flexible work scheduling on work–home conflict. Our observations speak directly to this issue by refining and reinforcing the ways that work–family role blurring contributes to what appears to be a downside to schedule control. However, we have unpacked the complex mediating, suppression, and moderating effects that link schedule control, role blurring, and work–family conflict. These previously undocumented patterns may have been contributing to prior ambiguous findings. Thus, although schedule control often functions as a boundary-spanning resource that affords more benefits than costs, it is important to assess schedule control's influence on work–family role blurring—especially given the well-established positive association between role blurring and work–family conflict. In sum then, this study makes small strides toward illuminating the connections between boundary-spanning resources and demands and their consequences for the work–family interface.

Appendix

Table AI. Zero-Order Correlations for Focal Measures

	1	2	3	4	5
1	Work–family conflict	1.00			
2	Work at home	.05	1.00		
3	Work–family multitasking	.36*	.39*	1.00	
4	Schedule control	–.04	.31*	.31*	1.00

* $p < .05$, one-tailed test.

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Note

1. Even though they are not part of our focal hypotheses, some readers might wonder about the possibility of other potential contingencies in our models given their relevance for the work–family interface. These include gender, marital status, and parental status. First, with work–family multitasking as the dependent variable, we found no evidence of gender-contingent effects for either schedule control or working at home. Thus, schedule control and working at home are associated with higher levels of multitasking in similar ways among women and men. Likewise, with work–family conflict as the dependent variable, we found no evidence that the effects of schedule control, working at home, and multitasking on work–family conflict differ by gender. Thus, the associations that we document in Tables 2 and 3 do not vary by gender. In addition, none of the following marital and parental status interactions yielded significant results: Marital Status \times Multitasking; Number of Children in the Household (of any age) \times Multitasking, and Spouse or Partner Employment Status (either full- or part-time) \times Multitasking; Moreover, separate assessments of these potential contingencies by gender reveal similar non-significant patterns for women and men. In sum, although there may be theoretical reasons for suspecting that marital, parental, and spouse or partner arrangements

modify the focal associations assessed above—in different ways for women and men—our additional analyses found no evidence to support such claims.

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