



The demands of creative work: Implications for stress in the work–family interface [☆]

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ABSTRACT

Using data from a 2006–07 US survey of workers, we examine the association between creative work and work-to-family conflict, focusing special attention on the demands associated with creative work and their implications for work–family multitasking. Findings indicate that creative work is associated negatively with work-to-family conflict and stressful work-related thoughts—but these associations are suppressed by the following patterns: (1) creative work is associated with greater work demands; (2) those conditions are associated with higher levels of work–family multitasking; and (3) demands and multitasking increase work-to-family conflict and stressful boundary-spanning thoughts. Taken together, these patterns reveal suppression effects: Individuals with creative work would report lower work-to-family conflict and fewer stressful thoughts were it not for their exposure to work and boundary-spanning demands and their more frequent work–family multitasking. Collectively, our findings reveal previously undocumented patterns in the ways that the demands associated with creative work influence stress in the work–family interface.

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1. Introduction

Problems involving the work–family interface—especially work–family conflict—are highly relevant given the well-established deleterious consequences for health and role functioning (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has recently identified work-to-family as one of the most pervasive and problematic workplace stressors (Kelloway et al., 1999). Yet much remains unknown about the specific social conditions that influence the exposure to work-to-family conflict. Sociologists who study stress and its implications for health have focused particular attention on the relevance of status inequality in these types of processes (McLeod and Nonnemaker, 1999; Pearlin, 1999; Turner and Lloyd, 1999). To date, however, most research has considered the ways that disadvantages in dimensions of stratification, including work conditions, increases exposure to stressors and, subsequently, elevated risk for poorer health outcomes (Mirowsky and Ross, 2003; Tausig, 1999). We contribute to that research by examining the possibility that status advantages in the work domain—especially those associated with *creative work* activities—may have unexpected (and negative) implications for stress in the work–family interface. Specifically, we ask: What is the association between creative work and work-to-home conflict? And, more importantly, what are the intervening mechanisms in that focal association?

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2. Background

2.1. Definition and significance of creative work

Creative work is defined as “varied, challenging, nonroutine, and engaging activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something” (Mirowsky and Ross, 2007, p. 385). We follow the lead of Mirowsky and Ross (2007, p. 400), who recently argued that the “definition of creative work used here focuses on qualities of paid work. . . It does not directly refer to employment in arts and entertainment or in occupations and industries categorized as creative (e.g., Florida, 2003). It does not require that others ascribe novelty or unique value to the product or service or that they ascribe insight or intuition to its production (e.g., Simonton, 2000).” Moreover, Mirowsky and Ross (2007) assert that “creative work is an act rather than a condition” (p. 386).

Creative work is generally viewed as a favorable and desired set of arrangements on the job. At its conceptual core, creative work involves opportunities to learn new things and solve problems; it typically requires workers to engage in creative tasks and foster skill development. We integrate these ideas and conceptual orientations into our thesis. The concept of creative work shares conceptual terrain with other job characteristics such as skill discretion, autonomy, complexity, and variety (Dean and Snell, 1991; Karasek, 1979; Kohn and Schooler, 1973). Often scholars confound job conditions, such as skill discretion or autonomy and creativity; however, as Mirowsky and Ross (2007) argue, autonomy reflects decision-making latitude, while creative work reflects originality and imagination. Therefore, “[s]ome degree of autonomy is necessary but not sufficient for creativity. A lack of autonomy can restrain creativity, but no amount of autonomy can guarantee creativity.” (p. 386). For these reasons, we consider creative work as distinct from other conditions, including skill discretion and autonomy.

According to Voydanoff (2007), work conditions that foster creativity, skill enhancement and utilization, and problem-solving represent work resources. The ways in which workers use work and family resources, such as autonomy and support, to avoid exposure to or weaken the impact of work-to-family conflict have become of great interest to researchers in this area (e.g., Powell and Greenhaus, 2006). According to this resource hypothesis, job-related resources like creative work should help individuals avoid or minimize conflicts between work and nonwork life. However, we seek to elaborate on that proposition by describing the possibility of more complex processes that link creative work to stress in the work–family interface. In contrast to the resource view, we hypothesize that creative work is associated with greater work demands that, in turn, elevate the frequency of work–family multitasking. As we describe in greater detail later, theory and evidence suggests that work demands and work–family multitasking should be associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict. Taken together, these patterns imply that the demands of creative work and their links to multitasking might *counterbalance* or offset the resource benefits of creative work for the work–family interface. In a subset of analyses, we also consider two additional questions that have yet to be examined but which can extend current thinking about the work–family interface: (1) Is creative work associated with the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts? (2) If so, do work demands and work–family multitasking function as intervening explanatory or suppression influences in those processes? The following sections outline a more specific theoretical rationale for each of these questions.

2.2. The demands and resources of creative work

From a job demands-resources (JD-R) perspective, job conditions can be organized into two general categories: demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2003). According to Bakker and Geurts (2004):

“Job demands refer to those physical, psychosocial, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or mental effort and are, therefore, associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. . . Job resources refer to those physical, psychosocial, or organizational aspects of the job that may be functional in meeting task requirements (i.e., job demands) and may thus reduce the associated physiological and/or psychological costs—and at the same time stimulate personal growth and development” (p. 348).

Creative work seems ideally suited to represent a workplace *resource* because it allows individuals to learn new things, solve problems, while fostering skill development (Mirowsky and Ross, 2007; Ross and Wright, 1998). These resources are purported to enhance workers’ ability to deal with job demands, as described by Bakker and Geurts (2004) in the previous quotation. Consistent with that view, research underscores the positive psychosocial and health implications associated with creative work (Mirowsky and Ross, 2003, 2007). By extension, as a work resource, it is highly plausible that creative work helps individuals avoid or minimize conflicts between work and family—but few explicitly examine the relationship between creative work as a resource and its connection to the work–family conflict.

As the resource hypothesis predicts, individuals in jobs with more creative work are more likely to enjoy their activities and hence may be less likely to experience stressors that contribute to interference between work and family spheres. Since work often constitutes a separate domain that is distinct from family, individuals with creative work may maintain levels of control over their own work that help reduce the risk of work-to-family conflict. In fact, these ideas fit fairly nicely with Karasek’s (1979) conception of “job control.” However, although the hypothesized resource benefits of creative work and their influence on work-to-family conflict are plausible, we argue that it is also necessary to consider the *demands* of creative work and the ways these blur the borders between work and family life. As an alternative to the resource hypothesis, therefore, we

propose that elevated levels of work and boundary-spanning demands may contribute to border blurring processes. These claims originate from Coser's (1974) characterization of work as a "greedy institution" that extracts time, energy, and attention from its workers—especially those in higher status positions (Milliken and Dunn-Jensen, 2005; Pittman, 1994). In recent times, the insatiability of work has been fed by the introduction of new ways to blur work–family boundaries. For example, as communication technologies increase in sophistication and prevalence, work-related activities have progressively crept into nonwork life (Chesley, 2005; Lewis and Cooper, 1999; Valcour and Hunter, 2005). These processes have implications for traditional conceptualizations of work-related demands and their link to stress processes in the work–family interface.

In this regard, Voydanoff (2007) provides conceptual innovations to this literature by identifying boundary-spanning demands—that is, the frequency of receiving work-related communications outside of normal work hours from an array of sources, including coworkers, supervisors, managers, customers, or clients. In contrast to more traditionally-defined work demands (Karasek, 1979), which typically involve the sense of being overwhelmed by an excessive workload or time pressures, boundary-spanning demands represent a new form of role blurring in which the temporal and physical boundaries separating work and nonwork roles become less defined (Clark, 2000; Voydanoff, 2007). This may be representative of those in jobs that entail more creative work, especially since this type of work often includes intellectual labor and may be performed anytime, anywhere. These processes have potential positive and negative implications. While advances in communication technologies (i.e., e-mail, cell phones, and "Blackberries") augment individuals' ability to engage in remote work (Batt and Valcour, 2003), these technologies can also expand expectations for the completion of work tasks in ways that privilege work over family life—irrespective of time or place (Milliken and Dunn-Jensen, 2005).

Individuals with creative work may be expected to work outside of "normal" work hours and the structural boundaries of the workplace; in turn, they may be more frequently contacted by others outside of the typical parameters of the workplace. These configurations contribute to a "weak" work–family border that is not uniformly favorable for workers (Chesley, 2005; Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). Incursions from work into other spheres may have serious implications for the work–family interface—especially if they generate difficulties in satisfying the responsibilities and obligations of family roles (Schieman and Glavin, 2008; Valcour and Hunter, 2005). Collectively, these ideas underscore the potential complexities of demands associated with creative work and allude to their potential implications for stress in the work–family interface. That is, the demands of creative work may mask or offset the hypothesized resource benefits of creative work for work-to-family conflict.

Along these same lines, creative work and boundary-spanning demands may also influence what we refer to as boundary-spanning thoughts. Boundary-spanning thoughts are distinct from boundary-spanning demands because they represent the extent to which individuals think about work-related obligations outside of normal work hours. The very conceptualization of creative work itself involves the extent that workers think about and solve problems (Mirowsky and Ross, 2007). These cognitive activities, however, may exact a price for the work–family border: Some individuals who engage in more creative activities at work may have difficulty shutting down or turning off thoughts about work-related matters after they "clock out." This is especially the case among those enduring boundary-spanning demands, since such demands can promote work-related thoughts outside of normal work hours. Thus, thinking about work outside of the normal spatial and temporal parameters of the workplace represents another way that work creeps into people's family lives.

In an effort to contribute to knowledge about these processes, we examine the antecedents of boundary-spanning thoughts, including creative work and boundary-spanning demands. To our knowledge, no studies have examined the association between creative work and the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts. Thus, in addition to the central focus on work–family conflict, we also examine the following in supplemental analyses: Is creative work associated with the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts? We hypothesize that creative work is associated positively with the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts because of its association with boundary-spanning demands.

2.3. Implications for stress in the work–family interface

Conflict between core social roles is among the most salient stressors in the stress process model (Pearlin, 1999; Wheaton, 1999). In particular, work-to-family conflict involves the extent that individuals perceive work interfering with the responsibilities and expectations of family, competing for individuals' finite amounts of time and energy (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1987; Kopelman et al., 1983).¹ Structural, cultural, and technological forces, however, have changed the ways that workers traverse work and family borders (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Valcour and Hunter, 2005)—which, in turn, generates the need for conceptual refinements of a broader array of work–family interface processes that includes "role blurring" (Clark, 2000). We draw upon border theory to describe the ways that creative work and its associated demands influence work–family role blurring and their implications for work-to-family conflict.

¹ Although both directions of conflict (work-to-family and family-to-work) are important, the work-to-family direction is more common (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). Jacobs and Gerson (2004, p. 92) have argued that "the spillover from family to work is real, especially for parents, but it is not as pronounced or severe as the opposite dynamic, in which work spills over into the home." In addition, the different directions of conflict are conceptually distinct and have different social-structural antecedents. Specifically, it is more logical theoretically to assert that activities in the work role are likely to create work-to-family conflict, while household conditions are likely to generate family-to-work conflict (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). However, having a spouse/partner and children in the household entails responsibilities that can create competing demands. Therefore, it is essential to account for marital/parental statuses and conditions that may contribute to a "time bind" for working adults (Hochschild, 1997).

Border theory posits that work and family are separated by psychological, temporal, and physical barriers with varying degrees of integration between the two spheres. Here, two concepts are especially critical: “flexibility” and “permeability” (Ashforth et al., 2000). Flexibility involves workers’ capacity to dictate the location and timing of role-related tasks, while permeability involves the degree that aspects of one sphere are allowed to seep into the other. Low flexibility and permeability result in a more clearly defined and less permeable work–family border (Clark, 2000; Voydanoff, 2007). We contend that creative work contributes to work–family border blurring because of its link to *greater* flexibility and permeability. Individuals with creative work, for example, are more likely to feel the powerful force of the work devotion schema, which “demands that one give an immense time commitment and strong emotional allegiance to one’s firm or career” (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 7). In turn, such individuals are likely to identify with this schema because of the rewards associated with creative work. Moreover, those who share the work devotion schema may find it difficult to separate the work domain and the family domain, and consequently, work becomes prioritized across both domains. As central participants in many workplace cultures, individuals with creative work may experience work–family role blurring as a more normative feature of the work devotion schema.

From the demands perspective, the question becomes: Are the demands associated with creative work associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict? If so, what are the implications for the resource hypothesis prediction that creative work should reduce work-to-family conflict? A critical but understudied dimension of these processes involves *work–family multitasking*—or the frequency that individuals take on work- and family-related activities simultaneously when they are at home (Voydanoff, 2007). A work-home configuration that encourages multitasking exemplifies the concept of role blurring because it is difficult to demarcate where one role ends and the other role begins. As we described above, it is reasonable to suspect that creative work increases demands. In turn, these demands likely increase the frequency of multitasking. Work demands may influence multitasking because workers are expected to perform tasks that extend beyond the spatial and temporal parameters of the workplace. Similarly, boundary-spanning demands increase multitasking because, by definition, they blur the borders of work and family domains resulting in individuals performing work and family tasks simultaneously. These processes have been shown to be associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict (Kossek et al., 2005; Schieman and Glavin, 2008; Voydanoff, 2007). Thus, these ideas contribute to the demands hypothesis prediction that frequent work–family multitasking activities may suppress a negative association between creative work and work-to-family conflict.

From a demands perspective, creative work may also be detrimental because of its positive association with the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts. Boundary-spanning thoughts are distinct from boundary-spanning demands because they represent the extent to which individuals think about work-related obligations outside of normal work hours. Some clues about these processes are provided by the conceptualization of creative work, which underscores the extent that workers think about and solve problems (Mirowsky and Ross, 2007). In the demands framework, these cognitive activities could exact a price: Some individuals who engage in more creative activities at work may have difficulty shutting down or turning off thoughts about work-related matters after they, technically speaking, “clock out.” This may be especially likely for individuals who are exposed to more frequent boundary-spanning demands, since such demands are likely to facilitate the flow of work-related issues across temporal, spatial, and psychological parameters of the work–family border. Thus, when individuals think about work outside of normal work hours, this process may represent another way that work creeps into people’s family lives.

Creative work may therefore elevate stress through work-to-family conflict *and* through frequency of work-related thoughts outside of “normal” work hours. It is important to note, however, that we are not modeling the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts as *predictors* of work–family conflict. Instead, we prefer to focus a separate and supplemental analysis on the ways that creative work is associated with the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning. These steps allow for further elaboration on the “demands” conception of creative work and its subsequent consequences for the work–family interface. In an effort to contribute new insights about these processes (above and beyond the traditional focus on work–family conflict), we examine the ways that levels of creative work, the frequency of boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking influence the likelihood and appraisals of boundary-spanning thoughts. We hypothesize that creative work is associated with more frequent boundary-spanning thoughts because individuals in such positions experience greater exposure to boundary-spanning demands and work–family multitasking. Moreover, the consequences of boundary-spanning thoughts depend on the stress associated with them. That is, these types of thoughts should be more consequential for functioning to the extent that individuals appraise them as *stressful*. Therefore, we examine the influence of creative work on the level of stress that is associated with boundary-spanning thoughts. The lack of prior evidence about this issue presents challenges for articulating clear predictions as to whether creative work will increase or decrease the stressfulness of these thoughts. From a demands perspective, greater demands and work–family multitasking may contribute to a positive association between creative work and stress. By contrast, it is also plausible from the resource view that while creative work activities may increase the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts it will also *diminish* the extent that workers appraise them as stressful. We test both of these possibilities.

2.4. Summary of hypotheses

Based on the theory and evidence provided above we hypothesize that: (1) creative work is associated with higher levels of work demands and boundary-spanning demands; (2) creative work is associated with more frequent work–family

multitasking; (3) demands are associated with higher levels of multitasking; (4) demands and work–family multitasking are associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict; (5) collectively, the interrelationships predicted in hypotheses 1–3 should *suppress* any negative association between creative work and work-to-family conflict. That is, once we statistically adjust for the higher levels of demands and more frequent work–family multitasking that is associated with creative work, a negative association between creative work and work-to-family conflict should emerge. In Fig. 1, we provide an illustration of these hypothesized focal associations. Finally, in analyses that parallel those for work-to-family conflict, (6) we hypothesize that creative work, work demands, and boundary-spanning demands are positively associated with boundary-spanning thoughts, and may subsequently impact the stressfulness of these thoughts. We leave the direction of the latter part of this hypothesis open for investigation.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The data derive from telephone interviews with working adults in the United States; the first wave of interviews of 1800 adults were completed in 2005.² 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 also had to be sufficiently fluent to complete the interview. At wave 1, we successfully interviewed 71% of individuals who were identified as eligible. Approximately 18–20 months after the initial interview, we were able to successfully re-interview 1286 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. We exclude those with missing values on focal measures; this yields a sample of 956 cases for our analyses.³

3.2. Focal measures

3.2.1. Work-to-family conflict

An index of four items was used to assess work-to-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 were averaged to create the index; higher scores represent greater work-to-family conflict ($\alpha = .85$). This index is similar to those used in other recently published studies (Thompson et al., 1999; Voydanoff, 2005b, 2007).

3.2.2. Work–family multitasking

Information on work–family multitasking was gathered by asking: “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. This item was used in the 2002 National Survey of the Changing Workforce and appears in published studies of the work–family interface (Voydanoff, 2005a, 2007). Although they are empirically related, work–family multitasking is conceptually distinct from work-to-family conflict because it taps whether individuals perform work and family tasks simultaneously. Work-to-family conflict assesses the extent to which work demands and obligations *interfere* with family life. Factor analyses (not shown) reinforce this claim by showing that the multitasking item loads on a different factor than the work-to-family conflict items.

3.2.3. Creative work

Four items are used to assess creative work activities. Referencing their current job, participants were asked the following: “How often do you have the chance to learn new things?”, “How often do you have the chance to solve problems?”, “How often does your job require you to be creative?”, and “How often does your job allow you to develop your skills or

² These data were collected as part of a study that was funded by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. To obtain the sample, we used a list-assisted random digit dialing (RDD) selection drawn proportionally from all 50 states from GENESYS Sampling Systems. The sampling approach employed the List +1 method, which tends to yield a higher proportion of productive numbers (Lepkowski, 1988). List-assisted RDD is widely accepted now by most social survey research organizations as a cost-effective alternative to the pure RDD methods originally developed by Waksberg (1978). List-assisted RDD increases the probability of encountering residential numbers while minimizing the biases often associated with non-traditional RDD techniques. For our study, GENESYS generated a sample from 50 states that was drawn in proportion to the distribution of households. The total sample was based on: (1) telephone numbers associated with residential households; (2) households agreeing to answer the screening questions; (3) successfully screened households that have one or more adult members who are currently working; and (4) eligible households with a sub-sampled adult who agreed to participate in the interview.

³ In addition, we decided to exclude the self-employed and individuals in family businesses for several reasons. First and foremost, we felt that issues of work–family interference, role blurring and conflict might be quite different for individuals who are self-employed or work in family-run businesses; many may tend to work more hours at home, so the borders between work and family are quite different for these groups compared to others. In turn, some of the focal issues that we seek to address here, especially those associated with boundary-spanning demands and role-blurring may be quite distinct for these groups.

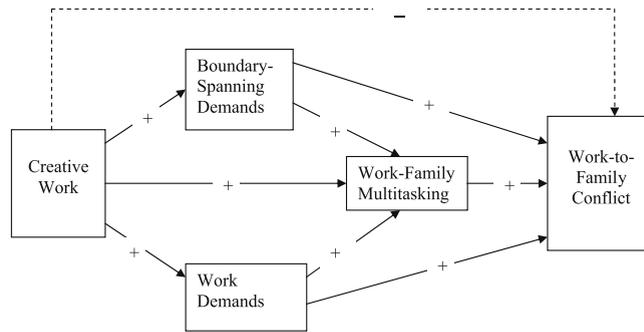


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of creative work and the work–family interface. *Note:* The dashed line represents the hypothesized suppression effect of creative work’s negative association with work-to-family conflict.

abilities?” Response choices are: (1) “never” (2) “rarely” (3) “sometimes” and (4) “frequently.” We averaged the items to create the creative work index ($\alpha = .73$). These items are similar to those in other recently published studies (Mirowsky and Ross, 2007). Steps were taken to ensure the validity of our creativity measure, including factor analyses with other job related measures, such as job demands and autonomy (not shown). We also analyzed differences in creative work across occupational categories using analysis of variance procedures (ANOVA, not shown). Our findings are consistent with theoretically relevant arguments that professionals and craft workers report greater creativity in their work compared to those in administrative, service, or labor positions, net of job autonomy and work demands.

3.2.4. Work demands

Two items are used to assess work demands: “How often have you felt overwhelmed by how much you had to do at work?” and “How often do the demands of your job exceed those doable in an 8-hour workday?” We averaged the items to create the work demands index ($\alpha = .66$).

3.2.5. Boundary-spanning demands

We use one item that was specifically created by the researchers involved in the 2002 NSCW to assess the frequency of exposure to boundary-spanning demands (see Voydanoff, 2005a, 2007). It asks participants: “How often do coworkers, supervisors, managers, customers, or clients contact you about work-related matters outside normal work hours? Include telephone, cell phone, beeper and pager calls, as well as faxes and e-mail that you have to respond to.” Response choices are coded as follows: (1) never, (2) less than once a month, (3) once a week, (4) several times a week, and (5) once or more times a day. Workers who reported that such contact was “not relevant” for their job were coded as “never.”

3.2.6. Frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts

To assess the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts, one item asks: “How often do you think about things going on at work when you are not working?” Response choices are (1) “never,” (2) “rarely,” (3) “sometimes,” and (4) “frequently.” As a follow-up to assess the appraised stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts, individuals who *did not* report “never” were asked: “When you think about work-related things outside of work, how stressful are these thoughts?” Response choices are (1) “not at all stressful,” (2) “somewhat stressful,” and (3) “very stressful.”

3.3. Control measures

Several control measures are included in all models because prior theory and evidence suggests that sociodemographic conditions (Bellavia and Frone, 2005), family structure and household conditions (McManus et al., 2002) and work conditions (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Voydanoff, 2007) may have relevance for the conditions and linkages delineated among our focal associations.

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.

3.3.1. Spouse/partner work status

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

3.3.2. Number of children in household

We include a measure of the total number of children under the age of 18 residing in the household.

3.3.3. 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, (5), college graduate (BA or BS), and (6) post graduate—advanced degree (MA, Ph.D.).

3.3.4. 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 that participants spend most of their time. We also asked about some of the main duties to more accurately code responses. Using the open-ended information provided, we coded responses into five main categories in accordance with the commonly-used 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.

3.3.5. 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.

3.3.6. Job autonomy

One question asks participants “In your current job, how often does someone else decide how you do your work? Response choices are: (1) “never” (2) “rarely” (3) “sometimes” and (4) “frequently.” These items were reversed so that higher scores represent greater job autonomy.

3.3.7. 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?” We coded responses as no schedule control (0), limited control (1), and full control (2). In regression analyses, individuals with no schedule control are the omitted/contrast category. This item is similar to those used in prior General Social Surveys and recently published research (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Voydanoff, 2007).

3.3.8. Work hours

We contrast participants who work 50 hours with workers in two other categories: 40–49 hours per week and fewer than 40 hours per week.

3.3.9. 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?”

Table 1 provides summary statistics for all variables used in these analyses.

3.4. Plan of analyses

All analyses were conducted using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques. In the first set of analyses in Table 2, we examine the association between creative work and three focal measures: work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking. These models test (1) the hypothesis that creative work is associated with greater work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking and (2) the hypothesis that work demands and boundary-spanning demands independently increase work–family multitasking.

In the next set of analyses shown in Table 3, we test the hypotheses about the association between creative work and work-to-family conflict and focus special attention on the intervening roles of demands and multitasking in that association. Model 1 regresses work-to-family conflict on creative work; subsequent models include work demands (model 2), boundary-spanning demands (model 3), both forms of demands simultaneously (model 4), work–family multitasking (model 5), and all measures (model 6). These steps are taken to identify the unique and shared influence of demands and multitasking on the association between creative work and work-to-family conflict, as well as possible mediating links between demands

Table 1
Summary statistics for all study variables.

Variable	M	SD	Range
<i>Focal measures</i>			
Work–family conflict	2.35	.78	1–4
Creative work	3.29	.64	1–4.75
Work demands	2.84	.80	1–4
Boundary-spanning demands	2.41	1.23	1–5
Boundary-spanning thoughts	2.80	.95	1–4
Stressfulness of thoughts	1.80	.60	1–3
Work–family multitasking	1.98	.99	1–4
<i>Control measures</i>			
Women	.60	.49	0–1
White	.77	.42	0–1
Age	44.48	12.15	18–85
Never married	.16	.37	0–1
Previously married	.21	.41	0–1
Married	.63	.48	0–1
Spouse/partner works	.77	.42	0–1
Kids at home	.85	1.28	0–8
Education	3.80	1.52	1–6
Administrative	.39	.49	0–1
Service	.14	.35	0–1
Craft	.07	.25	0–1
Laborer	.08	.28	0–1
Professional	.32	.47	0–1
Supervisor	.62	.49	0–1
Job autonomy	2.96	.94	1–4
No schedule control	.46	.50	0–1
Some schedule control	.39	.49	0–1
Full schedule control	.15	.35	0–1
<40 hours per week	.26	.44	0–1
40–49 hours per week	.47	.50	0–1
50-plus hours per week	.26	.44	0–1
Personal income	45,016.79	34,818.27	0–300,000

Note: All values presented are based on $N = 956$ except for the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts ($N = 955$ and 842 , respectively).

and multitasking. To illustrate observed effects, we provide a figure for the unadjusted and adjusted association between creative work and work-to-family conflict net of demands and multitasking (Fig. 2).

To test Hypothesis 6, we examine the association between creative work and two additional dependent variables: the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts. For each, we regress the frequency (or stressfulness) on creative work (Table 4, model 1) and add work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and multitasking (Table 4, model 2) to assess their influence on the link between creative work and boundary-spanning thoughts.⁴

4. Results

4.1. Creative work, demands, and work–family multitasking

Is creative work associated with work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking? It appears so. The first two columns in Table 2 indicate that individuals who have more creative work tend to report higher levels of work demands and boundary-spanning demands. Moreover, as shown in the first model for work–family multitasking, creative work is associated with more frequent multitasking. In the second multitasking model, work demands and boundary-spanning demands are associated with more frequent work–family multitasking. Two patterns are noteworthy: (1) the effect of each form of demand is observed independently of the other and (2) these interrelationships contribute partially to the positive association between creative work and work–family multitasking, although that effect remains statistically significant. Collectively, these patterns support hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

⁴ For the analyses in Tables 2 and 4 we examine ordinal dependent variables. In these instances, we estimated separate models using ordered logistic regression techniques. However, these results essentially mirror those obtained using OLS techniques. Therefore, we report findings based on OLS procedures for ease of presentation and interpretation (available from the authors upon request).

Table 2The association between creative work and work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking ($N = 956$).

	Work demands	Boundary-spanning demands	Work–family multitasking	
			(1)	(2)
Creative work	.13** (.04)	.23** (.05)	.19*** (.05)	.13** (.05)
Work demands	—	—	—	.17*** (.04)
Boundary-spanning demands	—	—	—	.19*** (.03)
Women	.11 (.06)	-.30*** (.08)	.01 (.07)	.01 (.07)
White	-.09 (.06)	.24* (.09)	-.16** (.07)	-.19** (.07)
(Age) ^{e-02}	-.50 (.22)	-.57 (.34)	.17 (.28)	.18 (.27)
Never married ^a	-.08 (.07)	.05 (.11)	.07 (.10)	.07 (.09)
Previously married ^a	.01 (.07)	.23* (.10)	.17** (.08)	.13 (.08)
Spouse/partner works	.05 (.06)	.04 (.09)	.02 (.08)	.00 (.07)
Children at home	.00 (.02)	-.02 (.03)	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Education	-.01 (.02)	.05 (.03)	.08*** (.02)	.08*** (.02)
Administrative ^b	-.12* (.06)	-.24 (.09)	-.25** (.08)	-.18** (.07)
Service ^b	-.19* (.09)	-.13 (.13)	-.12 (.10)	-.06 (.10)
Craft ^b	-.17 (.11)	-.38* (.17)	-.24 (.14)	-.14 (.13)
Laborer ^b	-.10 (.11)	-.55*** (.16)	-.46*** (.13)	-.34*** (.12)
Supervisor	-.14* (.05)	-.38*** (.08)	.06 (.06)	.16* (.06)
Autonomy	-.10 (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.08 (.03)	-.06 (.03)
Some schedule control ^c	.08 (.05)	.22** (.08)	.27*** (.07)	.22*** (.06)
Full schedule control ^c	.02 (.08)	.70*** (.11)	.67*** (.09)	.54*** (.09)
<40 hours per week ^d	-.25*** (.06)	-.47*** (.09)	-.43*** (.07)	-.30*** (.07)
40–49 hours per week ^d	-.68*** (.07)	-.22*** (.11)	-.45*** (.09)	-.29*** (.09)
(Personal income) ^{e-05}	.08 (.08)	.23 (.12)	-.19 (.10)	-.21* (.096)
Constant	.91	.50	.33	.08
R ²	.19	.23	.20	.27

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

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

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

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

^a Compared to married.

^b Compared to professional occupations.

^c Compared to no schedule control.

^d Compared to 50-plus hours per week.

4.2. Creative work and work-to-family conflict

Next, we turn to the association between creative work and work-to-family conflict. The first model in Table 3 indicates that—at least initially—creative work appears to be unrelated to work-to-family conflict. However, models 2–6 reveal important intervening suppression influences. Specifically, a negative and statistically significant association between creative work and work-to-family conflict appears only after we adjust for work demands (model 2), boundary-spanning demands (model 3), both forms of demands simultaneously (model 4), and work–family multitasking (model 5). When we include demands and multitasking together in the same model (model 6) we observe that the size of the negative creative work coefficient is more than twice that shown in model 1 and is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level. Fig. 2 illustrates the slopes representing the association between creative work and work-to-family conflict prior to and after statistical adjustments for both forms of demands and multitasking. The unadjusted slope suggests that creative work is unrelated to work-to-family conflict. However, the adjusted slope suggests suppression influences attributable to the demands and role blurring associated with creative work. This statistical process is more readily observable when we plot the unadjusted and adjusted effects of creative work on work-to-family conflict.

Two patterns contribute to these intervening suppression influences: (1) creative work is associated with higher levels of work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking and (2) both demands and multitasking are associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict. Taken together, these findings lend support to hypotheses 4 and 5. As predicted, people in creative work would report *less* work-to-family conflict were it not for the fact that they tend to report *more* of both forms of demands and multitasking. Thus, these intervening relationships mask or conceal the resource “benefits” of creative work for the work–family interface. Once we account for the potential “costs” of creative work (as represented in the demands perspective), the “benefits” of creative work for the work–family interface are more easily distinguished (as predicted by the resource view).

4.3. Creative work and boundary-spanning thoughts

In Table 4, we document the influence of creative work on the frequency and stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts. The first model shows that creative work is associated with more frequent boundary-spanning thoughts. The

Table 3
Regression of work–family conflict on focal measures and controls ($N = 956$).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Creative work	-.05 (.04)	-.10** (.04)	-.08* (.04)	-.12*** (.04)	-.10** (.04)	-.15*** (.04)
Work demands	–	.34*** (.03)	–	.38*** (.03)	–	.33*** (.03)
Boundary-spanning demands	–	–	.13*** (.02)	.09*** (.02)	–	.05* (.02)
Work–family multitasking	–	–	–	–	.28*** (.02)	.22*** (.02)
Women	.11* (.06)	.07 (.05)	.15** (.06)	.10 (.05)	.12* (.05)	.10* (.05)
White	-.03 (.06)	-.01 (.05)	-.06 (.06)	-.02 (.05)	.02 (.05)	.03 (.05)
(Age) ^{e-02}	-.48* (.22)	-.20 (.20)	-.41 (.22)	-.25 (.20)	-.43* (.21)	-.25 (.19)
Never married ^a	-.03 (.07)	.00 (.07)	-.04 (.07)	.00 (.07)	-.05 (.07)	-.02 (.06)
Previously married ^a	.06 (.06)	.05 (.06)	.03 (.06)	.03 (.06)	.00 (.06)	.00 (.06)
Spouse/partner works	-.13* (.06)	-.15* (.06)	-.14* (.06)	-.15** (.06)	-.14* (.06)	-.15** (.05)
Kids at home	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)
Education	.04* (.02)	.04* (.02)	.02 (.02)	.03* (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Administrative ^b	-.10 (.06)	-.05 (.06)	-.07 (.06)	-.04 (.06)	-.03 (.06)	.00 (.05)
Service ^b	.04 (.08)	.11 (.08)	.06 (.08)	.12 (.08)	.08 (.08)	.14 (.07)
Craft ^b	-.16 (.11)	-.09 (.10)	-.11 (.11)	-.06 (.10)	-.09 (.10)	-.03 (.10)
Laborer ^b	-.01 (.11)	.03 (.10)	.06 (.10)	.07 (.10)	.12 (.10)	.15 (.10)
Supervisor	-.20*** (.05)	-.14** (.05)	-.15** (.05)	-.11* (.05)	-.21*** (.05)	-.15** (.05)
Autonomy	-.18*** (.03)	-.14*** (.02)	-.18*** (.03)	-.14*** (.02)	-.16*** (.03)	-.13*** (.02)
Some schedule control ^c	.00 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	-.07 (.05)	-.10** (.05)
Full schedule control ^c	-.05 (.07)	-.06 (.07)	-.14 (.07)	-.12 (.07)	-.24*** (.07)	-.24*** (.08)
<40 hours per week ^d	-.50*** (.06)	-.39*** (.06)	-.43*** (.06)	-.36*** (.05)	-.38*** (.06)	-.30*** (.05)
40–49 hours per week ^d	-.61*** (.07)	-.34*** (.07)	-.59*** (.07)	-.34*** (.07)	-.48*** (.07)	-.27*** (.06)
(Personal income) ^{e-05}	-.10 (.80)	-.13 (.73)	-.11 (.78)	-.13 (.72)	-.51 (.75)	-.89 (.70)
Constant	3.52	3.16	3.05	3.14	3.42	3.11
R ²	.19	.32	.22	.33	.29	.39

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

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

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

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

^a Compared to married.

^b Compared to professional occupations.

^c Compared to no schedule control.

^d Compared to more than 50 hours.

second model, however, indicates that the influence of creative work is no longer statistically significant. Two patterns account for this: (1) as we established earlier, creative work is associated with more demands and work–family multitasking; (2) demands and multitasking, in turn, are associated with more frequent boundary-spanning thoughts. Collectively, these intervening links fully contribute to the positive association between creative work and the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts.

By contrast, the models shown in the third and fourth columns tell a different story. The third column shows that creative work is associated negatively with the appraised stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts. That is, people who have more creative work activities and experience boundary-spanning thoughts tend to appraise those thoughts as less stressful than those with less creative activities. Adjustments for demands and multitasking—which are associated positively with stressful appraisals—partially suppress the effects of creative work. We interpret this suppression effects in the following way: People with creative work activities would appraise boundary-spanning thoughts as less stressful were it not for the greater demands and more frequent multitasking associated with creative work. Taken together, the results in Table 4 illustrate the ways that creative work activities can increase the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts while also simultaneously diminishing their stressfulness.⁵

5. Discussion

This study examined the influence of creative work on the work–family interface. Results provide four main contributions. First, we underscore the value of creative work as a work resource because of its negative association with work-to-family conflict and the stress of boundary-spanning thoughts. At the same time, however, we have revealed previously undocumented intervening suppression influences. Specifically, creative work is associated with higher levels of work demands, boundary-spanning demands, and work–family multitasking. In turn, all three of these processes are associated with

⁵ Some readers may wonder about potential gender contingencies in the patterns observed in all of our analyses. In a series of separate analyses (not shown, but available upon request), we found no evidence of gender-contingent effects in any of the models in Tables 2–4. Thus, creative work and both forms of demands are associated with more work–family multitasking in similar ways among women and men. Likewise, creative work, demands, and multitasking are associated with work-to-family conflict, the frequency of boundary spanning thoughts, and the appraised stressfulness of those thoughts in similar ways for women and men.

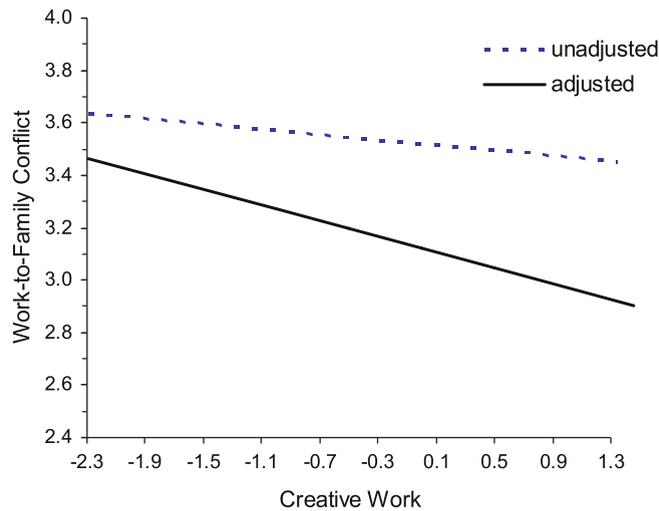


Fig. 2. The association between creative work and work-to-family conflict. *Note:* Predicted values of work-to-family conflict are based on results shown in model 1 and model 6 of Table 3. All continuous values are held constant at their respective means. For categorical variables in the model, we solved that equation for white, married women working 40–49 hours per week in professional occupations who had a working spouse and no schedule control. Solving for other values will alter the intercept but not the slope representing the association between multitasking and work-to-family conflict.

higher levels of work-to-family conflict and greater stress. So were it not for their greater demands and more frequent multitasking, individuals with creative work would report even less work-to-family conflict and less stressful boundary-spanning thoughts. Taken together, our findings shed new light on the complexities of creative work—as a resource and as a source of demands—and their collective implications for stress in the work–family interface.

As Voydanoff (2007) and others have argued, there is little doubt that creative work is a work resource that most workers prefer. The definition of creative work entails workers having opportunities to learn new things, solve problems, enhance their skills, and engage in creative tasks. These elements represent *resources* that, for the most part, seem to be among other work conditions (i.e., autonomy, schedule control) that can help individuals avoid or minimize the difficulties associated with navigating the work–family interface. Yet, our observations underscore a critical but often overlooked point—creative work appears to come with some costs: It tends to elevate exposure to work-related demands.

As the job demands-resources model and border theory predict, these processes typically contribute to work–family role blurring. One form of role blurring involves work–family multitasking activities; that is, doing work- and family-related tasks at the same time. We observe that creative work and demands are associated with more frequent multitasking. There is a critical implication of these patterns for the resource view of creative work: The *negative* association between creative work and work-to-family conflict is *suppressed*. Were it not for their higher levels of demands and more frequent multitasking activities, individuals with creative work would report even lower levels of work-to-family conflict. Simply put, the demands associated with creative work and their implications for role blurring in the form of multitasking increases exposure to work-to-family conflict. Thus, if there is a “downside” to creative work, this appears to be it. Once we take these conditions into account, the observed *net negative* association between creative work and work-to-family conflict is consistent with the basic predictions of the resource hypothesis.

Our findings also contribute to previously unexamined work–family interface processes: the frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts and their appraisal as stressful. Intrusive thoughts about work represent another way that work creeps into nonwork life. We find that individuals with creative work report more frequent boundary-spanning thoughts because of their greater demands and multitasking. These patterns provide further evidence about the ways that central participants in the workplace experience a more permeable border between work and family. When one frequently thinks about work-related issues outside of the workplace, this process has potentially deleterious consequences.

We extend prior research by showing that, despite reporting more frequent boundary-spanning thoughts, individuals with creative work are less likely to appraise these thoughts as stressful. While this finding elaborates on an understudied element of role blurring, it also underscores the flawed assumption that thinking about work outside of normal work hours is *uniformly stressful*. Creative work may foster productive processes that include a sense of being able to effectively manage work-related tasks. Moreover, creative work is often enjoyable and engaging—so individuals may desire to think about their work when they are outside of usual spatial and temporal parameters of the workplace. Indeed, it is these more favorable social–structural arrangements and processes, as identified by the resource hypothesis, which may contribute to the overall *net negative* association between creative work and levels of work-to-home conflict.

Table 4
Regression of boundary-spanning thoughts on focal measures and controls.

	Frequency of boundary-spanning thoughts		Stressfulness of boundary-spanning thoughts	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Creative work	.12* (.05)	.02 (.05)	-.12*** (.04)	-.18*** (.04)
Work demands	—	.25*** (.04)	—	.21*** (.03)
Boundary-spanning demands	—	.11*** (.03)	—	.08*** (.02)
Work–family multitasking	—	.26*** (.03)	—	.10*** (.02)
Women	.02 (.07)	.03 (.06)	.13** (.05)	.13** (.05)
White	.12 (.07)	.15* (.06)	.02 (.05)	.04 (.05)
(Age) ^{e-02}	.00 (.28)	.24 (.25)	-.37 (.19)	-.18 (.18)
Never married ^a	-.14 (.10)	-.14 (.08)	.01 (.07)	.01 (.06)
Previously married ^a	-.02 (.08)	-.09 (.07)	-.05 (.06)	-.10 (.05)
Spouse/partner works	-.03 (.08)	-.05 (.07)	.00 (.05)	-.02 (.05)
Kids at home	-.03 (.03)	-.03 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Education	.04 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Administrative ^b	-.14 (.08)	-.03 (.07)	-.08 (.05)	-.01 (.05)
Service ^b	-.20 (.11)	-.10 (.10)	-.09 (.07)	-.02 (.07)
Craft ^b	-.10 (.14)	.04 (.13)	-.17 (.10)	-.08 (.09)
Laborer ^b	-.35** (.13)	-.15 (.12)	-.20* (.10)	-.08 (.09)
Supervisor	-.16* (.06)	-.10 (.06)	-.04 (.04)	.00 (.04)
Autonomy	-.05 (.03)	.01 (.03)	-.04 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Some schedule control ^c	.22*** (.08)	-.11 (.07)	.00 (.05)	-.05 (.04)
Full schedule control ^c	.29** (.09)	.04 (.09)	.06 (.07)	-.06 (.06)
<40 hours per week ^d	-.21** (.07)	.02 (.07)	-.11* (.05)	.03 (.05)
40–49 hours per week ^d	-.41*** (.09)	.02 (.09)	-.21*** (.06)	-.02 (.06)
(Personal income) ^{e-05}	-.61 (.10)	-.45 (.09)	-.12 (.07)	.12 (.06)
Constant	3.05	2.70	2.01	1.73
R ²	.14	.28	.07	.21

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

Note: N = 955 for models 1 and 2; N = 842 for models 3 and 4.

* p < .05 (two-tailed test).

** p < .01 (two-tailed test).

*** p < .001 (two-tailed test).

^a Compared to married.

^b Compared to professional occupations.

^c Compared to no schedule control.

^d Compared to more than 50 hours.

5.1. Study limitations

Several study limitations deserve brief mention. We examine cross-sectional data. Although we propose hypotheses that suggest causal ordering in Fig. 1, it is impossible to make definitive statements about causal order. However, theory and evidence provide a compelling case for the hypothesized interrelationships among these focal associations. That is, a substantial portion of the association between creative work activities and both work demands and boundary-spanning demands likely flows from creative work to demands. In turn, there are sound reasons for suspecting that demands instigate the need for more frequent multitasking. Likewise, others have documented that these conditions influence work-to-family conflict (Voydanoff, 2007). Nonetheless, longitudinal analyses are needed to determine causal linkages in these processes. In doing so, it would also be worth attending to the possibility of individual differences in preferences for the segmentation versus integration of work/family domains. These issues may directly relate to choice of creative work as career and, in turn, have implications for both the levels of and associations among the focal measures in our analyses.

The second limitation involves the use of single item assessments for some of our focal measures, including boundary-spanning demands, multitasking, and boundary-spanning thoughts. Multiple-item measures are ideal; however, several of these single-item measures have been used in the 2002 NSCW and in recently published research on the work–family interface (e.g., Voydanoff, 2007). It is important to keep in mind that these items are asking participants about the frequency of specific activities or behaviors, such as being contacted outside of normal work hours or engaging and work- and family-related tasks simultaneously while at home. Therefore, it is debatable that in these instances a simple single-item measure is adequate to capture the specific activity in question. Moreover, the items used to assess boundary-spanning thoughts are straightforward and easy to interpret. That is, the frequency and stressful questions provide a clear, direct measure of these activities and appraisals. Nonetheless, we readily acknowledge the critique that having more items might improve the validity and reliability of our estimates. These are issues that are ripe for future inquiry. In addition, while we focus on multitasking that occurs in the home, future research should consider the implications of doing so in the workplace. Unfortunately, our data do not contain questions about that process.

6. Conclusion

Stress and conflict in the work–family interface is a serious and highly prevalent social problem. There is little doubt that when work interferes with family life the implications are detrimental for many people. While that fact is well-established, less is known about the relevance of work activities for dynamics in the work–family interface. We address that issue by documenting that creative work is a resource and a source of demands that shape role blurring and work-to-family conflict. Our findings elaborate on the resource view of creative work by identifying the downsides of more demanding jobs and more frequent work–family multitasking activities. By explicating in more detail these consequences of creative work, our findings reinforce Coser's (1974) classic characterization of work as a “greedy institution” and refine the consequences of “status inequality” for the work–family interface. Lastly, our observations about intervening suppression influences of demands and multitasking contribute to knowledge about the ways that *resourceful* jobs can have negative implications that detract from their otherwise protective benefits.

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